

# BALANCES AMONG KURDS IN SYRIA, REGIME OPPONENTS AND TURKEY: RELATIONS PATTERN AT THE CROSSROADS OF CONFLICT-STABILITY

SURİYE'DE KÜRTLER ARASI DENGELER,  
REJİM MUHALİFLERİ VE TÜRKİYE:  
ÇATIŞMA-İSTİKRAR AYRIMINDAKİ  
İLİŞKİLER ÖRÜNTÜSÜ

الموازين ما بين اكراد سوريا، المعارضة وعلاقتها بتركيا: نمط تمايز  
العلاقات من حيث الصراع والاستقرار

CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES  
ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ

مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية



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الصراع والاستقرار

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## CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

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### **History**

*In Turkey, the shortage of research on the Middle East grew more conspicuous than ever during the early 90's. Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) was established in January 1, 2009 in order to provide relevant information to the general public and to the foreign policy community. The institute underwent an intensive structuring process, beginning to concentrate exclusively on Middle affairs.*

### **Outlook on the Middle Eastern World**

*It is certain that the Middle East harbors a variety of interconnected problems. However, neither the Middle East nor its people ought to be stigmatized by images with negative connotations. Given the strength of their populations, Middle Eastern states possess the potential to activate their inner dynamics in order to begin peaceful mobilizations for development. Respect for people's willingness to live together, respect for the sovereign right of states and respect for basic human rights and individual freedoms are the prerequisites for assuring peace and tranquility, both domestically and internationally. In this context, Turkey must continue to make constructive contributions to the establishment of regional stability and prosperity in its vicinity.*

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*ORSAM, provides the general public and decision-making organizations with enlightening information about international politics in order to promote a healthier understanding of international policy issues and to help them to adopt appropriate positions. In order to present effective solutions, ORSAM supports high quality research by intellectuals and researchers that are competent in a variety of disciplines. ORSAM's strong publishing capacity transmits meticulous analyses of regional developments and trends to the interested parties. With its web site, its books, reports, and periodicals, ORSAM supports the development of Middle Eastern literature on a national and international scale. ORSAM supports the development of Middle Eastern literature on a national and international scale. ORSAM facilitates the sharing of knowledge and ideas with the Turkish and international communities by inviting statesmen, bureaucrats, academics, strategists, businessmen, journalists, and NGO representatives to Turkey.*

**Assist. Prof. Dr. Serhat ERKMEN**

Serhat Erkmen, who was born in 1975 in İstanbul, graduated from Ankara University Faculty of Political Science Department of International Relations. He completed his master's degree and doctoral study at Ankara University Institute of Social Sciences. Working as Middle East Researcher in Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies between the years 2000-2008, Erkmen has been working as ORSAM Middle East Advisor since 2009. Also, Erkmen has been Head of Department of International Relations at Kırşehir Ahi Evran University since 2009.

## PRESENTATION

Despite the fact that it has been more than 1,5 years since the outbreak of the conflicts in Syria, the country could not reach a stability. On the contrary, the instability in Syria spreads into other countries. Syrian Kurds appear as an important factor in this instability. The Kurdish Problem, which is still one of the most important ethnic problems of the Middle East since the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, comes to the fore in different forms at each important turning point in the region. The Kurdish Problem, which had been overshadowed by other problems for years in Syria, is becoming important with each passing day. In this period, when the arguments related to the post-Assad period have new aspects, the situation of Kurds is becoming more important.

As ORSAM, we already issued two reports on political movements of Syrian Kurds. This third report rather deals with the recent developments. In the report prepared by Assist. Prof. Dr. Serhat Erkmen, there are basically three dynamics emphasized. These dynamics are: The relations among Syrian Kurdish political movements, relations between Syrian Kurds and other opponents, and the relations between Turkey and Syrian Kurds. The report starts with the analysis of the cooperation agreement signed among Kurds in Syria, and the situation of the Kurdish parties, then it continues with the problems between Turkey and Syrian Kurds. Lastly, future of the conflicts in the country within the framework of the conflicts between the Free Syrian Army and Kurds is discussed in detail. Dr. Erkmen, who already prepared a detailed report on Syrian Kurds, deals with new dynamics and developments in this study and analyzes the developments in Syria from a different perspective.

*Hasan Kanbolat*  
*ORSAM Director*

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By: Assist. Prof. Dr. Serhat ERKMEN

# BALANCES AMONG KURDS IN SYRIA, REGIME OPPONENTS AND TURKEY: RELATIONS PATTERN AT THE CROSSROADS OF CONFLICT-STABILITY

## Abstract

- It might be suggested that there are 4 main tendencies in Kurdish political spectrum in Syria: PYD and related groups, KDP in Syria and related parties, youth movements and silent groups.

- PYD in Syria is the same with PJAK in Iran, and PÇDK in Iraq. In short, PYD is like the wing of PKK in Syria to a large extent.

- The process between 19 and 23 July has been the most effective event in terms of the consensus efforts among Syrian Kurds. The Kurdish High Council, which was formed in Erbil in early July as a result of the agreement between KNC and TEV-DEM, became the main power managing the regions controlled by Kurds.

- Are the terrorist attacks, which have been on the rise in Turkey in the recent period, a periodical reflection of the civil war in Syria? Or is the region controlled by Kurds that could appear in Syria in the long term going to turn into a threat for Turkey? The answer to those questions will affect the nature and future of the relations between Turkey and Syrian Kurds.

- The Kurds in Syria were handled in terms of Turkey on the basis of PKK both in the pre-Arab Spring period and also afterwards. The presence of Syrian Kurds within PKK is the root cause of the concern. However, in the period following the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, Turkey could not develop a comprehensive strategy on Syrian Kurds.

- Syrian Kurds could not develop a policy to place trust in Turkey after the start of uprisings in Syria either. They got reactions by bringing up the Kurdish Problem in Turkey in their discourses.

- The presence of Kurds in Syria should not constitute a problem for Turkey by its nature. If the problem in Syria is democratization, it should support the demands of Kurds within the framework of democratization, and try to know Syrian Kurds more closely in order to develop a mutual understanding. Also, Syrian Kurds should prevent all kind of formations to help terrorist organization, and respect the sensitivities of Turkey.

- Kurds focused on the idea of creating a stable region of their own away from conflicts and far from drifting into a chaos. Their quest of staying away from armed conflicts between the regime and opposition has been successful to a large extent.

- The Assad administration preferred that PYD seized the control of some areas in the north rather than FSA did so. So that, while it kept some regions, especially Hasake, away from the control of FSA, it also aimed at hitting Turkey on its soft spot. FSA, on the other hand, avoided clearly facing the opposition of Kurds while there was a more important power to deal with. Despite stating that they are against a Kurdish region in Syria on all occasions, FSA kept away from clashing with Syrian Kurds or PYD siding with the government.

- Tougher the civil war in Syria gets, the harder it becomes for Kurds to implement the tactic of directly taking sides in the armed conflict. The events in Qamishli and Aleppo show that Kurds have not been sided with any of the parties in the conflict yet. However, in both events, the conflict between PYD and FSA either in terms of politics or armed events would further drive a wedge between Arab opposition and Kurds in Syria.

- Considering in terms of internal dynamics of Kurds, it might be suggested that PYD which has been effective mostly in northern part of the country where Kurds live in majority, especially in Afrin and Kobani, could become more powerful also in Aleppo.

- The axis and grounds of conflicts, which have been going on in Syria so far, are extremely fluctuating. The longer civil war becomes, the more complicated attitudes of the parties and alliances get. As a result of this tendency, it appears that the possibility of the emergence of at least two civil wars in Syria in the long term should not be underestimated.



## Introduction

The transition period in the Middle East brought up not only democratization demands, but also the relations depending on fragile factors for a long time in the region to the agenda. After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, wide-scale transition scenarios including the change of borders and regimes in the Middle East started to be discussed again. The fact that the Arab Spring was not limited with the demands for democratization and turned into a revolutionist character led to questioning the alliances formed in the Middle East in the last 30 years. The opposition movements, which came out against the oppressive regimes with demands for democratization and for living under humanitarian conditions, after a while started to inevitably continue their movements on ethnical and sectarian lines. The inevitability of this process stems from the fact that domestic reactions against the minority administrations that came out in the Middle East after the World War I led to ideological, ethnic and sectarian consequences in 1950s. While the wave of revolution and change in the Middle East in 1950s and 1960s created oppressive regimes that were organized in ideological, ethnic and sectarian context in countries such as Iraq, Syria, Libya and Egypt; it also brought along the rise of authoritarian tendencies of the states (most of which are the Gulf monarchies) excluding themselves from the revolutionist processes as a kind of defense reflex.

Therefore, while the opposition groups led by the Islamists movements toppled the dictatorships including Libya, Tunisia and Egypt in the new transition movement in the Middle East; the problem that almost every state in the Middle East, including Iraq, has been facing with the transition process in the recent period started to acquire an ethnical and sectarian dimension to some extent. Even

though the developments in countries like Iraq and Syria were rather handled within the frame of Sunni-Shiite balance as the Shiite discourses grew stronger in the Middle East as of 2006, an ethnical transition process started to equally take place in both countries. In Iraq and Syria, which were started to controlled by the UK and France after the Ottoman Empire, Kurds could achieve to take new political opportunities only in 2000s after their political failures in 1920s. After the gains that Iraqi Kurds obtained in 2003, it did not take long for Syrian Kurds to be affected by this situation. As a matter of fact, the 2004 Qamishli Riots are considered as the events explicitly affected by the developments in Iraq.<sup>1</sup> The Kurdish nationalist movements, which could not find what they asked for in the post-World War I system, developed an approach on a wide perspective to compensate their disappointments from approximately a century ago when the balances created by the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Middle East came to an end. This understanding, which started off with autonomy and federalism and did not refuse the fact that its final objective is to gain independence, aims at an ultimate change of system to affect many countries in the Middle East.

Although the quest of Kurds for a revolutionist change in which new borders would be defined in the Middle East came to the forefront during the first half of 2000s after the U.S. invasion of Iraq; the joint threat perception of Iraq, Syria and Turkey from this process and their cooperating as a result of this perception limited the maneuvering space of the Kurdish movements. On the other hand, the changing internal balances following the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq on 2010, and the collapse of the Syria-Turkey-Iran triangle due to the events in Syria shows that the transition in the Middle East might not be limited with the regimes. The Kurdish nationalist movements,

which are observed more clearly in Syria and Iraq today but which have been going on in Iran and Turkey for decades, are on the verge of a new turning point. The most important actor of this turning point would probably be the Kurdish movements in Syria that were regarded as the weakest and least effective Kurdish movement compared to others until some years ago. Trying to make their own way in the civil war that is getting more complicated and chaotic in Syria with each passing day, Syrian Kurds struggle both among themselves and also with other opposition groups in Syria. However, the determinant for almost all Syrian Kurds is Turkey. Therefore, the relations between Turkey and Syrian Kurds, who believe that the main dynamics to ultimately define their future would stem from Turkey, has a particular importance. In this report, we will try to analyze the above-mentioned three dynamics; namely, internal conflicts among Syrian Kurds, the relations between Syrian Kurds and opposition movements, and Turkey factor together.

### **1. Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Cooperation and Power Struggle**

It might be suggested that there are 4 main tendencies in Kurdish political spectrum in Syria: PYD and related groups, KDP in Syria and related parties, youth movements and silent groups.

As is known, PYD is a party that is mostly composed of former PKK members in Syria, at least in terms of its leaders. In other words, PYD in Syria is the same with PJAK in Iran, and PÇDK in Iraq. In short, PYD is like the wing of PKK in Syria to a large extent. However, PYD has been denying its organic bond with PKK so far, and describes their relationship as ideological similarity and bond.<sup>2</sup> It is necessary to make a right comparison in order to perceive the relationship between the

two actors correctly. PYD is a political party which takes part in a series of organizations composed of pro-PKK Kurds in Syria. The parties, NGOs and other organizations in Syria which are related to PKK are gathered the roof of TEV-DEM. As a matter of fact, it is also TEV-DEM which signed the partnership agreement with the Kurdish National Council. Within this framework, it is known that a considerable part of the high-level members of TEV-DEM, PYD and other PKK-related organizations are the members of PKK. On the other hand, it might be asserted that the party grassroots are considerably composed of those who are not PKK members or at least who did not join the “mountain group”, also with the affect of the rapid expansion among the Syrian Kurds in the recent period. Within the framework of the structure outlined above, PYD suggests that it is not an extension of PKK, but they have an ideological bond with each other. Nevertheless, considering that PKK formed NGOs, legal political parties or subsidiary organs in Turkey or outside in line with its goals, it cannot be argued that PYD is a non-PKK organization. As a matter of fact, PYD’s being a part of KCK points out its general framework and characteristics.<sup>3</sup>

Formed in 2004, PYD appears like a party which knows what it wants compared to other Kurdish parties. As a part of KCK, it has a political vision targeting “democratic autonomy” in Syria. Despite not adopting an attitude against the Assad administration for a long time as from the outbreak of events in Syria, it has been using an anti-regime discourse in the recent period. In fact, it is seen that PYD leaders have been striving to erase their pro-regime image in previous months and that they have been trying to put an emphasis on it in the interviews.

It is seen that PYD has a clear supremacy in regions such as Afrin and Kobani based

on the grassroots of PKK in Syria. However, PYD's supremacy is not only limited with those areas. It is seen that PYD has a supremacy against other parties also in some districts and towns in the neighborhood of Qamishli. However, it has been a recent development. PYD had the upper hand in most of the Kurdish settlements after 2011 through the means explained in detail in the previous report. It should be kept in mind that also YPG, which is not directly related to PYD but which is a part of the same formation, played an important role in this supremacy. YPG is an armed group called Popular Protection Units and mainly composed of PYD members. In an environment where arms and politics are together in Syria, PYD and other related organizations have been the ones that use the arms mostly efficiently among the Kurdish political parties. Both the physical supremacy (for instance; limiting the activities of other parties or pressure against the opponents) provided by YPG, and also the role played in controlling the regions seized is extremely important in terms of creating a political order PYD wants.<sup>4</sup> Today, if PYD can form local administrations in line with its own ideology in some cities or other settlements of Syria and integrate the people to this system, then the "force" factor, namely the role of YPG, should not be underestimated.

It can be suggested that the secondary political group among the Syrian Kurds is composed of the successor parties of KDP in Syria. It is said that those parties range from 12 to 16. The ambiguity in figures partly stems from the difficulty in identifying names of some parties due to the fact that they are so small that they cannot be considered as a party, and partly stems from the formation of a new party with almost the same name right after the struggle for leadership in each party. The first common characteristics of these parties is the fact that each of them derived

from the Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria created in 1957. While some of those parties still carry the name of SKDP with some suffixes, some others went through partial ideological and organizational transitions in due course. There is no consensus on what could be the best political solution for the future of Syria and for Kurds. Even though a relatively joint discourse was observed after the formation of the Syrian Kurdish National Council a year ago (on October 2011), what is concluded from the interviews with the party representatives is that there is no consensus on whether those parties ask for a similar federal structure or an autonomous region as in Iraq. It is seen that these parties, which are rivals to one another in terms of their organizational structures, leaders and areas of activity, are losing their free decision-making abilities with each passing day, and they are being dragged into the supremacy of KRG. This situation is considered as an historically inevitable consequence for many Syrian Kurdish parties. The factions within IKDP starting from 1957 have affected Syrian Kurds. The split between KDP and PUK in Iraq also affected the Syrian Kurdish parties. However, the relations with Iraqi Kurds were effective not only in organizational terms, but also in terms of the political discourse, tradition of struggle, and strategic choices. For instance, SKDP which might be considered as the party which has the closest relations with the IKDP and led by Abdulhakim Bashar, argues for federalism just like KDP does in Iraq. Above all, 2004 Qamishli riot may not have been directly related caused by the support of Iraqi Kurds, but the main inspiration of Syrian Kurds in Qamishli is the gains obtained by Kurds in Iraq.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, the influence of Iraqi Kurdish parties on other parties in Syria were limited until the outbreak of 2011 events. The oppressive policies of the Assad regime and the

fact that KRG avoided provoking Syria led to limited relationship. But when the Kurdish parties in Syria clearly adopted an attitude against the Assad regime after 2011 (what is most important here is that Massoud Barzani gave a negative response to the invitation of Damascus), it became inevitable for the Kurdish parties, which have a limited influence in Syria, to establish close relationship with Erbil as a part of their quest for a foreign support. Despite the factions among themselves today, the parties in this group do not seem to go beyond the general line of KRG. Adding this situation to organizational weaknesses and the factions in the group, it makes people think that it is an actor becoming more dependent with each passing day. Lastly, the fact that it was stated Kurdish young people escaping from Syria took military training in North Iraq created a perception that those might be a balancing factor for PYD or a supporting factor for KNC to some extent; and even this situation leads to a questioning their control for KNC parties.

The group which has grabbed least attention among Syrian Kurds so far, but which should not be underestimated in terms of the grassroots is the youth movements. Before the process of Kurdish parties' joining the uprising movements against Damascus became clear, some Kurdish youth groups joined their forces and formed youth movements. Despite the fact that a substantial part of the parties avoided taking action until they were sure the Assad regime would be toppled or the uprising would spread all across the country, Kurdish youth movements showed their attitudes before long. It might be suggested that currently there are more than 20 youth movements, some of which are directly related to the parties and some of which are independent. The most popular of those movements might be listed as follows: Kurdish Youth Movement (TCK), Organization of

Youth of West Kurdistan (KCRK), Union of Coordinating Committees of Kurdish Youth (YHXKS), Avahi Coalition, Sawa Coalition, Free People of Syrian Kurdistan, Coordinating Committee of Rokndeen, Free People of Tirb Spi, Syrian Kurdistan Movement, Coordinating Committee of Sheikh Meshuq Al-Khaznawi, and Coordinating Committee of Kurdish Brotherhood.

While some of these youth movements are directly under the control of parties or party coalitions, some others are independent. Even though the basic demands of independent movements are rather developed within the frame of freedom, democratization, cultural rights and political rights; it is seen that there is a lack of whole group of demands. The most important reason why the youth movements with lots of members and which address a large group of people want to stay out of parties is the reaction among the young groups caused by the ambiguous attitude of political parties. Although most of the independent youth movements seem to receive support from the parties, they believe they are reacted due to the fact that they do not take the same initiatives with them.<sup>6</sup>

The third group that should be mentioned among Kurds in Syria is composed of the popular groups which generally follow the developments and are not active in political terms. As it is seen in UN reports, it is observed that the rapidly increasing number of Syrian Kurds started to migrate to UN camps in North Iraq.

The relationship between the four tendencies outlined above might be defined as follows: The process between 19 and 23 July has been the most effective event in terms of the consensus efforts among Syrian Kurds. The Kurdish High Council, which was formed in Erbil in early July as a result of the agreement

between KNC and TEV-DEM, became the main power managing the regions controlled by Kurds. However, PYD became stronger than the parties constituting KNC based on four reasons. Those reasons might be listed as follows:

1. The parties constituting KNC do not have a financial support as PYD does. Most of the KNC parties do not have their own independent resources. Although most of the KNC parties receive financial support by KDP, it is only sufficient to carry on the party activities. The financial problems of those parties prevent them from reinforcing the party organizations, and even it is seen that they lose power due to the fact that they cannot support the people when they are in need. Some Syrian settlements' being under the control of High Kurdish Council, on the other hand, did not bring any financial advantage for KNC parties. On the contrary, the fact that the needs of the people are met by the leaders or committees led by PYD decreases the expectations of the people from other parties.
2. The differences between the regions Syrian Kurds live limits the political activities of KNC parties. As mentioned above, those differences also have historical and social backgrounds. However, beyond those backgrounds, the events that have been taking place for the last year led to further decline of influence of parties that are members of KNC except for Qamishli and some areas in the neighborhood. For instance, while it is seen that the parties within KNC could sate demonstrations in Afrin and Kobani during the first months of the outbreak of protests in Syria, it is observed that they have suspended their activities in the recent months to a large extent. It might be suggested that a limited number of demonstrations resulted in conflicts or they were suppressed before they attained their goals.
3. There is a lack of total reconciliation, consensus among the parties of KNC. The alliance among themselves are extremely weak. Factions are observed among KNC parties which have a weak relationship among themselves. Although some parties come to the fore to prove themselves, it should not be surprising for especially small-scale parties to side with the powerful one.
4. The main difference between PYD and KNC is the military actions and the existence of an armed group. PYD can seize the control of almost every region where Kurds have the control thanks to its relationship with PKK. All of the armed Kurdish units that are known as the Popular Protection Units (YPG) are either PYD sympathizers or PYD militants. Despite the fact that it started to operate under the roof of High Kurdish Council following the formation of the aforesaid Council, after a while it adopted an independent attitude.<sup>7</sup> The fact that YPG declared it left the High Kurdish Council points out the establishment of a new political balance and that conflict dynamics would increase. In late October, the fact that PYD accused Azadi movement of leading to conflict between the Free Syrian Army and YPG in Aleppo set an example to this process. PYD mem-



bers started to provoke Azadi movement sympathizers against FSA, and to apply pressure by accusing them of doing what Turkey says, both in Aleppo and also in some other Kurdish settlements

## 2. Turkey and Syrian Kurds: Recent History, Relationship and Inspiration

Today, in a substantial part of works written on Kurds in Syria, the presence of Kurds in Syria is handled at least in two groups. The Syrian Kurds within the first category are those which have been living in Syria for centuries, which spread to different parts of the country and which keep their existence in the cities such as Damascus, Hama and Homs. The first category which is different from other Kurds in terms of its social and political characteristics is put forward as the most important proof that there has been a Kurdish entity in Syria since Salahaddin Ayyubi.<sup>8</sup> There is no consensus regarding to what extent those Kurds, who are claimed to have been Arabized in various resources, went through an identity erosion. However, as it is put forward in the interviews made with Syrian Kurds in the recent period, despite the fact that a considerable part of those people were Arabized in terms of their language, it cannot be suggested that they forgot their national identities. In fact, as the events that broke out in 2011 also showed, the neighborhoods, where Kurdish people live in majority in Damascus and Aleppo, have agreed on staying away from the conflicts. This choice does not come to mean that they support the Assad administration, or they side with the opposition, or they chose it as a result of the suggestions of some Kurdish parties. In addition, as indicated by the political quests of Kurds in Damascus in early 20<sup>th</sup> century when Syria was under the French mandate, Kurds have never been totally isolated from the political struggle. Beyond the role that Kurdish offi-

cers like Edip Çiçekli and Hüsnü Zaim played in the process of coup d'état in Syria, Kurds that might be included in the first category developed a special relationship between those who control the system in Syria and among themselves. This relationship is based on avoiding to adopt a challenging attitude in return for not being affected by the system, rather than being based on demands for ethnic and cultural political rights. Especially the fact that the influence of Kurdish families which had a traditional influence in Damascus declined as a result of the migration waves from the Kurdish-dominant northern regions due to economic and political reasons led this category to adopt an attitude developing a special relationship with the one that is in power.

The second category that could be formed related to the Kurdish entity in Syria is composed of Kurds who have a close relationship with Kurds who mostly live in Turkey and who have immigrated to Syria approximately within the last 90 years. The fact that the relatives in Turkey and Syria remained in both sides of the border is not a totally unintended process. While there were splits stemming from the difficulties encountered by villagers, who did not know about borders, to adapt into a modern life after leaving their century-old homeland by being confronted with a fait accompli, or the splits of relatives in order not to lose the territories in both sides of the border; some of the early Kurdish migrations from Turkey to Syria were totally intended. The immigration of Kurds, who had to leave Turkey in the aftermath of Ağrı and Dersim uprisings, to Syria might be handled within this framework. This immigration wave led to a growing Kurdish population in certain areas in northern Syria. Moreover, this immigration was not only limited with the groups supporting the uprisings. Some of the leading groups of the Kurdish nationalist move-

ment in Turkey in 1930s passed to Syria and continued their activities here. However, it cannot be suggested that all of those Kurds, split across Aleppo, Raqqa, and Al-Hasakah province in northern Syria, are related with Turkey. There are Kurds, if in small numbers, who have close relationship with Iraqi Kurds.

It should be highlighted that Kurds who live in northern Syria do not show consistency among themselves either. Central and western parts of the regions composed of Kurdish population in majority in northern Syria are different from those who live in eastern part of the country in ideological, social, economic and political terms. It cannot be argued that there is a major difference between east and west in terms of the relationship with Turkey. In fact, some of the Syrian Kurdish settlements in the east are closer to Turkish border. However, it could be suggested that there is a relative dominance of parties which have close relations with KDP and PUK in those regions as they have a closer relationship with Iraqi Kurdish nationalist movement as of 1950s. Even though those parties lost their limited influence in the post-2011 period, they are still more effective in districts, towns and other settlements that are close to Iraqi border than the areas like Afrin and Kobani. Considering West, on the other hand, it is seen that there is a political movement shaping the political awareness by taking the developments both in Syria and Turkey into consideration, even if they have particular demands for Syria. The ideological relationship which got closer especially after the formation of PKK in late 1970s shows the fact that Syrian Kurds living in northwest of the country have a much more Turkey-centric political perception than those who live in the eastern part of the country (except for some districts).

Actually for that very reason, Kurds joining PKK is not only limited with PKK's estab-

lishing its base in Syria or with Syrian government's playing its Kurdish card against Turkey. As from 1930s, there is a Kurdish nationalist group, which is interested in the Kurdish movements in Turkey from time to time and which is directly or indirectly affected by those movements, in Syria. In general, it is stated in the studies carried out on Syrian Kurds that the Kurdish movement in Iraq has an impact on Syrian Kurds.<sup>9</sup> Considering the interaction between Turkey and Kurds in Syria, this argument which became concrete following the establishment of KDP in Syria in 1957 after being affected by Iraqi KDP remains insufficient. In other words, it cannot be suggested that the external impact on Syrian Kurds was limited with the impact of Iraqi KDP in 1950s. Within this framework, the Turkey perception among Syrian Kurds developed not only within the frame of Turkey's interest in North Iraq or its policies towards this region, but rather within the frame of Turkey's Kurdish problem and the relative policies. Turkey's similar perception towards Syrian Kurds remained limited with PKK for a long time. Despite the fact that the 2004 Qamishli Riots alerted Turkey, which was quite concerned about the process in North Iraq during that period, the potential gains of the nationalist movement and the Kurdish existence in Syria has been perceived from the perspective of Turkey's own Kurdish problem.

The best example to this situation took place in 2012. As from the outbreak of uprisings in Syria, the situation of Kurds among the Syrian opponents in Turkey did not grab much attention. The factor related to Syrian opposition which came to the fore in Turkish press after the opposition meeting held in Turkey on June 2011 was the Arab opposition and especially the Muslim Brotherhood. Putting the rare news aside, Kurds in Syria did not take much place on media until the assassination of Mashaal Tammo on October 2011.

Even though the formation of Syrian Kurdish National Council on October created a short-term interest, 19 July 2012 was the turning point in Turkey's interest in Syrian Kurds. Until that day, the position of Kurds in the process in Syria, the content of demonstrations, expectations, power, capacities and their outlook on Turkey were brought up to the agenda neither on media nor in academic circle. The interest after 19 July 2012, on the other hand, developed within the framework of the establishment of a new "Kurdistan" on Turkey border and that this new structure was under the control PKK (PYD). Afterwards, the Kurdish problem in Syria continued to be handled in Turkey in the axis of PKK's strengthening in Syria, Syrians in PKK, and the anti-PKK Kurdish groups.

### **3. Turkey and Syrian Kurds: The Problem of Perception, Deadlock and Coexistence**

Maybe the most important consequence of the civil war in Syria is the fact that it is quite difficult to restore the central authority in the country. Even if the conflicts came to an end and the Assad regime was toppled, it is obvious that Syria would face a new political crisis. After that point, the Kurdish movements in Syria would not settle for less than they have right now. The regions that Kurds seized the control in July paved the way for establishment of a Kurdish region in Syria. This step is both regarded as a response to the allegations suggesting that Syrian Kurds do not have their own region, and also it sheds light on the policies that Syrian Kurds could pursue in the forthcoming period. The Kurdish region, of which the foundations are already laid, does not include a considerable part of the Kurdish population in Syria. However, there is no major obstacle before the expansion of the aforesaid region in near future. In case the Assad regime further lose its power or is toppled, it is highly likely that Qamishli

and some neighboring settlements would be included in the de facto Kurdish administration. Still political geography of Syrian Kurds require a large-scale demographic change to establish a federal district similar to the one in Iraq. In case this kind of democratic change does not take place, it might be suggested that substantial number of non-Kurdish elements, especially Arabs, would be included in this Kurdish region which could be established in northern Syria when the current demographic structure is taken into consideration. No matter what the scope and borders of the region under the Kurdish control in Syria are, it is a development that could affect not only the balances in Syria but also the balances in the Middle East. The rising influence of PYD in this region might create an impact which goes beyond the one in Iraq for Turkey. PKK, which found a place to set up its base in the power vacuum in Iraq after 1990s, could never be a prime power in North Iraq. In the post-2003 period, on the other hand, its power and realm of impact in North Iraq became more limited. This limitation led PKK to implement its plans only in the areas designated for itself. However, it is seen that PKK in Syria has been striving to put the "civilian" model in its mind into practice even nowadays. The Syria experience of PYD, which imposed social and political conditions envisaged in KCK model despite the opposition of other parties, is regarded as a model for PKK. Although PYD and other related organizations are considered as a consequence of a Syrian-centric understanding, the practices carried out in the regions controlled by Kurds in Syria since July are similar with PKK's demands from Turkey in a sense when its limited originality is put aside. This process is closely followed by Turkey as well. As a matter of fact, Turkey's perceiving the developments in northern Syria on PYD-PKK basis from the very first day might be attributed to that.



What makes the activities of PYD important for Turkey is not only its support for PKK in terms of discourse, or bringing up the situation of terrorist Abdullah Öcalan rather than the issues related to Syria during the PYD demonstrations. Turkey believes that a new problem has been added to the security problems stemming from the existence of the terrorist organization within its own borders and the infiltrations from Iraq. As a matter of fact, the rise in the number of terrorists, detected to have come from Syria, behind the terrorist actions carried out in the recent period proves this security perspective. Are the terrorist attacks, which have been on the rise in Turkey in the recent period, a periodical reflection of the civil war in Syria? Or is the region controlled by Kurds that could appear in Syria in the long term going to turn into a threat for Turkey? The answer to those questions will affect the nature and future of the relations between Turkey and Syrian Kurds. It is hard to answer this question now. But the last two years of the relationship between Turkey and Syrian Kurds give some clues.

What should be indicated in the first place is the fact that the relationship between Turkey and Syria has not been managed well in the last two years. As mentioned before, the Kurds in Syria were handled in terms of Turkey on the basis of PKK both in the pre-Arab Spring period and also afterwards. The presence of Syrian Kurds within PKK is the root cause of the concern. However, in the period following the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, Turkey could not develop a comprehensive strategy on Syrian Kurds. Turkey's policy of adopting an equal approach towards the ethnic and sectarian groups in its neighbors partially prevented itself from developing a special policy against Kurds. However, the real concern stemmed from the fact that the nature of Kurdish opposition in Syria and its details were not completely known. The way

Turkish media handles Syrian Kurds sheds light on this perception. The steps taken by Syrian Kurds in the post-March 2011 period were not followed carefully, and Kurdish movements were handled in two general groups such as; the supporters of Iraqi Kurds and PKK supporters. Even though Turkey supports the existence of Kurds in Syrian opposition, not much effort was paid to solve the problem between those parties and the Arab parties in the Syrian opposition. The steps taken on this subject (for example inviting Syrian Kurds to the opposition meeting in İstanbul) did not create constructive results in general. Turkey's general perception might be suggested as not to bring the Kurdish problem in Syria to the forefront, and the problem would be solved among the Syrian groups on its own after the change of regime.

On the other hand, Syrian Kurds could not develop a policy to place trust in Turkey after the start of uprisings in Syria either. They got reactions by bringing up the Kurdish Problem in Turkey in their discourses. The talks between Turkey and Syrian Kurds remained limited and personal until the talk, held between Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and the parties constituting KNC, in Erbil on August 2012. Although the fact that Abdulbasit Sayda, a Syrian Kurd, took over the leadership in Syrian National Council from Burhan Galyun is a factor put forward to reinforce the understanding that Turkey is not against Syrian Kurds; the lack of an alternative for Sayda among Syrian Kurds caused to failure of this move. In fact, it caused to more reaction among both KNC and other Kurdish parties.

PYD, on the other hand, did everything to get the reaction of Turkey for a long time. Especially its role in the rising terrorist actions of Syrian Kurds within PKK in Turkey in the recent period seems to be a move made on purpose. Even though PYD tried to give rela-

tively moderate messages to decision-makers in Turkey through the media after July 2012, it seems to be extremely meaningless. Today, Turkey considers PYD as an extension of PKK. On the other hand, PYD considers Turkey as a state to eliminate their gains in Syria and the only state to have the capacity to do so. In this equation, the attitude of the parties that are members of KNC does not draw an optimistic table. The factions within KNC also reflected on the relations with Turkey. While some parties are willing to establish close relations with Turkey, some others strive to take political advantage of this process. Those parties, which try to take advantage of the reaction among Syrian Kurds against Turkey, accuse those who want to establish close relations with Turkey on various grounds. This complicated relationship makes it difficult for Kurds in Syria and Turkey to live side by side with each passing day. On the one hand, a considerable part of Syrian Kurds consider Turkey as a state which oppresses Kurds in the country and which is focused on eliminating their gains in Syria; on the other hand, Turkey considers the majority of Syrian Kurds same with PKK due to PYD, and regard it as a security problem. Nevertheless, neither Turkey refuses the demands of Syrian Kurds for democratic rights, nor all Syrian Kurds support PKK.

What is concluded from this situation might be summarized as follows: The presence of Kurds in Syria should not constitute a problem for Turkey by its nature. If the problem in Syria is democratization, it should support the demands of Kurds within the framework of democratization, and try to know Syrian Kurds more closely in order to develop a mutual understanding. Also, Syrian Kurds should prevent all kind of formations to help terrorist organization, and respect the sensitivities of Turkey. However, the tension in which the conflicts in Syria escalate points out the rise

of conflict dynamics rather than peace in an environment where the regime and borders in the Middle East are about to change.

#### **4. Relationship Between Syrian Kurds and Other Opposition Organizations: The Enemy of My Enemy Is My Friend**

Most of the opponents could not reach an agreement on lots of points since the first day of trying to create a large-scale opposition in Syria. Those inside reacted against the ones outside, Islamist reacted against seculars, civilians reacted against the army, and they struggles among themselves as well as against the Assad regime. However, Kurds are the ones whose positions within the opposition have been the most ambiguous from the very first. In the first place, Kurdish parties could not adopt a common attitude. While some of them joined the Syrian National Council (SNC), some others were included in other organizations, and some of them kept their distance from other organizations. As the SNC became more powerful, the Kurdish existence was discussed. However, the majority of parties constituting SNC did not positively respond to demands of Kurdish movements. Even though decentralization was accepted after long bargains, it could not be exactly put in practice yet. Moreover, despite the fact that a considerable part of Kurdish parties gathered under a single roof on October 2011, some of them were still in touch with other opposition movements. In addition, even after the Erbil Agreement signed among Kurds, parties under PYD and KNC developed different relationships with Syrian Arab opposition. Despite those different relations, a conflict did not break out between Kurds and the armed opposition resisting against the Syrian regime for a long time. In fact resistance groups, in which Kurds and especially Salahaddin Ayyubi joined in 2012, were formed. However, the fact that Kurds started to seize

the control of some cities in Syria inevitably led to an opposition between FSA and PYD.

This process might be summed up as follows: As it is known, Kurds in Syria joined the opposition from the very beginning, but they could not draw an integral image. Some Kurdish parties joined Syrian National Council (SNC) and then they left the Council on the grounds that this group did not meet their demands, and formed their own group. PYD, the most powerful party among Kurds in Syria, pursued an indecisive policy for a long period of time. Despite opposing to practices of the regime in discourse, it maintained a “special relationship” with the Assad regime. Hardening its anti-Assad discourse after seizing the control of some regions in northern Syria on July 2012, PYD embarked on a quest of establishing dialogue and cooperation with other Syrian dissident organizations. During this process, any conflict did not take place either among different Kurdish parties, or Assad administration, or among the groups under SNC and FSA. Kurds focused on the idea of creating a stable region of their own away from conflicts and far from drifting into a chaos. Their quest of staying away from armed conflicts between the regime and opposition has been successful to a large extent. As a matter of fact, except for the small-scale events between the government forces and Kurds during the period when Kurds seized the control of some cities in July and the threats of FSA against Kurds as well as some other small-scale conflicts; Kurds achieved staying away from the conflicts. This situation appeared also as a result of the fact that the conflicting parties which would like to “control the center” did not want to face the opposition of Kurds. The Assad administration preferred that PYD seized the control of some areas in the north rather than FSA did so. So that, while it kept some regions, especially Hasake, away from the control of FSA,

it also aimed at hitting Turkey on its soft spot. FSA, on the other hand, avoided clearly facing the opposition of Kurds while there was a more important power to deal with. Despite stating that they are against a Kurdish region in Syria on all occasions, FSA kept away from clashing with Syrian Kurds or PYD siding with the government. However, the stage where the civil war in Syria arrived started to disturb this balance.

September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2012 might be indicated as the date when the instability began. On that day, a suicide attack took place in Qamishli, in Al-Hasakah province which was still under the control of the Syrian government, but de facto administrated in accordance with an agreement between the government and Kurds in the region; and a group under FSA assumed the attack. In the attack carried out through a bomb-laden vehicle, 4 people were killed and 15 people were injured. The main factor which makes the attack important is the fact that it was the first important indicator that the areas where Kurds live in majority and which were believed to be stable and safe until that period could turn into an area of conflict between the government forces and the opposition. This process took a new shape towards the end of October.

In the recent period, conflicts have taken place mostly in Aleppo, in Syria. The conflicts, which increased after the opponents designated Aleppo as the strategic target in order to break the resistance of the government both in financial and moral terms, turned different parts of the city into a battle field. In this process, Kurds pursued a similar policy with what they want to do in the north, and tried to keep Eshrefiyah and Sheikh Maksut Neighborhoods, where Kurds constitute a considerable part of the population in Aleppo, away from the conflict. Of course, it couldn't be always possible. In the opera-

tions that government forces are claimed to have targeted opponents, these settlements were also damaged from time to time just like the other settlements. On 26 October 2012, on the other hand, an event which could be the milestone of the civil war in Syria in the forthcoming period took place.

On 25 October 2012, an armed opposition group under FSA (despite the fact that some sources say approximately 200, the exact number of people in the group is now known) wanted to set up a base in Eshrefiyah and the Kurdish opposition in the region tried to remove them. The following day, on October 26<sup>th</sup>, the government forces carried out bombardment against the opposition forces which set up their base in Eshrefiyah, and during the bombardment 15 people, 9 of whom Kurdish, were killed besides the opponents, and approximately 20 people were injured. People who are alleged to be from FSA opened fire against the group, which protested the Syrian army and staged demonstration to remove the opponents from the neighborhood; and 10 people were killed while approximately 20 people were injured during the conflict. Nevertheless, as far as understood from the images/videos captured during the conflict (some Syrian Kurdish opponents shared them on the internet), it is seen that demonstrators had light arms and that they shouted slogans in favor of PKK while the fire was opened. The next day of the events (27 October), Popular Protection Units (YPG) (which is said to be the armed wing of PYD) under the same roof with PYD attacked against the opponents within FSA who had opened fire against the demonstrators. In the conflict, 22 people were killed and many others were injured in both parties. During the conflicts that took place between the parties afterwards, lots of people were killed and injured in both parties. As a result, both parties called a truce and they reached an agreement on a series of

points especially such as exchanging the captives and not attacking against each other.<sup>10</sup>

A couple of days after the aforesaid events in Aleppo, on 8 November 2012, Sere Kaniye (Ras Al Ayn) which is a settlement in Raqqa and which started to be controlled by Kurds in mid-July turned into a battle field between FSA and government forces. The conflict which broke out between the two parties were quite bloody, and YPG preferred to stay away from the events rather than being involved. However, Kurds clearly indicate that they feel so uncomfortable with this situation. All in all, the conflicts between Kurds and FSA or the conflicts between FSA and regime forces show the following points in terms of the relations between Kurds and FSA.

1. Tougher the civil war in Syria gets, the harder it becomes for Kurds to implement the tactic of directly taking sides in the armed conflict. The events in Qamishli and Aleppo show that Kurds have not been sided with any of the parties in the conflict yet. However, in both events, the conflict between PYD and FSA either in terms of politics or armed events would further drive a wedge between Arab opposition and Kurds in Syria. This situation would especially reinforce the perception of SNC and FSA regarding that PYD supports the Assad regime or that it does not support the revolution in line with its own interests. This perception might lead to conflict between the government and the opposition forces and create new areas of conflict in Aleppo and important places in northern Syria in the future. Probably the main factor which hampers it right now is the fact that FSA does not want to open a new front besides Assad.
2. Considering in terms of internal dynamics of Kurds, it might be suggested that PYD

which has been effective mostly in northern part of the country where Kurds live in majority, especially in Afrin and Kobani, could become more powerful also in Aleppo. It might be envisaged that other Kurdish parties (considering the fact that the parties within Kurdish National Council which continue to work hand in glove with SNC have remained insufficient in face of the recent events) could lose its grassroots as it showed an organized resistance against the conflicts and adopted a distant attitude towards FSA from the very beginning.

3. The axis and grounds of conflicts, which have been going on in Syria so far, are extremely fluctuating. The longer civil war becomes, the more complicated attitudes of the parties and alliances get. As a result of this tendency, it appears that the possibility of the emergence of at least two civil wars in Syria in the long term (for instance central authority war, inter-community war, regional civil war etc.) should not be underestimated.

The fact that the civil war has sectarian dimensions (it is wrong to suggest that civil war is totally on Sunni-Shiite or on a similar platform. However, it does not seem realistic to completely ignore the sectarian factor either.) to a certain extent is already a known fact. Adding the conflicts between Kurds and Arabs to this fact, the situation in Syria would be a total deadlock.

### Conclusion and Suggestions

In a period when the conflict in Syria is becoming more complicated and strong alternatives for solution cannot be developed, the political future of Syrian Kurds remains uncertain. The three main subjects handled in the report are actually closely related with

each other: Syrian Kurds relations among themselves, the relations with Turkey and the relations with other opponent organizations.

At this point, the concrete suggestions for the parties might be listed as follows:

#### *Suggestions for Syrian Kurds*

1. Syrian Kurds should form a joint and comprehensive political grouping, but this grouping should not include any kind of relation with terror. One of the most important problems of Syrian Kurds who have been continuing their political struggle for decades is the fact that they could not overcome the organization problem. Even during the days the report is being written, Syrian parties have been going through internal problems and split due to the struggle for power. Kurds need to create a stability in their own political formations.
2. The basic problem that Syrian Kurds have encountered so far is that they cannot come up with stable suggestions for the post-Assad period. Syrian Kurds need to come up with a series of reasonable political suggestions which could be accepted by all political groups in the country.
3. They should take part in the opposition restructured against the Assad administration. The post-Assad period can by no means reach a long-term democracy without Kurds. However, Syrian Kurdish political parties should launch a powerful cooperation process beyond a dialogue in order to do so.
4. Syrian Kurds should keep in mind that Turkey is a major neighbor which is in favor of democratization in Syria. They should attach importance to ally with Tur-



key. The main goal to do so is to stay away from terrorist organization.

#### *Suggestions for Opponents*

1. They should stop refusing all kind of suggestions to come from Syrian Kurds with ethnic biases, and clearly discuss it.
2. They should not create new fronts against the regime, and should not offend Syrian Kurds in political and military fields.
3. In restructuring process, Kurds should also be accorded the right of representation in line with their power and population in the country.

#### *Suggestions for Turkey*

1. In the Kurdish problem in Syria, Turkey should focus on the grand scheme of things and it should consider the situation not only in the axis of PKK but also in the context of the power struggle in the region.
2. Turkey should develop a more comprehensive attitude towards Kurds, and it should especially help Syrian Kurds develop a relationship with other opponents.
3. It should underline the fact that Kurdish movements and Turkey have common points and also it should develop cooperative opportunities.

## Interviews

### 1. An Interview with Mustafa Juma, Leader of the Kurdish Freedom Party in Syria which is known as Azadî in short, and is Partiya Azadî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê in Kurdish

**ORSAM: Could you introduce yourself in brief?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** My name is Mustafa Juma. I am leader of the Kurdish Freedom Party in Syria (Partiya Azadî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê).

**ORSAM: How do you evaluate the current situation in Syria in general? What does this process mean for Kurds?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** Our country is under a major threat. The future is still uncertain. There is a major war and destruction across the country. Bashar Assad doesn't take any step which is to leave the power in order to bring peace in the country. Authoritarian power prevails in all Eastern countries. Every leader coming to power thinks of somewhat keeping his seat. Leader also considers the people as his slaves. This kind of understanding brings along not leaving the power, fighting till the end, and killing people. Armies were formed in Syria to fight against Israel and weapons were purchased to that end, but all these weapons were used against its own people, not against Israel. Therefore, how the problem in Syria will be solved is a total question mark. The strategic importance of Syria makes the problem more complicated and brings the international dimension forward. All the actors struggling on Syria approach towards the problem from their own perspective of interest. There are two methods for the solution of the Syrian problem. The first one is the internal solution, and this would be carried out over the Free Syr-

ian Army. The second one, on the other hand, is an international solution. If Assad stopped killing people, this would be the best solution for the Syrian problem. Otherwise, ultimately there would be an international intervention. UN Security Council or NATO will make the decision. Bashar Assad's putting a democratic and a multi-party system into practice and meeting the demands of the people would be the best way to solve the problem. Syria's future is based on a decentralized structure. Because there are quite different social groups in Syria. There are two main nations in the country which are Arabs and Kurds. In addition, there are also some minorities which are Turkmens, Circassians, Chaldeans, Assyrians. Also there are sectarian groups such as Alawites, Druses, Shiites, Ismailis, Christians. Therefore, there should be a multi-party and democratic system in Syria.

**ORSAM: What do you think about Turkey's Syria policy?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** In Syria, we consider Turkey as our friend. As Kurds, we argue that Turkey should be the friend of Kurds as well, but unfortunately it is not the case right now. Kurds are one of the most important elements of the Middle East. Kurds live in four different countries. The biggest one is Turkey. Turkish Foreign Minister held talks in Erbil not long ago. He has very profound political opinions. We hope that these opinions belong to AK Party and Turkey. Kurdish problem is the most important issue of the region. Turkey should peacefully solve the Kurdish problem in order to live in peace in the region as the major power of the region. There would not be future in the region without finding a solution to the Kurdish problem. There has been positive changes in Turkey's approach towards Kurds in the recent years. This is also a positive development for the future of the

region and of all groups (Turkish, Arab, Persian etc.). We believe that Turkey should take the lead and take an initiative on Syria as the major power. Turkey should not oppose to desires of Kurds in Syria. The main interest of Turkey is to be with Kurds and to support them.

**ORSAM: What can you say about the relations between the Syrian opposition and Kurdish opposition?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** There are so different groups in Syrian opposition. There should be a consensus among those groups. As each Syrian opposition group is close to a certain country or group, it is necessary to take the interests and demands of all these actors into consideration to solve the Syrian problem. There is a need for consensus where everybody's demands are met. The Syrian National Council which is led by Abdülbasit Sayda also go through problems due to the different opinions of different groups. We believe that Bashar Assad should leave the power. We also think that all the opposition parties should convene to establish a democratic and a multi-party system. Recently a conference was held among all groups. Syrian National Council and Kurdish National Council convened. Then another meeting was held to talk to the Arab League Secretary-General. Parties reached a consensus on redefining the relations between themselves, and on reaching an agreement on certain points. If a consensus were formed between these two groups, it would be an important step in terms of ensuring the integrity of the Syrian opposition. If so, the opposition would join their forces and the international actors would agree on the Syrian opposition. In this case, a major step would be taken in solving the Syrian problem.

**ORSAM: Could you inform us about your party?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** Our party was formed in 1957. Then, it was called Syrian Kurdistan Democratic Party (SKDP). After a year, the name Kurdistan was changed into Kurdish. This situation went on like this until the congress in 1970. Afterwards, it was divided into three parts. We kept our name and only added the term "Left". It continued until 1980. In 1980, a congress, where the name of our party was changed into "Kurdish People's Union", was held. Its leader was Salah Bedreddin. This continued until 2001 when Salah Bedreddin resigned and I took office as the Leader of the Party. We kept the name "Kurdish People's Union" until 2005. That year Kurdish People's Union and Kurdish Left Party joined their forces and formed current "Azadi" party. We still keep this name.

**ORSAM: You said that the best model for the future of Syria is a decentralized structure. Could you tell us more about it?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** In societies where many groups live together, there should be a decentralized structure. Also in Syria, many ethnic and sectarian groups live together. Such a model is required for the people in Syria to live in peace. Each group should have their own rights. It should be the same with the structure in Iraq, and in the future Iran and Turkey should also adopt a decentralized structure. Each group should be accorded their own rights. They should live in peace instead of fighting against each other.

**ORSAM: Is decentralization different from federalism?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** No. They are similar and this is the right solution.

**ORSAM: Does your party argue for establishing a federal district for Kurds in Syria?**



**MUSTAFA JUMA:** Yes, we do; and we believe that this is the best solution for the future of Syria.

**ORSAM: Could you give us more details about the structure of the federal district? Which places will the federal district include?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** Mainly it will include three provinces: Aleppo, Al-Hasakah and Raqqa. The Kurdish region in Syria is 22 thousand square kilometers, which is two times bigger than the surface area of Lebanon. Approximately 4 million Kurds live in Syria. An Arabization policy was followed in the last century. People were displaced. This policy was implemented in Idlib, Latakia. There are Kurdish people who forgot their native language because of the Arabization policy. The northern Aleppo was a Kurdish region, but these areas were Arabized due to the Arabization policies.

**ORSAM: What do you think about Kurdish armed groups' seizing the control in Kurdish regions? Is it a tactical withdrawal of the Assad regime, or something else?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** In fact, PYD and Bashar Assad made an agreement on giving the control of those areas to PYD. There are lots of information about the close relationship between PYD and Assad regime, there is an alliance that has been strived to be maintained with PYD right now, and we do not want to ruin it. We went through a conflict with PYD three months ago. However, despite the fact that we have forces, we do not want to use them.

**ORSAM: PYD alleges that Syrian Kurds support them. To what extent it is true?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** It is by no means true.

They cannot take the support of even 10 per cent of Syrian Kurds. While tens of thousands of people are gathered wherever we stage a demonstration, they can gather two thousand people at most.

**ORSAM: What is the role of tribes among Syrian Kurds?**

The tribes in Afrin currently have a less important role. That is because of the close relationship between Afrin and Aleppo. However, tribes have an important role in Al-Jazira.

**ORSAM: What are the prominent tribes in Kobani?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** Barazi, Shiham, Getkan, Dinan are the prominent tribes. But there are also different groups within those tribes.

**ORSAM: Are all of the Kurdish armed groups belong to PYD?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** It is as if PYD tries to create an impression that everyone supports the group, but it is not true. Currently, PYD has some 4000 armed forces. People's Defense Forces (HPG). They came from Kandil and some other regions.

**ORSAM: Do other parties have armed forces?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** No, other parties either do not have an armed force or it is quite limited if they have. Some of them have a small-scale armed force, but nobody wants to bring this force to the fore to prevent a potential conflict among Kurds.

**ORSAM: Does PYD apply pressure on Kurds?**

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** Absolutely. They abduct and kill people. We do not want Kurds to fight against each other, but PYD applies pressure. PYD would lose its power after the regime change, because they are dependent on them right now.

**ORSAM:** What are the regions where your party is more powerful?

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** We are present at every region, but we are more powerful in Kobani and Afrin. Compared to Al-Jazira, we are more powerful in those areas. PYD claims it seizes the control of, and is powerful in these areas. However, it can do it only by resorting to force indeed. We have to accept things the way they are until some changes take place. That change is the collapse of the regime. The Syrian government still exists in Afrin.

When the government loses its power, they will be gone too. PYD can seize the control of Kurdish regions only through the support of regime.

**ORSAM:** Are PYD and PKK the same? How can we define the relationship between these two groups?

**MUSTAFA JUMA:** Öcalan lived in Syria, and presented his party as the leading party of entire Kurdistan. The former name of PYD was PKK. They changed the name into PYD some years ago. They are trying to show that they are based in Syria and they are different from PKK. PYD is completely financed and armed by PKK.

**ORSAM:** Thank you.

## 2. An Interview with Dr. Hamed Ahmad Derbendi, Deputy Minister in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Political Figure Representing Kurdistan Regional Government on the Syrian Kurds File

**ORSAM: Could you please inform us about the general outlook of the Kurdistan Regional Government on the events in Syria, and its policy on Syrian Kurds?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** Kurdistan Regional Government's policy on Syria is very clear. Currently, there is an uprising in Syria. The Syrian people ask for change. Kurds, Arabs and other groups all ask for this change. We are on the same page with the Syrian people as well. As for the Syrian Kurds, on the other hand, Kurds were under the pressure of the government in Syria. Tens of thousands of people did not even have their civil rights. Lots of Kurdish villages and settlements where the Kurdish people lived were evacuated, and Arabs were settled in those areas. Kurds could not have a title to the land until recently. All Syrian people were suppressed, but Kurds were particularly under pressure. Currently, all these groups ask for their rights. The country ask for their rights within the framework of its integrity. As Kurdistan government, we support the people, Syrian Kurds in terms having those rights, and we act in unison with them.

**ORSAM: During the period when the uprising broke out in Syria, Kurds acted more cautiously. However, they adopted a different attitude as from October 2011. What do you think might be the reason of the change from this cautious attitude into an active position? What happened to change the attitude of Kurds in that period?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** In the beginning, each group took part in this movement of change

except for two parties. They took part in the Syrian opposition. However, they did not have a good relationship with the opposition. The ambiguity about the Syrian opposition was effective in this situation. There were concerns also among Kurds due to the fact that it was not clear which group belonged to the Syrian opposition. It is necessary to understand those concerns, it is completely normal. Kurds were curious about which rights they would be accorded in the forthcoming Syrian government. They had relations with the Syrian National Council. Currently, they have a good relationship as well. Most probably, the Syrian National Council (SNC) and Kurdish National Council (KNC) might form a major alliance.

**ORSAM: What will be the grounds of the agreement between the parties? What were the problems that prevented them from acting in unison? How could those problems be overcome?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** Actually, Kurdish National Council already thought of acting in unison. However, Syrian Kurdish parties wondered about which rights they would be given. Syrian National Council did not have a certain strategy against Kurds before. The majority of them did not know much about Kurds in Syria.

Currently, forming a Front among themselves is on the agenda, and it will be formed. This situation does not come to mean that Kurdish National Council will be included within the Syrian National Council. Kurdish National Council is composed of 16 parties. As a result of 4-5 talks held between the parties, it was decided to form this Front. Syrian Kurdish parties out of the Kurdish National Council might have different opinions, but they can also join this Front if they want. However, in this alliance the parties will carry on separately. Syrian National Council will stay as it is,

and Kurdish National Council will separately carry on its activities. However, there will be a joint Front among themselves. We decided to form the aforesaid Front in Erbil.

**ORSAM: Will the alliance PYD is found within join this Front?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** That decision is totally up to them.

**ORSAM: When and how the problem between the Kurdish National Council and Syrian National Council was overcome?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** As Kurdistan Regional Government, we only support and help them. But we do not force them. As far as I know, there is no problem or an obstacle that could not be overcome between the parties. Right now, they are in the process of deciding the name of Syrian Republic.

**ORSAM: As the Assad regime withdrew from the Kurdish-populated areas, Kurds started to control their regions. Free Syrian Army threatened Kurds with a strong reaction. We know that Free Syria Army is another opposition group in relationship with the Syrian National Council. Don't you find it contradictory that while Syrian National Council and Kurdish National Council agree on creating a Front, Free Syrian Army threatens Kurds?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** I do not believe that Kurds and Free Syrian Army are directly going through a problem. Besides, it is necessary to clarify who Free Syrian Army is. Currently, there is a total chaos in Syria. Armed groups of 20-30 people in each city fight against the regime. Free Syrian Army could not make its presence felt in an organized way in none of the cities. Therefore, statements of a group or a leader from the Free Syrian Army against

Kurds do not come to mean that these statements belong to entire Free Syria Army, because I said before there is not an organized structure. We have not heard so far that Free Syrian Army is against Kurds. As a result, we can suggest that there is not problem between Kurdish National Council and Free Syrian Army.

**ORSAM: If you believe that Free Syrian Army is that much dispersed, how do you think they reached the power to damage and even destroy the Assad regime?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** I did not mean to say that Free Syrian Army is weak. I only tried to say that they have a dispersed structure and that a group cannot represent the entire Free Syrian Army.

**ORSAM: Many Kurdish parties in Syria and Kurdish National Council gathered under a single roof. In the first place, it seemed like they were in rivalry with a group led by PYD. However, they reached an agreement in the following meetings. As a result of this, it was said that Kurds have the control of their own regions and both groups act in unison. Nevertheless, it is seen that PYD seized the control of those areas on its own following the withdrawal of Syrian government from Kurdish regions. First of all, is this true? If so, what is your opinion on this subject?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** Above all, let me tell you why these two groups joined their forces. In the first place, there were problems between the two groups. The alliance that was formed was to eliminate the problems both in the region and also between themselves. Bringing peace in the region was in favor of all parties. It is in favor of the Syrian opposition, in favor of the neighboring countries, and of course in favor of Kurds. The alliance between these

group was formed 2-3 months ago. Nowadays, we hear that they are going through some problems. Even if they have problems, they should act in unison to eliminate those problems. They created commissions. We hope that the two parties act in unison within the framework of the Erbil Agreement. All we can do as Kurdistan Regional Government is to help. Of course, they know their interests and strategies better. We only try to be helpful.

**ORSAM: It is always said that PKK and PYD are actually the same organization. Do you believe that PKK and PYD are the same?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** As a matter of fact they are the same, but also they are not. This kind of statements are even used for some political parties in Turkey. These political parties are described as it is the same with PKK. However, these political parties are related to the Turkish government, this party has been carrying out its political activities within the Parliament. PYD, on the other hand is only a movement composed of Syrian Kurds. But PYD itself says that they feel sympathy towards PKK in ideological terms. PKK and PYD share the same opinion on lots of points. For instance, they have parallel views regarding how the problem of Syrian Kurds could be solved. On the other hand, PYD officials stated for several times that they are not directly related to PKK, and that they only share the same views on Syrian Kurds. They said they did not pose any threat against Turkey. When Mr. Davutoğlu convened with Syrian Kurdish parties in Erbil, PYD was also invited to the meeting. Because Syrian Kurds and Kurdish National Council wants to be in good relations with its neighbors, and they thought PYD should not be excluded. Currently, it is seen that Turkey has a strategy. I believe that they can see the future well. There is a good

relationship between Turkey and Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government. The relations which are getting closer between both sides have positive effects on Syrian Kurds.

**ORSAM: If this process continued, PYD might seize the control of all Kurdish regions on its own. How would you respond as Kurdistan Regional Government, if PYD did not abide by the provisions of the agreement and continued to control Kurdish areas on its own?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** Even so, we should focus on the positive result. Of course, I do not mean only to think and hope. Also in practice, it is necessary to strive to bring it to a positive conclusion. We hope that everything will be all right, and PYD will not use its armed force and strive to keep the Kurdish regions in Syria under its control. That's our hope. They also said for several times they would not do so. Even if they attempted to do such thing, I do not believe it would be successful. They need to act in unison with other groups as well. If they put another alternative into practice, they would damage their people. We have a quite clear stance about it. We want peace in this region. This is not a world of imposition. Nobody can impose their views on others by force. Even PYD itself does not think so. There is an alliance between the two groups on a certain ground.

**ORSAM: Leader of the Kurdistan Regional Government Barzani stated that Syrian Kurdish soldiers were being trained and that they would be sent to Syria. What do you think about it? Where are those soldiers trained?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** First of all, Mr. Barzani did not say that we send these Kurdish young people to Syria. Secondly, approximately 1000 Syrian Kurdish young people and those



who deserted the army took shelter in our region. In addition, as you know, Syrian Kurdish families also took shelter in our region. We created a camp in Domis for all these Syrian refugees. This camp included both families and also Kurdish young people who deserted the army or immigrated on their own. Approximately 1000 young people with no family and who deserted the army were in that camp. They stayed with families almost for 3 weeks. Nevertheless, after a certain point, single young people's living in the same place with families started to create problems. At the request of Kurdish National Council, we removed the young from Domis camp and we built another camp for them. However, in an environment where only the young live together problems started to come out in due course. These young people needed to busy themselves with something. Therefore, we started to give physical and military training to these young men. All of them are now in the camp, and none of them went to Syria. Their stay in the camp is within the knowledge of Kurdish National Council. Syrian National Council was also informed about this situation. Not even a single Kurdish young man have been sent back to Syria so far, and all them are here right now. If these young men want to turn back to their country in the future, if they are needed they can go back to Syria. In case of a regime change, a need might arise in case of a regime change to protect the border zones, or for Kurds to protect themselves in areas where Kurds live. At this very point, these young men might assume the role if needed. After the regime change in Syria, a major chaos would take place. In such a chaos environment, we can send Syrian Kurdish young people upon the request of Syrian National Council if they needed them. Other than that, we do not have any authority. This issue of military camps is on the agenda of every country where Syrian refugees are found. Because there are Syrian who desert the army and they need to stay in separate

camps. For example, there are similar groups in Jordan as well. A military camp was built for those who deserted the army.

**ORSAM: The Domis refugee camp in Duhok is under the control of United Nations. Are those camps you have mentioned also under the control of United Nations?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** No, but even the Domis refugee camp is barely under control of the United Nations. Until the end of July 2012, namely until recently, there was not any United Nations official in the Domis camp. The camp has recently passed under control of the United Nations.

**ORSAM: How many military camps are there for the Kurdish young people? Approximately how many people stay in each camp?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** Right now, there are three camps in total and approximately 500-600 Syrian Kurdish young men stay in each camp.

**ORSAM: Lastly, how do you evaluate Turkey's approach towards Syrian Kurds?**

**HAMIT AHMET:** We are very content about Turkey's recent approach on Syrian Kurds. Turkey has a great experience in terms of how to act in different cases. It is necessary to bring other means, except for violence, to the forefront and to establish a dialogue in order to bring peace to the region and to the environment. That is our wish. Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu's statements are also in parallel with this. Whatever the Syrian people decide, we agree with that decision. We are not on the same page with Turkey on Syrian Kurds, but I can say that we have a close dialogue on this subject.

**ORSAM: Thank you.**

### 3. An Interview with Nadjia Hafsa, Legal Officer in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

**ORSAM: Can you inform us about the Domis camp in Dohuk where Kurdish Syrian refugees were settled?**

**NADJIA HAFSA:** This camp was opened on April 29<sup>th</sup>. 14,410 Syrian refugees have been living in this camp since September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. Everyone in the camp is Kurdish. Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government has been pursuing an "open door" policy on Syrian refugees. Not only UNHCR, but also the international organizations such as WFP, UNICEF, WHO, IOM; and also Ministry of Internal Affairs within Kurdistan Regional Government and local authorities are interested in this camp. Expenses of the camps are financed by UNHCR. Water and electricity, on the other hand, are provided by Kurdistan Regional Government. Asayish provides security of the Domis refugee camp.

The distribution of Syrian Kurds in provinces they arrived in the camp might be listed as follows: 72% Al-Hasakah, 10% Damascus, 7% Aleppo, and 4% other provinces. A considerable part of those who came from Al-Hasakah come from Qamishli. The number of those coming from Damascus and Aleppo has been on the rise in the recent period. By the way, those who come from Damascus are mostly from the rural areas rather than central Damascus. Those from Damascus and Aleppo immigrate due to the economic downturn in the country. Other than that, of course, they flee to Iraq to escape from the violence. Currently, there are 14,410 registered refugees in the camp, but only 3,166 of them stay there. The rest of them, more than 10,000 refugees, live in central Dohuk. Those people look for a job, and work in the city.

**ORSAM: We know that another camp was opened in Al-Anbar province, other than the Domis refugee camp. What can say about this camp?**

**NADJIA HAFSA:** We opened El-Kaim camp in Al-Anbar. In this area, namely the area located across the Deir-ez Zor Province in Syria, borders were opened on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. The number of refugees in the aforesaid camp reached almost 4,000 as of September 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2012. As the camps are not sufficient yet, some of the refugees stay in schools. There are still refugees waiting on the border to enter in Iraq. The capacity of camp has not been exceeded yet. The majority of those who stay in this camp come from Deir-ez Zor, and they are mostly Arabs.

**ORSAM: In some military operations the Syrian army carried out on the borders of Turkey, Lebanon and Jordan, sometimes the operations went beyond the Syrian borderline. Did any border violation or a conflict took place between the opposition forces and Syrian security forces in the areas where the aforesaid camps are located in Iraq?**

**NADJIA HAFSA:** According to the UNHCR' guidelines, refugee camps is supposed to be 50 kilometers away from the borderline. It is completely different in Turkey. Turkey did not give the control of camps to UNHCR, and it controls these camps itself. Therefore, the camps might be located in a close distance from the border. However, any conflict directly affecting the camps for they are supposed to be 50 km away from the border according to our regulation has not taken place. For instance, the Domis refugee camp is 70 kilometers away from the border. Other than that, many conflicts have not taken place on Iraqi border unlike other border countries. However, the Iraqi army opened fire against

those who tried to enter from Mosul to Iraq not long ago, and some people were killed. On the other hand, no conflict took place on Al-Anbar borderline.

**ORSAM: In Turkey, some problems took place between the local people, who live in the areas where Syrian refugees were settled, and Syrian refugees. Has any problem taken place between Syrian refugees and local people? What do the local people think about Syrian refugees?**

**NADJIA HAFSA:** There is no problem here between the local people and Syrian refugees. Because, it is a little different here. There is bond between the Kurdish local people and Syrian Kurdish refugees. As all of those who settled in Dohuk are Kurdish, the local people in the area consider the refugees as their guests and thus there is no problem among them. No conflict, tension or event has taken place so far. But it is impossible to say that refugees haven't had any impact. For instance, the rental prices are on the rise in Dohuk. Job opportunities are decreasing. The situation might create problems in time.

**ORSAM: What do you say about Syrian refugees' tendency to come and go back as from September 2012?**

**NADJIA HAFSA:** In the beginning, on average 500 refugees came per week. Afterwards, when the Assad administration withdrew from Kurdish areas and Kurds seized the control, the number of people turning back was on the rise for a while. However, currently the number of refugees is more than those who came here in the beginning. Thus, we can say that in the beginning there was an upward tendency, then it decreased and currently it is rapidly rising. We explain the aforesaid tendency as follows: In the first period, mostly Kurdish young men, who were poor and in-

involved in conflicts, immigrated. Soldiers and armed young men immigrated. Therefore, they came on their own. Thus, during the first period, there was on average 500 refugee flow per week. During the second period, on the other hand, there was a sudden decline in the number of immigrants, and even some refugees started to go back to Syria. It was because Kurds took over the control of Kurdish regions in Syria. Now we are in the third stage and the number of Kurdish refugees has reached higher levels than the average number of those who arrived per week in the first period. The third period might be explained by the fact that families started to immigrate due to the economic downturn. Currently, there is a considerable flow of families for economic reasons, rather than the flow of individuals for security reasons. Therefore, the number of refugees is rapidly rising. For instance, the majority of Kurdish people arriving in the first place were coming from Al-Hasakah. But now, most of them come from Damascus and Aleppo. This is completely related to the economic downturn. For instance, about 3,000 Syrian Kurdish refugees have come to Dohuk in the last two days.

**ORSAM: President of Kurdistan Regional Government Barzani not long ago stated that they gave military training to Syrian Kurdish young people. What can you say about the camps where those who desert army or who are on their own are settled and where they are provided with military training, except for the Domis camp?**

**NADJIA HAFSA:** There are three more camps which are not under the control of United Nations. These camps might be listed as; Selam camp in Sulaymaniyah, Zeytuna camp in Erbil, and Shihan camp in Dohuk. Some 1000 people stayed in each camp, but now there are approximately 600 people in each camp and 1,200 refugees in total. But as I



mentioned before, these camps are not under the control of UN.

**ORSAM: Could you inform us about the process of passing to military camps? Who are accepted to the aforesaid camps? How are they accepted?**

**NADJIA HAFSA:** When Kurdish refugees from Syria come to camps in Dohuk, families and single people are separated into two groups. Those who come alone, who are young and poor in general are placed in a separate section in camp. Besides, those with military backgrounds are placed in another

section as well. Officials from Kurdistan Regional Government come here and ask these single young men if they want to join military camps or not. Those who want to join the military camps leave the Domis refugee camp. For instance, there are currently 580 families in the camp, and this figure equals to 2,540 individuals. On the other hand, there are 460 single individuals in the camp. These individuals are asked if they want to join the military camp or not. The number of people arriving in the camp is increasing with each passing day.

**ORSAM: Thank you.**

#### **4. An Interview with Mahmoud Ahmad Arabo, the Northern Iraq Representative of Kurdish Freedom Party in Syria which is known as Azadî in short, and is Partiya Azadî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê in Kurdish**

**ORSAM: First of all, could you introduce yourself in brief?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** My name is Mahmoud Ahmad Arabo, and my code name is Kawa Azizi. I have a PhD degree in Political Science from Sofia University. I completed my doctorate in 1991. I am an academician in Faculty of Political Science at Seladdin University in Erbil since 2005. I give lectures on human rights, international organizations and civil society. Also, I am an executive board member of the Kurdish Azadi Party in Syria.

**ORSAM: As a political scientist, what do you consider about the developments in Syria?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** The situation in Syria is getting worse with each passing day. Currently, Syria is going through a sectarian war. The country is going towards a split. On the other hand, the humanitarian situation in the country is heartbreaking. The infrastructure in the country is about to be completely destroyed. Army and all security organizations will collapse. Agricultural and industrial activities have come to a dead stop. We are drifting into an unknown.

**ORSAM: What is the attitude of Kurds in Syria towards the aforesaid developments?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** 16 Kurdish political parties in Syria constitute the Syrian Kurdish National Council. This place is the office of the Syrian Kurdish National Council in Iraqi Kurdistan. We are sure that the regime will collapse. The situation in Syria is heading to-

wards the collapse of the state. As the people, we have been striving to live under double pressure for 7 years. One of the problems that cannot be solved in Syria is not only the Kurdish problem. There are also other issues related to Alawites, Druses, Christians, Shiites, Ismailis and Kurds. They constitute 45% of Syria. In addition, there are also Turkmens, Circassians and other nations in the country and all these nations live deprived of their rights, under pressure and torture. All the people and sects should have the rights to determine their own future in a united Syria. As Kurds, we wanted to determine our own future. More precisely, we asked for the right to define our future in the country, but we want the country to maintain its current borders. We want to determine our own destiny under a confederation, autonomy within the country. Syrian opposition had difficulty in accepting it, but we made it easier. Democratic and equitable solutions for the Kurdish problem in Syria are possible through a political decentralized structure in Kurdish nations' own historical territories. There is still time to come up with an idea or a slogan for the solution. We'll see what Sunnis and Alawites are going to do. Alawites will shape the future of Syria.

**ORSAM: How so?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** They have the weapons, financial source and power. They have been governing the country for 40 years. They also provided the necessary infrastructure for the Alawite state, and they have already determined the borders of their country in the region. They receive support from Russia. The Alawite people are heading towards establishing a country, because Sunnis would kill all of them if they remained under the control of Sunnis. This is not a joke, it is a sure thing. Even if they had to kill the half of Syria, Alawites would not surrender. They are ready to destroy every region out of control,

and they have already been doing so. Because they do not want a country behind to resist against themselves. The form of state also started to become clear, because they do not fight against Christians, Druses and Kurds. They only fight against Sunnis.

**ORSAM: What is the general strategy of Kurdish parties in Syria on this subject?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** Even though they do not explicitly state, they want a decentralized federation as in Iraq.

**ORSAM: Do all Kurdish parties within the Syrian Kurdish National Council agree with this strategy?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** The majority of parties agree with the idea, but some of them have different strategies. On the other hand, in addition to parties, the entire population also support this strategy. It is not possible for us to accept to live under the control of Arabs again. They have ruined our lives for 70 years. I could not have a passport.

**ORSAM: Would Kurds prefer to live together with Sunnis, if an Alawite state were established?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** If Syria were divided, we would leave Syria. The division of the country is neither up to us, not up to Alawites, nor up to Sunnis. It would be as a result of an international politics.

**ORSAM: An Agreement was signed not long ago between PYD and Kurdish National Council in Erbil. Following this agreement, armed Kurdish groups seized the control of some Kurdish regions, and then we observed that a conflict occurred between Kurdish National Council and PYD despite the agreement. What can you say about the relations between PYD and Kurdish National Council?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** The Kurdish parties in Syria are traditionally in favor of peace. We are a civilian, civilized and peaceful party. We might be considered as a cultural school. As Syrian Kurds, we have been through cultural revolution. PYD is a military party and they think militarily as well. They do not agree with other opinions. Therefore, a contradiction took place between PYD and Syrian National Council. We asked for help from the Kurdistan Regional Government. "It does not work like this, we do not want a war among Kurds," we said to Kandil. Especially the President of KRG and Erbil agreed to mediate. Then Erbil Agreement was signed between PYD and Kurdish National Council. We formed a joint Kurdish committee called 'Kurdish High Council'. It weakened the possibility of a potential conflict among Kurds, and paved the way for a cooperation. PYD should basically be a Kurdish party of Syria. We can never let PYD attack against another country. We do not want to create hostility in neighboring countries. "We are on the same side, we can talk on Turkey if you want," PYD said. We have joint commissions and we provide security in this way. Because there is an authority vacuum in the country. Besides, we provide various services for the people. Currently, everything is normal between PYD and other Kurdish parties.

**ORSAM: How are the relations between Syrian opposition and Syrian Kurdish National Council? Syrian National Council and Syrian Kurdish National Council did not act in unison. They cannot agree on certain points. What were the problems between the two groups that they could not act in unison? Is it possible that these problems might be overcome in the forthcoming period? At which point can the parties agree?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** SNC and KNC have the same objectives and programs. We talk-

ed to them in Cairo and İstanbul for several times. We could not reach an agreement. As for the reasons; they consider us as Syrian citizens with Kurdish culture. They do not accept that we are the people who live in our own territories. They ignore the Kurdish geography in Syria. They want to treat us as an ordinary citizen. We will continue to live in our territories as a population. Our territories are divided, and some of them are under the control of Syria. We have the right to determine our own destiny. We live as we like within the Syrian borders. We will designate the regime, not Arabs. However, they do not accept our suggestions. Currently, the talks with them still continue to reach a mutual solution. Important talks will take place between the two Councils during the following two weeks. Because we have to cooperate. SNC cannot do anything without Kurds. Because Europe and the U.S. do not recognize SNC as the legitimate representative of the people without Kurds. Currently we continue our talks, and we are hopeful about a common solution.

**ORSAM: Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu recently paid a visit to Erbil. A meeting was held with the participation of Syrian Kurdish parties in Erbil. Could you briefly inform us about the results of the meeting?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** As Syrian Kurds, we were quite pleased with the meeting. A friendly and positive talk was held between SNC, KNC, Turkey's Foreign Minister, and Kurdistan Regional Government. Mr. Davutoğlu was very sincere and friendly. We want these talks to continue and prevent any problem with Turkey, because both parties would be damaged to a large extent if hostility occurred. Turkey has to recognize the presence of Kurdish people. It is high time Turkey understood that Kurds need to be accorded their rights. Otherwise, we might be damaged, but Turkey would be damaged hundred times more. But if Turkey recognized us, and

also recognized the Kurdish population in the country, Turkey might become a super power. Thus, the hostility between Kurds and Turks which dates back to history would come to an end. We are not people who kill people as a hobby, we only aim at protecting our rights. We can live in tolerance with Arabs, Turks, Persians without any problem. But it is possible only under equal conditions.

**ORSAM: One of the major actors of the Kurdish problem in Syria is Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government. KNC is organized in Erbil. There is a refugee camp in Domis right now, and more than ten thousand Syrian Kurdish refugees stay there. Thus, the regional government supports the people. What can you tell about the role of Kurdistan Government on this issue?**

**MAHMOUD ARABO:** We are friendly towards Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government. As Syrian Kurds, our feelings towards the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government is the same as the feelings of Turks in Cyprus towards Turkey. We regard Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government as the closest friend to us. Mr. President Barzani is a biggest guarantee of the rights of Kurds. He is also a very moderate person himself. Besides, he is recognized by Turkey, Europe and the U.S. as well. Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government is the guarantee of Syrian Kurds. On the other hand, Barzani is also the one who would be resorted to in solving potential conflicts among Kurds. Barzani might assume a role in normalization of relations in potential conflicts between Syrian Kurds and Turkey. Therefore, Barzani is the guarantee for the Kurdish case. We believe that Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government will assume historical roles in solution of many problems in the Middle East. Particularly, it would assume a historical role in solution of the problems of Kurds in Turkey and Syria.

**ORSAM: Thank you.**

## **5. An Interview with Cedan Ali, the Northern Iraq Representative of Kurdish Reform Movement in Syria (Bizutnava Çaksaci in Kurdish – Hareket-ul Islah in Arabic)**

**ORSAM: First of all, could you introduce yourself please?**

**CEDAN ALI:** My name is Cedan Ali. I am the Northern Iraq Representative of Kurdish Reform Movement in Syria. At the same time, I am the representative of Syrian Kurdish National Council.

**ORSAM: Within the framework of the events that have been going on in Syria for 1,5 years, could you summarize the situation of Syrian Kurds and their outlook on the events?**

**CEDAN ALI:** The uprising in Syria broke out on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Since the first day of the uprising, Kurds have been involved in this process. The first Kurdish party in Syria was created on June 14<sup>th</sup>, 1957. We have been in opposition to the regime since that day. A Kurdish insurrection took place in Kurdish areas in 2004. Lots of people were arrested. Besides, people died and were injured. The first group being involved in the anti-regime uprising in 2001 was Kurds. The expectation of Syrian Kurds from Syria in the future is; a democratic, pluralist, parliamentarian, and a decentralized country which guarantees the rights of all nations and communities. Following the uprising in Syria, we see that our dreams come true. Therefore, we strive for a successful revolution with minimum loss. We have asked for a peaceful alternative from the very beginning. We were in favor of an unarmed revolution. However, oppressive method the regime resorted to, its using force to suppress the people led them to have to protect themselves. Thanks to the splits within the army, the people found a way to protect themselves.

Those who left the army strived to provide security for the people. What I hoped as a Syrian was that the nations which argued for democracy and freedom to support the Syrian people. However, unfortunately the Syrian people are hopeless about the international and internal forces. Despite this hopelessness, we continue to give victims. We are determined to overthrow the regime.

**ORSAM: Could you give us some information about the political party, of which you are the representative?**

**CEDAN ALI:** We are related to Syrian KDP which is the first party in Syria. Then our name changed. The first split within the Kurdish movement took place on August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1965. Those who split from the party formed the left wing, while those who remained in the party formed the right wing. We are in the latter group, not in the split one. The left wing told they were Marxist, and we were the right wing for them. Afterwards, Hafez Assad came into power in Syria. After that day, each party in Syria started to split. We remained in our party until 2008. As the party, we went through administrative and financial crisis. The problems causing to crisis mostly stem from financial reasons, rather than political reasons. The Secretary-General of the Party Abdulhamid Hadji Dervish, who currently lives in Sulaymaniyah, has been in this position since the formation of the party. So, we could not stand exclusion, oppression and dictatorship anymore. We aimed at making a reform within the party. As we could not achieve it, we left the party and changed our name into Hareket-ül Islah (Reform Movement). Our party is one of the 16 parties within Syrian Kurdish National Council. The Chairman of our Party is Faisal Youssef. There is a position called secretary or secretary-general in Kurdish parties. We call it spokesman. Instead of political board in other parties, we call it the



executive board. Also instead of central decision-making committee, we call it general coordination. We are present in every region where Kurds are densely populated in Syria.

**ORSAM: Is there a particular region where you are prominent?**

**CEDAN ALI:** We are more powerful in Derik, Amude and Qamishli.

**ORSAM: Could you tell us about political views of your party? For example, what do you suggest for the solution of Kurdish problem in Syria?**

**CEDAN ALI:** Following the formation of Kurdish National Council on 26 October 2011, the party programmes of 16 Kurdish parties were combined with the programme of the Council. We just want Kurds to be have self-determination. Of course, we want self-determination within territorial integrity of Syria. Besides, we argue for a decentralized, democratic, pluralist parliamentary system. All Kurdish parties share the same opinion after the formation of Syrian Kurdish National Council.

**ORSAM: In the past weeks, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu paid a visit to Erbil, and held a meeting with the representatives of Kurdish National Council. How do you assess Turkey outlook on Syrian Kurds within the scope of the aforesaid meeting?**

**CEDAN ALI:** We believe that the democracy mechanism in Turkey is well-developed. However, the ruling party in Turkey needs to solve the Kurdish problem as soon as possible. Davutoğlu's visit and his talking to our representatives was a very positive step for us. We know that Turkey is not against according rights and freedoms to Syrian Kurds, but we also know that the presence of PKK is not wanted in Turkey. This is an understandable attitude for all Kurdish parties in Syria. Since the outbreak of events in Syria, Turkey has adopted a positive approach. It argued against opening fire on the people, and hosted the opposition. In addition, its embracing the refugees please us as well. However, we expected more support from the Turkish Government as a neighboring, democratic country, and as an Islamic government.

**ORSAM: Thank you.**

## DİPNOTLAR

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