REPORT | 2023-1

A century of republican practices and Kurdish alter-politics

EUTCC

EU-Turkey Civic Commission

In cooperation with Kurd-Akad – Network of Kurdish Academics

CONTENTS

A century of republican practices and Kurdish alter-politics

Introduction

One hundred years have passed since the signing of the Lausanne Treaty, a foundational agreement not only for the Republic of Turkey but also for the international and legal denial of official status for the Kurds and Kurdistan. This report reconsiders the Kurdish question in Turkey a century later, focusing on three aspects: 1) the transformation of the Kurdish question within its international and regional context, 2) the contradictions of the Republic's representative democracy and the Kurdish alternative practice of autonomy, and 3) the economic aspects of the Kurdish question and the practice of democratic communal economy. While the report aims to provide a broader perspective, it particularly emphasizes the last two decades.

This report is the culmination of years of research conducted by three researchers specializing in various aspects of Kurdish politics. It seeks to illuminate the complexities of historical transformation in an accessible manner, in contrast to the utilitarian approach often found in typical policy papers that prioritize immediate geopolitical and contemporary developments. It examines the central issues and cornerstones that have shaped today's dynamics, contributing to the ongoing policy debate.

The report emphasizes that the Kurdish question is not a problem of ethnic nationalism but a political one, and that Kurdish democratic politics have introduced significant alternatives to address the Kurdish question. It not only explores various and often conflicting perspectives among political actors but also advances politico-social and economic alternatives developed on the ground by those directly impacted by the conflict. The report highlights that proposals such as "democratic autonomy" and "democratic communal economy" provide local answers to urgent global issues such as the climate crisis, extreme poverty, the crises of organizing political authority, ethnic and racial dominations, and gender-based exclusions. In this way, the report highlights that Kurdish alter-politics surpass the simplistic mainstream denomination of "ethnic nationalism."

Each section complements the others. The first section offers an international and historical background to the Kurdish question, arguing that reducing it to a matter of ethnic nationalism not only obscures the historical and international responsibility in the processes of colonization in Kurdistan but also securitizes the right to resist domination. Furthermore, mainstream perspectives disregard Kurdish political agency and obscure every politico-social democratic alternative. Thus, the first section establishes the context for the two subsequent sections of the report.

The second section centres on the political controversies of democracy and republic based on a detailed exploration of Hannah Arendt. It argues that republicanism does not guarantee democracy, and representative democracy does not ensure democratic governance. This is illustrated by the tension between Turkey's undemocratic republican practices, such as replacing elected co-mayors in Kurdish provinces with government trustees, and the Kurdish alter-politics of organizing radical and direct democratic structures. The section later shows how Kurdish democratic autonomous politics correlate with Arendt's council democracy, aiming to address fundamental questions such as how to organize political power and ensure direct democratic participation beyond representative democracy.

The third section of this report, akin to the second, centres on the contrast between the colonial political economy of the Turkish Republic in Kurdish provinces and the Kurdish alternative model of democratic communal economy. While many emphasize regional underdevelopment, this section highlights that the primary reason for the so-called underdevelopment of North Kurdistan is closely linked to colonial policies deliberately under-developing this region. That is, an extractivist model for exploitation, which increases inequality and produces unsustainability. It later focuses on how Kurdish social and political actors sought to materialize a social and ecological economy, named as the democratic communal economy, to address extreme poverty and gender-based exclusions, and how the state opposed these economic structures by outlawing and shutting down organizational structures.

The Kurdish question revisited: Securitisation, ruptures and the international

Jan Yasin Sunca

The states established on the lands where the Kurds are indigenous, the regional state system, and the global nation-state-based world order consider the Kurdish question as the internal matter of singular states. This is a formative international condition within which the Kurdish struggle for liberation in Turkey has been securitized, while the colonial origins of the Kurdish question with historical, social, and political-economic dimensions are removed from sight. However, a century-long struggle carried out by Kurds and the overall transformations in the region since the millennium suggest that it is no longer possible to keep the question in the cages of nation-states.
Although the primary focus of this first section is the relations between the Kurds and the Republic of Turkey over the century from an international relations perspective, similar, if not the same, structures of the regional Kurdish question are applicable in other parts of Kurdistan.

In the first part, I present the historical roots of the Kurdish struggle, and in the second part, the Western perspective, which substantially contributed to the securitization of the Kurdish struggle. Each of these perspectives reduces the century-long question to a geopolitical context that almost completely disregards its historical emergence and treats it as an instrumental problem that can be utilized if and when needed. However, as I highlight in the last part, the political ruptures both within broader Kurdistan and on a global level necessitate a shift in the reduced Western perspective beyond its utilitarianism and securitization.

The Kurdish Question

In the mainstream Western discourse, the Kurdish question is viewed as an issue of ethnic nationalism, seeking to establish a separate state on the lands of existing states. Consequently, it is considered a security concern for the states where Kurds reside (Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria). In other words, labelling it as a matter of ethnic nationalism gives rise to the "separatism" discourse and, thus, results in the "securitization" of the Kurdish question. However, this discourse reverses the line of causality: the emergence of modern/colonial states and state-led nationalisms, such as Turkish nationalism, systematically applied discriminations that resulted in the Kurdish struggle. The "ethnic nationalism" discourse obscures the underlying historical construction of social, political, and ideological structures based on the Eurocentric model of the modern nation-state and nationalism (Baris, 2021). Consequently, even some well-informed individuals refer to it as a question of ethnopolitics (e.g., Yegen, 2022).

Nevertheless, it has always been an international question for those who perceive anything more than reduced geopolitics in the "international." The "ethnopoliticization" of the Kurdish question is derivative of the global order surrounding it, resulting in a permanent structure of domination over the Kurds—a state behaviour ceaselessly pursuing (ontological) security

and a constant state-led nationalist propaganda of some sort, justified through "Kurdish separatism," whether real or imagined.

The international construction of the Kurdish question is directly related to the emergence of the nation-state-based world order. The transformation of colonial empires in Europe into nation-states and the declaration of independence by former colonies have resulted in a capitalist and nation-state-based world order. The Ottoman Empire was undergoing similar processes (Wallerstein et al., 2008, p. 35).

Although a minority in number compared to traditional notables, the modernized Kurdish elites were also involved in various political and cultural activities aiming for nation-building, especially from the 19th century onwards. However, these efforts proved to be unsuccessful due to several reasons, such as the Kurds being a borderland people who used to live in autonomy but never sought independence, or the perceived threat of "Western-backed Christians" by traditional elites incentivizing them to support Khalifa and later Mustafa Kemal (Özoğlu, 2001; Sunca, 2020). Therefore, the long-term historical sources of the Kurdish question are directly related to the global disintegration of empires and the reintegration of the nation-state system as a model of organizing political authority both internally and externally.

The constitutive dynamics of the Kurdish issue in Turkey were related to the Eurocentric modernization process, including exclusionary nationalisms (Conversi, 2012; Wimmer, 2004), and reshaped political hierarchies that confined societies under strict elite rule (Miley, 2018). The Armenian genocide and the cleansing of Anatolia from non-Muslims resulted in the Islamic unity of the 1921 Constitution. Turkey's War of Independence, which developed with a partial anti-imperialist character, received significant support from the Kurds, primarily due to this Islamic unity. The proclamation of the Republic in 1923 and the subsequent 1924 Constitution gradually established the superiority of Turkish ethnic identity (Ünlü, 2018).

The Republican identity of Turkey was shaped through state institutions, primarily the military, which embraced an ideological Turkish nationalism, a hypocritical secularism that privileged Sunni Islam, and a capitalist economy. The criteria of equal citizenship were forcibly implemented as Turkish ethnic identity, while Kurdishness was reduced to a security issue and banned. Thus, the emergence of the Kurdish issue is rooted in a colonial nationalist imagination.

Both the state operations and the Kurdish political and military struggle against (until 1938) had a regional and cross-border nature. Although the Kurdish movement led by the Azadî movement was generally limited to Northern Kurdistan, the transborder nature of the Xoybûn Movement and the Ağrı Rebellion was completely eliminated through interstate agreements. The Republic's main effort in Northern Kurdistan, including the Dersim Genocide of 1937-38, can be defined as its attempt to "civilize its colony" (Zeydanlıoğlu, 2008).

On a regional level, the Sadabad Pact (1937) and the Baghdad Pact (1955) were agreements that allowed Turkey to control and coordinate the Kurdish issue among themselves. All the steps taken after 1923 have characteristics that violate the rights and demands of the Kurds under the overall discourse of “the survival of the state.” This process, which began with the centralization policy of the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century and ended

with the Dersim Genocide in 1938, resulted in the construction of the Kurdish question as the internal problems of singular states, legitimized by an entire global system of nation-states (Matin, 2020).

Subsequently, the Kurdish question has become a question of ontological (in)security, not only for Turkey but also for the other three states, resulting in a regional conundrum, with four central dynamics:
(1) The Kurdish gains and the states' existence are considered to be in a zero-sum game; every political demand or move in the name of Kurdishness is placed against the state's unity. (2) Given the gigantic power difference between the states and the Kurds, the Kurds have been in need of external support, creating a situation of vulnerability and occasional instrumentalization. (3) The Kurdish question of each state is used as an element against those states either by regional or imperialist powers. This further sensitizes the states about their ontological vulnerability. (4) In response, the states have constantly reproduced a nationalist propaganda built on the discourse of "Kurdish separatism" to create popular consent for their violent policies and brutally punished those who show solidarity with the Kurds. The Kurdish conundrum is a sub-structure in the Middle East where both states and societies are captured, rendered vulnerable to external interventions, and ontologically confronted with one another.

While there was profound silence from 1938 to the 1950s on the part of the Kurds after continuous massacres carried out by the Turkish state, Kurdish political resistance started to surface in Turkey throughout the period from the 1950s to the 1980s, which was fully determined by the broader Cold War context. Turkey's attempts to align with democracies against fascism and Nazism and to demonstrate that Turkey is part of the "free world" against "communism" with the aim of securing Western support were translated into a multi-party system in the 1950s, ultimately paving the way for the political re-emergence of the Kurds in a rather conservative form (Bozarslan, 2013).

Kurdish notables and local elites were elected to the parliament from the Democratic Party (DP - Demokrat Parti). In the 1960s, this would channel into rather left-wing parties with the impact of the 1968 movement on a global level. In the 1970s, armed national liberation movements would emerge, and the PKK, among them, would continue throughout the 1980s (Akkaya, 2013). In the 1990s, the impact of the collapsed Soviet Union would change both the character of the PKK-led Kurdish movement and the approach to the Kurdish question. That is, unquestionable American hegemony has pushed existing conflicts to be resolved through the integration of conflict-ridden societies into the global neoliberal order (see e.g., Rossone de Paula, 2020). The same logic has led to the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq and the boomerang of terrorism in the early years of the 2000s.

The securitisation of the Kurdish struggle: blacklisting and proxy-ization

Despite this formative historical background of the Kurdish question, the Kurdish struggle for liberation has always been seen as a question of security and ethnic nationalism from a Western perspective, which has securitized this struggle, either as "bloody terrorists" or "eternal proxies." The mainstream academic and political discourse have labelled the Kurdish struggle against historical domination as terrorism, and the Kurdish resolve to defend themselves has been instrumentalized as "proxies."

Blacklisting the Kurdish struggle:

Although the 9/11 attacks in the US marked a turning point, the terrorism discourse was already in use for several years before. The formative dynamic of the "global war on terror" was that the US was establishing its global hegemony, while facing challenges from "terrorist groups sponsored by rogue states," particularly in the Middle East (Agnew, 2005; Dodge, 2006). If the threat of terrorism was fluid, globally present, and ready to strike at anytime, anywhere in the (Western) world, as Negri and Hardt (2000) discussed, then the struggle against terrorism must have also been everywhere. The West intensified its securitization of social processes, resulting in the consolidation of the global police state and increased control over dissenters (Robinson, 2018). The mass media and the state colluded to generate social consent by portraying "Islamist terrorists" and the rogue states supporting them as a threat, while simultaneously depicting "poor people" in dictatorships like Iraq and Afghanistan as in need of a "liberator" (Çubukçu, 2018). This narrative obscured the historical fact that the very emergence of these rogue states and the designated groups such as al-Qaida were intrinsically related to the Western anti-communist campaign (see, e.g., Matin, 2018).

Simultaneously, regimes in the region used the anti-terror context to maintain their rule by negotiating the conditions of global capital flow in exchange for support from core states against internal dissent. Designated terrorists change according to the political group in power, such as the Muslim Brotherhood for Egypt's current rule, the Yemeni Houthi movement for Saudis, Palestinian organizations for Israelis, and Kurdish and leftist organizations for Turkey. I do not claim or argue that all forms of resistance are acceptable or legitimate, but all forms of resistance have a historico-social background rooted in tangible dominations faced by communities.

The PKK was blacklisted as a terrorist organization by the US in 1997 and by the EU in 2002. The EU and the US were already in complete collaboration with Turkey under the NATO roof against the Kurdish resistance led by the PKK throughout the 1980s and 1990s. Germany’s PKK ban in 1993 due to increasing Kurdish protests of the Turkish state in Germany, during one of the darkest periods in Kurdistan in terms of state violence against civilians, is a representative example of this collaboration. The blacklisting is a continuation under the post-Cold War conditions. However, the proscription of the PKK as a terrorist organization was both historically and conjuncturally unjustified. Historically, the PKK is the last link in a long chain of liberation movements that fought for Kurdish liberation, as briefly explored above. If the PKK continues to exist up until now and if one speaks of its relative success in bringing the Kurdish question to the international agenda, it is because it has undeniable large support from the Kurds (O’Connor, 2021). A similar conclusion was made in 2020 by the Belgian supreme court.

Conjuncturally as well, it is unjustified. In 1998, under pressure from the US and Turkey, Syria expelled Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK's ideological and political leader. In 1999, the US handed over Öcalan to Turkey, which triggered the biggest organizational crisis in the PKK's history, leading to splits within the party and weakening its guerrilla forces. By the time of its proscription by the EU, the PKK had already withdrawn its fighters beyond the borders of Turkey. The proscription came at a moment when Öcalan was negotiating a potential political solution with state representatives. Blacklisting the PKK under such circumstances, rather than when it was fully active in its guerrilla fight, suggests that the West was pleasing

Turkey to seek its support for interventions in the region, rather than objectively assessing the "terrorist acts" of the PKK.

Blacklisting has resulted in the further securitization of the century-long Kurdish question on several layers, but two of them are central to this report. Firstly, the policy perspective of the West towards the Kurdish struggle was completely framed as "terrorism" within Turkey's "legitimate security concerns." The military aspect of the problem, i.e., the clashes between PKK fighters and the state, has taken precedence over all other aspects. Secondly, and related to the first, the Kurdish resistance to dominations both in Turkey and in Europe was criminalized under the broader pretext of anti-terrorism (Sentas, 2018).

Throughout the 2000s, Turkey defended the excessive use of military or police forces, the dissolution of civil society organizations, and the ban on the Kurdish language as measures against terrorism. One major example is the Turkish anti-terror law in 2016, which enabled, among other things, the suppression of democratic Kurdish demands and imposing limitations on the use of the Kurdish language under the banner of anti-terrorism (İnsan Hakları Derneği 2009). Another example of persecution on terrorism grounds was the legal political representation. The closure of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP – Demokratik Toplum Partisi) in 2009 by the constitutional court, and the Supreme Election Board's veto on seven Kurdish deputies during the 2011 elections on the grounds of anti-terrorism dashed hopes for any negotiated peaceful settlement to the Kurdish question, resulting in a period of clashes until 2013.

The peace process that involved the Turkish government, Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK, and the HDP representatives increased hopes for a peaceful settlement. But from mid-2015 on, which marked the end of the peace process, the state has started a new campaign of securitization of every aspect of Kurdish political representation, which continues to the date: the immunity of the HDP parliamentarians was lifted, several MPs were imprisoned, including the HDP co-chairs and everyone who played a role during the peace talks. Moreover, all democratically elected HDP co-mayors of the Kurdish cities were removed, and government trustees were appointed. (See also the following sections of this report.) The state has been punishing its primary interlocutors and everyone who is somehow related to the Kurdish political movement under the overall discourse of "terrorism." This has led to increased violence against ordinary Kurds without any political involvement, such as arresting Kurdish singers for singing in Kurdish or rewarding the killers of the Kurdish Dedeoglu family in Konya with impunity.

In Europe as well, this was bearing consequences. The major issue in this context is the vulnerability of the Kurds in Europe as targets of states, Turkey and Iran in particular. The assassination of three Kurdish women in Paris in 2013, the revealed plans for the assassination of exiled Kurdish politicians (Arti Gercek, 2022), and European politicians of Kurdish origin (Deutsche Welle, 2020) show this vulnerability. On a more social level, members of legal Kurdish associations, participants in legal Kurdish demonstrations, or employees of Kurdish organizations can hardly obtain citizenship in the Western European state they reside in, such as Germany or Belgium, even though they meet all other requirements, due to reports provided by states' secret services. The European states carry out similar criminalization practices against their own citizens as well, simply because of being in solidarity with the Kurdish cause (Käyhkö, 2020).
The overall narrative of the war on terror has placed societies as the target of states; black-

listing the PKK was no different. Western institutions have often criticized the violation of individual freedoms and disconnected it from those who were deemed terrorists. But this was precisely the limbo, strategically shaped by the anti-terror discourse, within which the state legitimized its acts against a whole population.

Proxy-isation:

A second aspect of the securitization of the historical Kurdish struggle is its instrumentalization as "permanent proxies." According to Mumford (2013), proxy wars are the replacement for states seeking to further their own strategic goals while avoiding engaging in direct, costly, and bloody warfare. In other words, it is an intervention in a conflict context without deploying (a large number of) its forces, which avoids risks, extra costs, and allows for international deniability in case of major war crimes. Although there are numerous problems with proxy warfare, one aspect is of importance for this report, that is, the “proxies” are meaningful as long as they serve external agendas and their political subjectivity, aims, and goals are not a concern from the perspective of the powerful state-actor.

Historically, several examples of “Kurds as proxies” are cited: Iran’s support for the Kurdish parties in Iraq from 1980 onwards in the context of the Iran-Iraq war, Syria’s sanctuary for the PKK against Turkey for about 20 years, the US relations with the Kurdish parties in Southern Kurdistan, Iraq, and lately the US relationship with the Kurdish-led forces in Syria from 2014 onwards. While the first two examples are internal to the region (under obvious hegemonic conditions), the latter two examples involve the US as an external hegemonic force in the region. But the structures and overall governing logics of both forms of “proxy-ization” are very similar. For the overall aim is to “use” a weaker force in need against designated enemies.

Especially since the US aerial support for the Kobanê resistance in Rojava against ISIS, many focused on the Kurdish struggle only from a utilitarian approach, devised the possibilities of "using the Kurds" against "the enemies of the West" and as such completely ignored the very right of the Kurds to resist imperialist dominations and state violence (e.g., Hughes, 2014; Plakoudas & Michnik, 2023; Thornton, 2015). Although this approach is extremely problematic in several dimensions, I will remain focused on two main issues.

Firstly, the historical coercion of the Kurds into the position of a "proxy" is almost completely ignored. The Kurds were initially placed under four different colonizing states, sowing the seeds of century-long struggles, massacres, and even genocides, as seen in the cases of Halabja or Êzîdîs. They sought to emancipate themselves from the colonization of both the regional states (Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria) and the colonial structures of the nation-state-based world order. On the one hand, the Kurds were trying to undo their subordination, achieve a sort of stable peaceful relationship with their neighbouring peoples, with a minimum degree of self-rule. On the other hand, their attempts at emancipation have continuously been a question of instrumentalisability by external state actors.

The Kurdish political struggle, whether we appreciate their ideology or strategies or not, was historically coerced to establish political connections against their much stronger colonizers. The discourse of the “Kurds as permanent proxies” not only fails to account for this historical coercion but also portrays an image as if it was the primary choice of Kurdish actors and they wanted nothing but to become proxies.

The second major problem is that only the powerful state actor's strategies to "use" weaker actors are usually taken into consideration, while the motivation, resolve, and the strategies of the weaker Kurdish actors are completely ignored. It is true that state actors have incomparable military strength, but it should not mean that Kurdish political agency was not involved in this. While regional or Western states have their control-driven agendas, the Kurdish political struggle was pursuing a form of emancipation from the respective regional states. Thus, if the states had the right to build alliances to topple down the Kurdish struggle, the Kurds would also have the same right to build alliances against their respective oppressors. However, state actors remain legitimate due to the international recognition of their monopoly over violence, even though this monopoly was used to terrorize, discriminate, and even annihilate their Kurdish population.

The Kurdish political struggle, a non-state armed actor, and a gigantic grey area in international relations, is considered illegitimate and illegal through the very same nation-state-based world order. This is the locus of proxy-ization: the legitimate Kurdish attempts to overcome their subordination and constant state violence lead to an organizational and armed capacity and a resolve to struggle for liberation, which emerges as an opportunity for the very actors who directly or indirectly dominated the Kurds to instrumentalize them as proxies.

As a result, the Kurdish struggle is securitized once again, through proxy-ization on four levels. Firstly, the regional states with a Kurdish population assign the Kurds as the "puppets of imperialism" or "the servants of the highest bidder." Secondly, the same regional states use the Kurdish struggle as their own proxy (such as Turkey-KDP relations). Thirdly, different Kurdish political parties find themselves often in contradiction to, and occasionally fight against, each other, due to different strategic/tactical alignments with external forces. Fourthly, the imperialist extra-regional forces (US and others) instrumentalize the Kurdish question in the region, for which they are historically responsible. Consequently, the Kurdish political agency and their struggle for liberation are either misrepresented as "the Kurds fight for the West" or it is completely obscured, disregarded, and delegitimized.

Ruptures and the renegotiation

Given the transformations from the 2000s onwards, however, it is no longer possible to continue approaching the Kurdish struggle for liberation as either terrorists or proxies. The transformation of the Republic's relations with the Kurds under the crisis of the neoliberal world order and its impact on the Middle East underlies the ongoing density of the conflict but also opens up new conditions in which the Kurdish question is renegotiated, 100 years later. Three formative political ruptures enable this renegotiation, and each one of these results from the historical struggle of the Kurds against colonial nationalisms. The West can no longer ignore the Kurds, nor can the question be framed through mere securitization.

Firstly, the new conditions that emerged after the September 11, 2001 attacks and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq conditioned a geopolitical rupture in the context of regional Kurdish politics. The de facto autonomy status that emerged in Southern Kurdistan in the early 1990s was formalized in the 2005 Constitution with the support of the United States. The AKP government's efforts to secure Western support against Kemalist

nationalists domestically and its efforts to develop a zero-problems policy and commercial relations with neighbours facilitated an opening towards Southern Kurdistan. The opening was made possible by the establishment of a consulate in Hewlêr in 2007, signifying recognition of the South's federal status, leading to a deviation from Turkey's codes of denying the existence of the Kurds and their political representation in any form.

Secondly, Turkey's denialist codes have been gradually eroding away throughout the peace talks and negotiations with the PKK. Neither the state was successful in eliminating the Kurdish struggle nor has the Kurdish struggle been successful in reaching its initial goal of establishing a Kurdish state. This dilemma led to the indirect talks between the PKK and former president Turgut Özal in the early 1990s, via special representatives and figures like Celal Talabani.

The acceptance of the existence of the Kurdish issue in Diyarbakır in 2005, and the talks between the PKK and state representatives, known as the Oslo talks in 2006, were steps that solidified this deviation from the state's historical denialism of the Kurdish question and the rejection of a negotiated solution. After these initial attempts, a new negotiation took place between 2013 and 2015, later named the Imrali process, signifying Öcalan's central role in these talks. These processes have not led to a lasting negotiated solution due to their design, the primary expectation of Turkey to disarm the PKK, and regional developments centred on Syria, among others (cf. Çandar, 2020; Sunca, 2016).

A period of total war started right afterwards, involving an unprecedented degree of state violence and the violation of fundamental Kurdish civil and political rights.
However, these talks and negotiations had already deviated the historical streambed of Turkish denialist policies and made it crystal clear that negotiation is not only possible but also indispensable for a lasting solution to the Kurdish question. Both the international and internal support for negotiations attest to the importance of this deviation in Turkish state politics.

A third rupture in the context of the Syrian uprising in the early 2010s further consolidated the internationally emerging need to resolve the Kurdish question. The Arab uprisings that began as a result of the socio-economic devastation caused by neoliberal capitalism turned into a civil war in Syria in 2012, leading to a third rupture in the regional Kurdish issue. When the Assad regime withdrew from areas in Northern Syria to defend regions like Damascus and Aleppo, these areas were controlled by the YPG/YPJ forces, giving rise to the Rojava Revolution.

The Rojava Revolution gained international attention and acquired a significant geopolitical position in the region, especially since 2014 through its self-defence against jihadist organizations like Jabhat al-Nusra and later Daesh (Cemgil, 2019; Sunca, 2021). This rupture was particularly important from the perspective of Turkey because, unlike Southern Kurdistan, the ideological and political line rooted in the movement in Northern Kurdistan gained such power for the first time in its history.

Therefore, the Turkish government gave military and logistic support to jihadist organizations, which was revealed in the international media, to stop the Kurdish-led revolution. The US-led coalition against ISIS has continued to support the Kurdish-led forces against Turkey-backed jihadist/Islamist groups, ringing alarm bells for the "survival of the state."

Although Turkey invaded two regions of Rojava, Afrin and Serêkaniye, in 2018 and 2019, respectively, and the military threat, daily shellings, and targeted drone attacks have never stopped ever since, the Rojava revolution is in its 11th year, and the rupture that it created still causes serious crises in Turkey's relations with the West in general.

These three ruptures are becoming more significant under the crisis of the liberal international order. It is difficult to explain the details of this crisis in the context of this report; however, due to its determining role in the ongoing transformations in the region, it is necessary, at least, to make a reference to this broader context. In the mid-2010s, the rising neo-fascist parties in the West, coupled with China's commercial/economic challenges and Russia's geo-strategic confrontations in the East, along with the convergence of social movements developing almost worldwide, created an unprecedented challenge to the international system that has been gradually consolidating since the Second World War (Adler-Nissen & Zarakol, 2020; Gerstle, 2022; Ikenberry, 2018; Rosenberg & Boyle, 2019).

Within this crisis framework, the liberal democracy and human rights discourses used by the West throughout the 20th century lost their meaning, and power struggles between political actors at the global level took on a geopolitical form in the region, linked to the gradual withdrawal of the United States from the Middle East (Chomsky & Prashad, 2022) and the rather rapid involvement of Russia and China in the regional developments.

Particularly, Putin's backing of the Assad regime against the mainstream opposition, which was initially supported by the West, highlighted the depth of this crisis for the region. The same analysis of the international level crisis by Turkey (see, e.g., Fidan, 2023) and the internal formation of an ultra-nationalist state coalition between the racist MHP and the AKP drove Turkey further away from its historical alliance with the West, represented in purchasing the Russian S-400 and the US punishment of Turkey by removing it from the US-led F-35 warplane project. It is no surprise that the Rojava revolution and ensuing US support for North and East Syria were formative of this crisis between the US and Turkey.

All these developments set the stage for the violent and non-violent renegotiation of the Kurdish issue in the 100th year of the Republic of Turkey. The global legitimacy and visibility brought forth by the South and Rojava, the continued crucial position of Kurds in Turkish elections, and the internal and external conditions that oblige a negotiated solution to the ongoing conflict between the PKK and the state, along with the transformative potential demonstrated by the Rojhilat (East Kurdistan) people in the protests in Iran, all contribute to the re-negotiation of the Kurdish issue. The global crisis of hegemony and related transformations on the regional level designate both the level of complications around the Kurdish question and the potential for a lasting solution.

Similar to 1923, in 2023, the Kurds are once again faced with either a liberation based on radical imagination or a new process of internationally legitimized denial. However, the key difference this time is the accumulated century-long experience of struggle despite all the shortcomings, difficulties, and problems.

Conclusion:

The Kurdish question has historico-political roots in the colonial division of Kurdistan into four parts, the denial of the Kurds' right to self-determination by four different states, and the legitimation of this overall situation in international relations. Thus, it has been an international political question since the late Ottoman period, and not an ethnopolitical question. Considering this as a question internal to singular states created by "Kurdish ethnic nationalism" might represent a reality of the existing state-based global order, but it cruelly turns the historical causality upside down by disregarding the historical domination of the Kurds by the four states under international legitimacy.

This mainstream approach constitutes the securitization of the Kurdish question and the struggle that the Kurds have been carrying out for liberation from the domination of existing colonial nationalisms in the region. A prevailing form of securitization was the blacklisting of the PKK as a terrorist organization. In the Kurdish context, blacklisting has historically been about delegitimizing and criminalizing anyone who struggles for their fundamental rights. This has unceasingly been the case both in Turkey and in certain European states against the Kurds who attempted any form of resistance. A second form of securitization is the proxy-ization of the Kurds. The Kurdish organizations that fight for a form of liberation are seen, both by the regional states and imperialist actors in the region, as proxy forces that can be instrumentalized at will, which in itself becomes an effective way of undoing and disregarding the Kurdish political agency and their resolve to defend themselves.

These examples of securitization cancel the right to resist domination and violence carried out by the states and the state-based world order. Despite the complexities in the actual practice of world politics, it is just and justified to assert the truth of the dominated without succumbing to the utilitarian trap of geopolitics. Therefore, presenting the lived and lively experiences of those demonized and confined in the trap of statelessness is an act of doing justice, and not being naïve about their struggle or romanticizing it.
In light of the century-long history of the Kurdish question, any just solution should consider this historical depth and account for historical responsibilities. The ongoing crisis of the neoliberal international order shapes geopolitical complications but also opens up realistic possibilities of emancipation. This is the current context of the region-wide Kurdish question.

More concretely:

Turkey's historically violent ontological insecurity shapes the prevailing Western approach to the Kurdish question. However, the Kurdish struggle for liberation constitutes an entity with political agency, ideological and political positioning, and relevant strategies. Therefore, Western policymakers should stop seeing the historical and region-wide Kurdish question from a narrow Turkish perspective and develop political alternatives that take seriously the experience of democratic political struggle built by the Kurds despite constant state violence and military pressure.
The terrorist designation or blacklisting has only led to the criminalization of the right to resist dominations and serves as a barrier to genuine negotiation of a peaceful settlement. The PKK should be immediately removed from the European and US American lists of terrorist organizations to create conditions for sustainable peace.

The resolution of the Kurdish question in Turkey requires negotiation on the conditions of decentralizing political power. Ongoing crises in Turkey and the region make internal and international conditions riper than ever. While strong international recognition is necessary for a solution, it should be home-grown. Democratization should be envisioned based on local conditions and historical experiences of coexistence in peace. Any resolution process that excludes the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan, its leader, is doomed to fail.

The continuation of the Rojava revolution is of crucial importance for the region, for it is a model. The autonomous status of North and East Syria should be internationally recognized. Ongoing military aggression by Turkey and embargos against North and East Syria weakens the region, threatens lives, and causes ecological degradation. Protection from daily aggressions is a crucial need for Rojava and should be provided.

"The new is dying and the old is being re-born"[1,2] National sovereignty must cease to be an obstacle to democratic innovations in Kurdistan

Hanifi Baris

That democracies have been backsliding into authoritarianism since the late 1990s; and this trend has been gaining momentum in the last decade has become a truism (Plattner, 2019; Zakaria, 1997). But the thesis that democracy is in crisis is only a half-truth. The democracy in crisis is the representative form of democracy, which is bound to the principle of national sovereignty conceptually and is dependent on the political party system institutionally.

Representative democracy is the new form of democracy. It was essentially developed to establish political regimes based on the principle of national sovereignty in the 18th century (Arendt, 1963, p. 24; also see Arato & Cohen, 2009; Kelsen, 1960). In that sense, the new, i.e., representative democracy based on the principle of national sovereignty, is dying. The underlying factor is an inherent flaw in representative democracy and a risk associated with it. The inherent flaw is that the principle of national sovereignty allows and indeed encourages the groups that secure a majority in parliaments to identify themselves with the nation. This identification inevitably leads to the associated risk: that the leaders and cliques identifying themselves with the nation almost invariably employ social engineering, trying to create societies in their own image (Arendt, 1951, p. 291). Consequently, excluding "the undesired" groups and communities from the definitions of the nation and subjecting them to assimilation, pogroms, ethnic cleansing, massacres, genocides, and other legal and military violence has been commonplace.

Representative democracies also commit suicide while trying to suffocate plurality for the sake of creating a society in the image of someone. The political systems solely reliant on representation always carry within the risk of the whole system degenerating into elitism, that is, regressing into an oligarchy and even a kind of feudalism (Gray, 2009; Varoufakis, 2023). Such degenerations inevitably fuel political alienation and the sense of powerlessness on the part of the citizen.

The inherent flaw in representative democracies, as noted, is that they are founded upon claims to sovereignty in the name of the people, and this invites domination; since in practice, sovereignty translates into domination (Lovett, 2018; Simpson, 2017). But maybe more importantly, historically, representative democracies, i.e., republics, are founded upon the fear of democracy, which they equate with majority dictatorship (Shapiro, 2011). Hence, republics are born with demophobia, i.e., the phobia of democracy.

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1 The research underlying this article has been jointly financed by the Leverhulme Trust and the University of Aberdeen.

2 This title is inspired by the statement from page 556 of Antonio Gramsci's "Selections from the Prison Notebooks" (1999, London: ElecBook): "The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this inter regnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear."

Demophobia fuels contempt towards direct democracy in modern republics, and its roots lie in the ancient rivalry between republics and democracy. The elite's fear of “the masses” and their efforts to keep political power away from the demos have been evident since Plato's Republic, a sentiment reiterated by the Federalist Papers during the foundation of the United States (Madison, 2001). Representative forms of democracy, thus, have been constructed on hostility towards and fear of direct democracy. Forms of government in the nation-state system are therefore exclusively republics and monarchies (constitutional and absolute).

Consequently, direct democracy, wherever and in whatever form it emerged, has been suffocated by representative democracies since the emergence of modern republics in the 18th century (Arendt, 1963, Chapter 6).

We contend that this contempt towards direct democracy can explain both the decline in liberal democracies over the last three decades and, more generally, the significant political violence directed towards minority communities in the name of the sovereign people/nation. Alternatives, such as direct and hybrid forms of democracy, as well as deliberative experiments within nation-states, have been emerging and flourishing from Kurdistan to Israel and Palestine, from Mesoamerica to Europe. In other words, the old, i.e., direct democracy is being reborn. Therefore, opening a discussion on representative democracy and national sovereignty, and understanding what their alternatives offer in theory and practice is long overdue.

This report delves into the discussion through the empirical example of the Kurdish model of political community, i.e., democratic confederalism, and one of its theoretical inspirations, i.e., Hannah Arendt’s council system.

The Republic of Turkey, where most Kurds live, is an example where nations and communities other than the Turks – who consider themselves as millet-î hâkime/the sovereign nation – have been subjected to all the types of violence mentioned above.
Identifying exclusively representative forms of democracy based on the principal of national sovereignty as the problem, some of the modern Kurdish national liberation movements set out to present an alternative to this rigid republican and centralist political tradition. They have developed a model of government based on small-scale public assemblies, neighbourhood and city councils, and regional parliaments; thus, combining direct, delegatory, and representative forms of democracy. Innovating democracy with newly conceived as well as indigenous decision-making institutions, they offer a genuine alternative to the exclusively representative political organisations.

The report contends that democratic confederalism has the potential to minimize the risk arising from the inherent flaw of domination in exclusively representative forms of democracy, because it discards the principal of the claims to national sovereignty. It also enriches and stabilizes representative democracies by injecting a strong dose of direct and delegatory democracy into the system, thus addressing political alienation and the sense of powerlessness that arises from the degeneration of representative democracy into oligarchy or feudalism.

The report invites the reader to be keep an open mind about political organisations alternative to the nation-state, exemplified in the Arendtian political thought and the Kurdish

model of democratic confederalism. Therefore, we will highlight the insights that Arendt offers to shed more light on the Kurdish model.

Below, after briefly touching upon a subtle difference between republic and democracy, we will discuss the council system and democratic confederalism, emphasizing the need for republics to open up to (direct)democracy in order to address conflicts emanating from the notion and institutions of national sovereignty.

Republic versus democracy

Democracy is essentially a form of self-government in which there is no distinction between the ruler and the ruled: citizens take turn to run public offices (Blaug & Schwarzmantel, 2016). Democracy invites the direct and alternating participation of every citizen in decision-making and administration in the body politic, encouraging everyone to volunteer for any public office, propose laws and suggest the abolition of existing laws, thereby enabling the people to govern themselves. This direct participation of citizens is facilitated through community assemblies, city councils, or face-to-face community meetings such as the agora (city/town square).

Democracy, thus, ideally function as the “power belongs to the people” slogan suggests: citizens/residents rule and are ruled in turn (Muldoon, 2019). As expressed in the nuanced statement, "The system in Rojava is not a form of ruling/dominating (hükümet in Turkish, translates as the ruler/the dominator); instead, it is the political self-organization and self-defence of the people," [3] ideally, there is no element of domination in democracy.

Republic, at least in the modern era, can be defined ideally as a form of government where not only privileged and wealthy individuals, but all citizens govern through their representatives (Heckeberg, 2011). Citizens are ideally protected against the misuse and abuse of power and authority by the constitution. Republic, therefore, does not mean anything more than government limited by the constitution. But democracy necessitates active participation of citizens and a sense power to the people in order for the citizenry to be and feel responsible, empowered, and equal in running for public offices and administering public affairs.

Hannah Arendt’s Council System

Hannah Arendt was a political theorist who ardently opposed the concept and institutions of national sovereignty: “in the realm of human affairs sovereignty and tyranny are the same” (1963, p. 152). For her, sovereignty meant domination and the abolition of plurality: “sovereignty, the ideal of uncompromising self-sufficiency and mastership, is contradictory to the very condition of plurality” (Arendt, 1958, p. 234).

Arendt predicts with remarkable foresight that representative democracy creates and will continue to create authoritarian and even totalitarian regimes, new wars, vulnerable and “stateless” (those lacking citizenship status) minorities, refugees, and migrants (Arendt, 1951). Having lived as a refugee herself for fifteen years, Arendt opposed to the establishment of an Israeli nation-state in Palestine because she, as a stateless Jew without official identity and citizenship rights (heimatlos), was against the nation-state and what it entails (Arendt, 1948).

3 Online interview with Nagehan Akarsel, one of the founders of the Jineology Academy, December 6, 2020.

Considering that national sovereignty was the basis of the nation-state and its global system (Arendt, 1963, p.24), Arendt looked for alternative political organisations that promise to minimise the domination and tyranny emanating from the concept and institutions of sovereignty. She proposed that the council system (her variation of council democracy) is a better alternative to representative democracy, which she named as the party system (Arendt, 1951, 1958a, 1963).

Arendt opposes the party system for it rests on the concept of national sovereignty, because "human action is conditioned by plurality" and the "desire to have power over everything always requires – in addition to its utopian arrogance – the destruction of plurality" (Arendt, 1958a, p. 202). She argues that the concept of sovereignty, and particularly the claim to national sovereignty, is contrary to the human condition, which is characterized by plurality and diversity. According to Arendt, this contradiction will not only constitute an opposition but those who emerge with claims of sovereignty will attempt to eliminate this diversity whenever they have the opportunity or create opportunities to do so. This "attempt to eliminate plurality is always equivalent to the elimination of the public domain itself" (Arendt, 1958a, pp. 220–234). In this final sentence, Arendt essentially emphasizes that the idea of democracy is "devoid of concrete organs" (Arendt, 1963, p. 236). This is because, according to Arendt, the organs of representative democracy and party politics are "inadequate to ensure participation and promote public freedom" (Muldoon, 2016b, p. 775).

This is where the rubber meets the rod: the council system, and by extension democratic confederalism, address this lack of concrete democratic organs of decision-making in representative systems. Councils fill the void that is left wide open by the absence of participatory organs of decision-making, which also serve as the venues of exercising public freedom for citizens/residents.

Council democracy is a form of government based on a federation of small-scale public assemblies and delegatory councils, in which every assembly and council hold a degree of political power and exercise autonomous political will with regard to the matters pertaining to the relevant community. In the council system no single assembly can claim sovereignty in the name of the people, because political authority is dispersed between a myriad of them.
According to Arendt, public assemblies and councils propelled modern Western revolutions and revolutionary attempts (1776 American Revolution, 1789 French Revolution, 1871 Paris Commune, 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions, 1918 German revolutionary movement, 1956 Hungarian Revolution). Hence, council democracy should have become the new and revolutionary form of government. However, these revolutionary and thematic (worker, military, women, student, youth, etc.) councils were eliminated by political parties after the revolutions.

These thematic and revolutionary councils are not completely modern innovations as Arendt believed, for some of them are traditional institutions of democratic decision-making from the Middle East to Mesoamerica (see Barış, 2022 for examples from three autonomous administrations in Mexico and Kurdistan that revived traditional democratic councils). Nevertheless, the point is that both the modern and traditional forms of councils are making a comeback and being revived via the Kurdish model of democratic confederalism.
Although indigenous elements give the Kurdish model of democracy its unique features,

there are conceptual and institutional convergences between democratic confederalism and Hannah Arendt's council system. For instance, both the Kurdish model and Arendt's council system were intended to address national conflicts in the Middle East. They promote and present federations and confederations based on small-scale public assemblies and delegatory councils as the political organisations most suitable for building a lasting peace and functioning democracies primarily in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions, and of course in the rest of the world.

But more strikingly, Arendt accurately predicted that the establishment of a Jewish nation-state in Palestine, i.e., today's Israel, would exacerbate nationalist competition for land and power, leading to a militarist culture and an endless cycle of conflict and violence (Arendt, 1948). This prophetic foresight resonates strongly with the underlying rationale for introducing the Kurdish model, which was developed to escape the vicious

In that sense, the most significant contribution of the council system to democracy, however, is the promise it offers as a remedy for statelessness, a condition that Arendt herself experienced. Lack of status, i.e., being left without legal protection (denationalisation / denaturalisation), as Arendt correctly emphasizes, is the first step taken by authoritarian or totalitarian regimes to exclude and/or destroy a group:

> *The first essential step on the road to total domination is to kill the juridical person in man. This was done, on the one hand, by putting certain categories of people outside the protection of the law and forcing at the same time, through the instrument of denationalization, the nontotalitarian world into recognition of lawlessness; it was done, on the other, by placing the concentration camp outside the normal penal sys tem, and by selecting its inmates outside the normal judicial procedure in which a definite crime entails a predictable penalty. (1951, p. 447)*

If authoritarian and totalitarian regimes take the first step towards annihilation by depriving individuals and communities of their political status, that is, by stripping off their legal protection, the logical way to counter this grave risk would be to establish political organisations in which every community would decide on, determine, and hold their political status. Such a political organisation, then, would not allow the emergence of an all-powerful centralized political power that could abolish the right to self-determination of communities. The council system, according to Arendt, basically promises to do just that: no matter their size or population, it bestows political status onto every community, including villages and neighbourhoods, to prevent the domination of one community/group by one another.

To reiterate, in the council system, not only the nations and communities considered to be the majority or the dominant group, but all communities have the right to self-determination. Such a political organisation is possible only through the forms of government that institutionalize direct democracy. Therefore, advocacy for political regimes resembling council democracy is gaining strength amongst political theorists worldwide (Berkowitz, 2018; Graeber, 2017b; Magnusson, 2021; Newman, 2014). Regional and local governments based on variations of council democracy are growing in in numbers empirically too (Barış, 2022; Gupta, 2017; Lederman, 2015).
The reason for this trend in theory and practice is that representative democracy cannot escape the master-serf or ruler-ruled dichotomy and the relations of domination, oppression and exploitation it brings about. Breaking this cycle depends on the incorporation of direct

democracy into constitutions. This opportunity once arose, as Arendt contended, in the 18th century, but was missed. This time we believe that the opportunity should not be missed: direct democracies should finally find their ways into constitutions.

Council democracy in Kurdistan versus the republican reactionism

What Arendt expresses and proposes above, i.e., a deep scepticism towards national sovereignty and getting beyond the majority-minority and the sovereign-subordinate divides in political organisation, are professed by the Kurdish model of Democratic Confederalism too. In an interview with Salih Muslim, the former co-chair of the Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat) in Syria, this aspect of the model clearly comes to the fore:

> *The solution to our problems was not nationalism or [the Western model of multi culturalist]autonomy, but democracy. Not electoral democracy though, like voting once in every several years, but radical democracy. The autonomy descending from the nation-state is a photocopy of the nation-state and we don't think it is any diffe rent from the nation-state. We don't call it [our system] autonomy, we call it demo cratic self-government. We may say autonomy, but it is a stateless democracy in which everyone can partake in decision making wherever they are. In our system, even a single Syrian village can make their own decisions and have them imple mented and respected by councils and assemblies.*
>
> *We look at all communities as nations; the population doesn't matter. They have the same rights as we do. We do not believe in and do not set our [political]structure on the bases of minority-majority [identities]. All cultural communities for us are na tions. We want to get rid of the minority-majority duality. I think in practice, we have proved that a grassroots democracy is better than the nation-states and the people around us now agree with us. (Interview by Hanifi Baris, 30.3.2021).*

Democratic confederalism, then, seeks to realise a variation of council democracy closely aligned with Arendt's council system. Developed by the branches of the Kurdish freedom movement in North (falls within the borders of Turkey) and West (falls within the borders of Syria) Kurdistan, democratic confederalism is experimented with by the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES), aka Rojava.

The AANES combines direct, delegatory, and representative institutions and processes of democracy in its constitution and institutionalisation (see The Constituent Assembly of the Democratic Federalism of Northern Syria, 2016). Its political structure has no place for a single entity or institution to claim the role of the sovereign. Starting from the basic administrative unit, i.e., the commune (each commune is comprised of 200+ households), all the way up to the neighbourhood assemblies, the district and city councils, the regional council, and the general assembly (the closest institution to a parliament), every administrative unit is autonomous and is the ultimate political authority with regard to its public affairs.
The AANES is an example of the council system in which power flows from the bottom to the top first, and then from the top to the bottom, and is also generated at every layer of the administrative pyramid. Our interlocuters in Rojava also told us that certain institutions of the autonomous administration, such as mala gel (public houses) and mala jin (women houses) were indigenous. They reiterated that democracy was not a foreign form of go-

vernment in Kurdistan, but a home-grown mode of government. This means that council democracy or the council system is not an exclusively Western phenomenon, but indigenous to Kurdistan and elsewhere too, although Arendt was not aware of or ignored this aspect of council democracy (see Barış, 2022, for a wider discussion).

In North Kurdistan, as well, organs calling themselves People's Councils declared self-governance in 16 provinces and districts, in August 2015 (Kasapoğlu, 2015). However, Turkish security forces, at the cost of severe human rights violations and the complete or partial destruction of some cities, neighbourhoods, and districts, did not allow the self-governing bodies to survive (Darıcı & Hakyemez, 2019; United Nations, 2017).

Our contention is that the unwillingness of the Syrian regime to recognize the AANES and Turkey's crackdown on the Kurdish democratic movement and structures cannot be isolated from the conflict between the representative democracy based on Turkish and Arab national sovereignty imposed by the Turkish and Syrian Arab republics and the direct democracy sprouting in Kurdistan.This conflict is especially sharp in the context of the appointment of trustees to the elected offices in the Kurdish villages, neighbourhoods, towns and cities in Northern Kurdistan in the Republic of Turkey.

Turkey transitioned to the Presidential Government System in 2017, where the executive branch is no longer the Council of Ministers but the presidency. The President, with extraordinary powers and privileges, controls ministries, institutions, committees, and the many offices brought directly under that office; universities, higher judicial boards, the general military staff, the state supervisory board etc. These powers and privileges have virtually created a pyramid. At the top of this pyramid is the president who has consolidated all of them in a single person.

In this respect, the political regime in Turkey has evolved into autocracy. However, what is crucial in the context of this report and in our opinion, more alarming in general too, is the authorization granted through the amendment to Article 45 of Law No. 5393 on Municipalities, by the Decree-Law No. 674. This provision gives the Minister of Interior, who is no longer even part of the executive, and the the governor, only an administrative office, the power to change election results. This provision is not only unconstitutional, which has been pointed out by academics and legal experts in Turkey (Muratakan, 2018; Ruşen & Özgül, 2017).
It has two more significant consequences:
(I) the Minister of Interior (overseeing metropolitan and provincial municipalities) and governors (overseeing district municipalities) can annul election results;
(II) the use of emergency powers/authorities deemed appropriate and legal only during the state of emergency (OHAL) by the Minister of Interior and governors has become regularized through this legal provision.
The most dramatic result is that the Ministry of Interior, which is no longer a branch of the executive but a unit of administration, and the governorship, another administrative authority, can now annul local election results and appoint municipal mayors. Ministers and governors have not been moderate in using these extraordinary powers: they have dismissed 119 mayors, more than 300 mukhtars (neighbourhood or village governors), and hundreds of municipal council members between September 1, 2016, and November 16, 2019, appointing government trustees in their place (HDP, 2019).

The developments above are a manifestation of the conflict between direct democracy and representative democracy in Northern Kurdistan. Therefore, it is useful to understand and discuss Hannah Arendt's council system, which she considers an alternative to representative democracy and the party-political system, as well as an indispensable element of political freedom, both in general and specifically in Northern Kurdistan.

The practice of appointing trustees instead of elected mayors, municipal council members, and even local leaders serves one of the significant purposes of keeping the central government of the nation-state as powerful as possible, ensuring that local governments remain instruments devoid of central government authority and jurisdiction. However, the practical implementation in the municipalities of Kurdistan where trustees are appointed aims to decentralize governance, transform power from the centre to the local level, and establish a form of direct democracy, thereby moving away from a centralized form of governance and fostering a strong understanding of local governance. It is worthwhile to examine the practice of appointing trustees to municipalities from this perspective as well.

In other words, in the context of Turkey and Kurdistan, we observe the manifestation of the ancient conflict between republic and democracy: the Turkish political establishment is committed to promote the dominance and privileges that the Turkish majority enjoys thanks to the principle of national sovereignty and the institutions of representative politics, which means preserving the centralised republic and nothing more. The Kurdish political movement, on the other hand, aims to introduce direct and delegatory variations of democracy in order to open up the civic space to the presence and flourishing of the marginalised and the excluded.

Conclusion

The appointment of government trustees (kayyım) to the elected offices in Kurdistan that began after 2015 in the Republic of Turkey, which are highly likely to continue after the local elections in 2024, should be seen as an attempt to stifle the direct democratic momentum created by and through Kurdish politics. In this regard, the practice of removing elected mayors and other local officials chosen by Kurds and replacing them with state officials reflects a systemic conflict between representative and direct democracy, conceptually representing a conflict between sovereignty and autonomy-based political programs. To put it in Arendtian terms, what we have been witnessing since the emergence of modern revolutions is being repeated: individuals and entities benefiting from the concept of sovereignty and representative organs are aiming to suppress the movements and institutions that emerge or pose as alternatives.

It is evident that what Arend calls the council system not only has found a refuge in Kurdistan, but it has been there - and elsewhere - all along. The ideal of democratic confederalism, promoted by Kurdish political movements, envisions the free organization of society and communities on the bases of a federation built upon public assemblies and district, city, and regional councils, thus combining direct, semi-direct, and representative democracy. Not unlike the council system promoted by Arendt as the only alternative to the party system, this project currently stands as the only alternative to the most draconian formulations and interpretations of a despotic notion of national sovereignty in various manifestations.
Hence, it is essential and imperative to discuss and open the public space for both the

Arendtian and the Kurdish alternatives if democracy is to survive into the future.
In this context, we do the following recommendations to the relevant parties:

• Since the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the only council democracy that has successfully institutionalized itself as an autonomous political structure on this side of the Atlantic is the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. This administration is a hybrid democracy that blends direct, semi-direct, and representative democratic concepts and institutions, ensuring the dual flow of political authority (from bottom to top and from top to bottom). Both this administration and its inspiration, democratic confederalism, are the products of indigenous democratic innovations.
To better understand these democratic innovations and similar ones, we recommend that all parties allocate more resources to studies and research on indigenous and local democracies. Imposing representative democracy as the sole form, and the nation-state as the only political organization, on every community and group perpetuates conflicts and disputes based on claims of sovereignty.
Democracy is inherently local, and the growth of local democracies should be encouraged to contribute more to problem-solving and conflict resolution. Of course, the contribution of financial and academic resources will be limited until fundamental security measures, such as preventing the assassination of researchers in Kurdistan by the Turkish government, are ensured.

•The European Union should prioritize creating an environment conducive to the existence of local, indigenous, and direct democracies that emerge alongside and within republics. This is a fundamental political and social priority. Not only in Kurdistan but also in Europe, trends and institutions such as mini publics (Fishkin & Fishkin, 2020) and citizens' assemblies (Scotland, 2021) are becoming widespread to restore the political status and will of indigenous communities and minorities and to promote direct political participation. Moreover, projects like democratic confederalism align with the Union's subsidiarity principle (Panizza, 2018; Pavy, 2020), and The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. In fact, democratic confederalism possesses a democratic characteristic that even surpasses the subsidiarity principle: while the principle of subsidiarity foresees a top-down flow of authority, democratic confederalism anticipates a bidirectional flow of authority, both from top to bottom and bottom to top, depending on the task and the decision to be made at hand.

•The Union should ensure that they take the necessary steps to encourage the states where the Kurds form a national minority to allow different political structures to emerge and gain constitutional protection. This might soften the exclusionary extremes of their political regimes which adhere to a rigid implementation of the national sovereignty principle. The most ordinary and harmless way to achieve this is undoubtedly to strengthen democratic local governments and governance.
However, the practice of removing elected Kurdish officers and administrators and appointing trustees to their posts in Northern Kurdistan and the attacks on Rojava and South Kurdistan by the Republic of Turkey demonstrate that the there is no tolerance even for constitutional and legitimate political agency in Kurdistan. It should be remembered that political will excluded from the constitutional and legitimate order will inevitably express themselves through other frameworks and means. Democratic innovations introduced by non-state political actors such as autonomous administrations and liberation movements in Kurdistan should be supported.

Otherwise, conflicts and disputes between those organizing against the current antidemocratic order and the system will continue to lead to the loss of life, time, and resources.

•The above suggestions are formal. The factor that will give them life and play a critical role in achieving those goals in the long term, which needs to be taken into account by all parties, is as follows: Establishing a universal citizenship ethos, as rightly emphasized by Hannah Arendt. This means that the protection of the rights and freedoms of individuals, communities, species, and ecosystems should not be the exclusive domain of a national political authority.

The Rights of Man, after all, had been defined as "inalienable" because they were supposed to be independent of all governments; but it turned out that the moment human beings lacked their own government and had to fall back upon their minimum rights, no authority was left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them. Or when, as in the case of the minorities, an international body arrogated to itself a nongovernmental authority, its failure was apparent even before its measures were fully realized; not only were the governments more or less openly opposed to this encroachment on their sovereignty, but the concerned nationalities themselves did not recognize a nonnational guarantee, mistrusted everything which was not clear-cut support of their "national" (as opposed to their mere "linguistic, religious, and ethnic") rights, and preferred either, like the Germans or Hungarians, to turn to the protection of the "national" mother country, or, like the Jews, to some kind of interterritorial solidarity. (1951, pp. 291–292)

The aim here is to create a universal citizenship consciousness, where every political subject and actor recognizes their responsibility for the well-being and freedom of their neighbours, fellow citizens and fellow humans, the entire species of living beings, and the environment. While a rhetoric of universal rights and freedoms has been established through international human rights law, in practice, due to the principle of national sovereignty, political structures provide protection and privileges only to the identity sponsored by the state. Citizenship practice should be conceptualized and institutionalized not only around final political goals but also by keeping in mind the obligations of citizens towards one another, rather than towards nation, leader, ideology, or political program. Citizenship fundamentally regulates the relationships of the residents of a place with fellow residents and with the environment. The relationship with the established political authority and actors is secondary and rests upon the former. The emphasis on creating a new human must evolve into establishing new and more democratic and egalitarian relationships between humans and between humans and the environment.

•To the Kurdish national liberation movements that promote democratic confederalism: in Northern Kurdistan, municipalities governed by the Kurdish freedom movement parties have not been able to reach wide and deep into the fabric of society with the democratic confederalism project, because they have not established an alternative economy. Municipal activities have been limited to political and cultural areas. If a council democracy is to be established by municipalities in Northern Kurdistan, the economic aspect of this should also be considered.

The resolution of the Kurdish question and the alternative economy

Azize Aslan

The United Nations General Assembly, in its 66th meeting held on April 18, 2023, made a historic decision by adopting the resolution "Promotion of Social and Solidarity Economy for Sustainable Development" (A/77/L.60). This decision, which sparked excitement and debate in various circles, is a continuation of the general discussion on decent work and the social and solidarity economy that took place at the 110th International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2022 (ILO, 2023).

Especially in recent years, the concept of social and solidarity economy, brought to the agenda by social movements, civil society, and the public, is being discussed as a strategic tool in addressing global issues such as the "natural" disasters caused by global warming and climate change, economic crises resulting from the impasse of a neoliberal accumulation cycle, inflation, unemployment, insecurity, and increasingly overwhelming poverty, as well as the influx of migrants created by those who have exhausted their chances of survival and abandoned their homes.

While this discussion may be new to the agenda of the United Nations (UN), regions and societies that have been discussing and implementing social and solidarity economies for many years are significant in number. One of these regions is Kurdistan. The democratic-communal economy, as termed by the Kurdish Political Movement, and its cooperative-centred understanding and policy of social economy are presented as tools for mitigating the effects of years of conflict conditions, resolving the Kurdish issue, establishing peace conditions, and promoting local economic improvement.

The colonial economic policies implemented by hegemonic states, including the Turkish state, on the Kurdish community and the Kurdish geography have resulted in Kurds being among the poorest social groups within the states they inhabit, and the regions where Kurds constitute the majority are positioned as the least developed areas within those countries. Despite the regional development plans implemented in Turkey since the 1960s, especially those targeting the underdeveloped regions where Kurds live, these areas have not yet achieved sufficient economic and social development (Aslan, 2012). This report aims to highlight, on one hand, the reasons for the 'underdevelopment' of the Kurdish geography, and on the other hand, to convey the locally generated economic development policies, i.e., the construction of social and solidarity economy, and the challenges it faces.

The Kurds in Turkey and regional economic development

It was not possible to talk about unequal development—the idea of unequal development

was considered to violate the unity of the nation/state—or regional planning in Turkey until the State Planning Organization (DPT - Devlet Planlama Teşkilatı) was established on September 30, 1960 (Elmas 2001: p. 95-96). Until then, the sole purpose of the Republic of Turkey was to create a national domestic market that could compete with international markets. Successful road programs implemented after the 1940s, the establishment of state factories in Anatolian cities based on the processing of agricultural products, and similar policies enabled the emergence of an economy in the 1960s that could integrate Turkey's domestic market with international markets.
However, not every region benefited equally from this development. Public investments made in Eastern Anatolia remained significantly smaller in comparison to public and private sector investments in Western Anatolia. The investments made in the Eastern Anatolian region, where Kurds predominantly reside, did not extend beyond equipping law enforcement forces and opening schools, which served as the foundation for Turkification policies.

The regional inequalities inherited from the Ottoman era grew even larger with the Republic (Tekeli 2008: p. 69), creating significant development gaps between Eastern Anatolia and Western Anatolia. Over time, these differences evolved into radical regional disparities. However, for the Republic of Turkey, which turned its face towards the West and Europe, ignoring these inequalities was not possible. In this context, efforts were initiated to develop regional development policies that were consistent with central planning.

However, although there were many development plans, a deeper examination shows that there is tremendous confusion in the concepts of “region” and “planning,” with plans and terms constantly changing. Expressions such as region, locality, centre, and underdeveloped region are consistently used in reference to the central state. Those who determine and implement development plans are always the central state institutions, and no initiative or even rights are granted to local actors regarding economic development. The essence of policies is established with the perspective that localities should support central policies, but this relationship is not established in reverse (Aslan 2012).

This logic has not changed with the new economic policies introduced in the 1980s, which were outward-oriented, neoliberal, and aimed at reorganizing the central role of the state in the economy. On the contrary, the violence, repression, and destruction policies created by the State of Emergency (OHAL) Governorates established after the military coup on September 12, 1980, in Kurdish provinces led to even greater economic decline in the region. Especially in response to the rejection of the state's “village guard” practice in Kurdish villages, the implementation of village burning and forced migration created the fastest and most comprehensive process of dispossession and proletarianization in the history of Turkey (Yörük 2009).

The prohibition of agriculture and animal breeding in many regions due to conflict resulted in Kurds migrating from their regions to industrial cities. No planning or support was provided by the state regarding migration. All economic tools, including labour, were dismantled, bringing economic activities to a halt in the region. In fact, the 9th Development Plan of Turkey published in 2012 pointed to the 15 provinces where Kurds lived as the most underdeveloped region in Turkey (Region 6 [6. Bölge]) (Yörük 2009). This map clearly shows that ethnic discrimination is a permanent feature of development policies, and this has fostered uneven economic development in Kurdistan by the Republic of Turkey in the last 100 years (Ministry of Economy 2012).

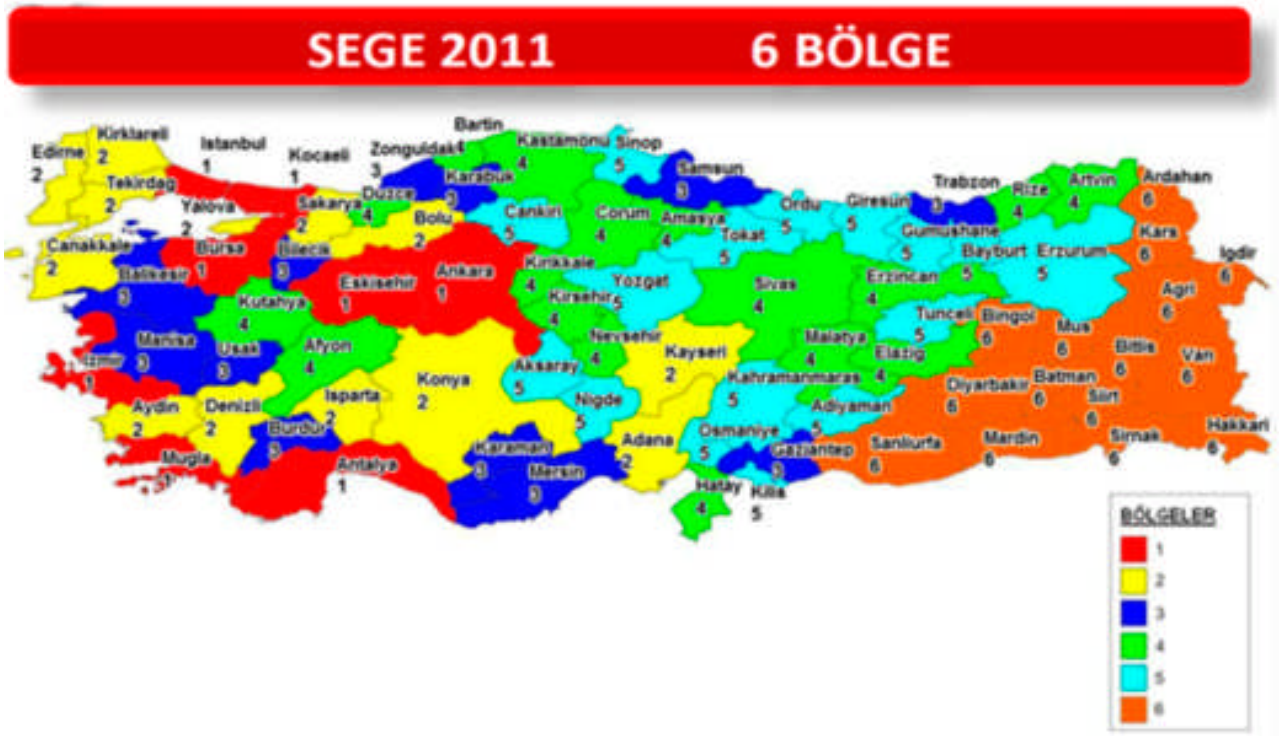

Figure 1: 2012 Map of Incentive System
Source: Ministry of Economy, 2012 Incentive System Presentation Text

Looking at the sectoral content of the investments encouraged in the Kurdish provinces designated as Region 6 (6. Bölge), one can say that low-value-added, labour-intensive sectors are incentivized. In these sectors, the work is poorly paid, and the working conditions are called 3D: Dirty, Dangerous, and Demeaning. It appears that this region is intended to be subjected to intense exploitation conditions, similar to what one might call Turkey's "China," and that poverty conditions are sought to be made permanent but sustainable in this way. Indeed, the Minister of Economy at the time expressed his intention to reinforce this with the implementation of regional minimum wage (Çağlayan 2005).

In contrast, actors from the Kurdish Political Movement like congresses of peoples, municipalities, political parties, and other institutions belonging to civil society base their perspective on the democratization of economic activity, emphasizing that the right to dignified work and a decent life is an essential right for all individuals in society, regardless of ethnic, religious, or sexual identity. In this context, in 2013, discussions on democratic-communal economy were initiated under the leadership of the Democratic Society Congress (DTK - Demokratik Toplum Kongresi) and the Free Women's Congress (KJA – Kongreaya Jinên Azad), leading to subsequent practical implementations (Abdullah Öcalan Sosyal Bilimler Akademisi 2012).

Democratic Communal Economy

The Kurdish Political Movement's democratic, ecological, and women's liberation-oriented paradigm of "new life" aims to reorganize social relations in a non-patriarchal, decentralized, and non-statist form (Aslan & Akbulut 2019). Named as democratic autonomy/democratic confederalism, this paradigm is built upon a vision of confederal organization consisting of self-governing mechanisms where social pluralism, equality, and harmony are fundamental, allowing the community to determine its own destiny. Democratic confederalism is multidimensional: within the perspective and practice of the "democratic nation," it envisions participation and collective decision-making mechanisms. For this new political system to be genuinely liberating, it is crucial to reorganize the economic sphere within the framework of non-capitalist, communal relationships (Abdullah Öcalan Sosyal Bilimler Akademisi 2012).

Sources provided by the Kurdish Political Movement refer to multiple conceptualizations related to the economic sphere. While Abdullah Öcalan defines the organization of the economic dimension of democratic confederalism as the "economic society," the PKK uses the term "communal economy" based on communes. The Democratic Society Congress (DTK), in the discussions and conferences it conducted in Bakur (Northern Kurdistan, Turkey) in 2013, highlights the concept of "democratic economy," while in Rojava (West Kurdistan, Syria), the term "social economy" has been prominent since 2014. Additionally, in Bakur, the Free Women's Congress (KJA) and in Rojava, Kongra-Star approach this field with the conceptualization of "women's economy" (Aborîya JIN) from a Jineology perspective, enriching the discourse (Aslan 2020).

Although economic organization in both Bakur and Rojava is inspired by a Democratic Communal Economy (DKE) perspective, the contextual realities, opportunities, and challenges of the two regions have shaped their trajectories in different directions. Democratic Communal Economy discussions and related experiences were initiated in Bakur under the "conditions of peace" ongoing between Abdullah Öcalan, the Imrali Committee, and the Turkish state. This period took place at a time when there was a significant possibility for peace. In order to sustain participatory and transparent peace dialogues, not only in the economic field but also in ecology, women's economy, local governance, labor, health, education, and many other areas, hundreds of workshops, conferences, meetings, panels, etc., were organized by the DTK and KJA during this period of potential peace.

Following five preparation workshops and three workshops initiated in 2012, DTK organized the Democratic Economy Conference[4] on November 8-9, 2014, in Van, with the slogan "Let's communalize our land, water, and energy; let's build a democratic free life."[5] The conference aimed to discuss the economic dimension of democratic autonomy widely. However, the main objective of the conference was to put into practice the Democratic Communal Economy perspective that was known and defended at the theoretical level, and to seek the views, suggestions and volunteers of all groups in society. On this basis, the conference was attended by more than 300 delegates from various Kurdish provinces, representing different social groups (businesspeople, trade unions, cooperatives, municipalities, academics, journalists, members of the people's congress and women's congress, representatives of political parties and associations).[6]

At this conference, the Democratic Economy was defined around three fundamental principles: democratic, ecological, and women's liberation-oriented. It was presented as a third alternative to economic liberalism and the central planning system (Yusuf 2015). The framework outlined at the conference envisioned the economy as a multifaceted and democratizable space where different production relationships coexist, aiming to counter the deepening of neoliberal and centrally developmental models in the region. Strategies were proposed to bring together various economic components in the form of a solidarity network, ranging from regional production and consumption cooperatives to family farming, craftsmen, small-scale capitalist companies, mutual aid associations, chambers, unions, and NGOs (Madra, Ercel, & Ozselcuk 2016).

It was argued that solidarity and community economy were closest to the essence of the Kurdistan communities and natural society, and that their collective strength could overcome the negative effects created by war. Emphasizing the economy's focus on social needs and use value rather than individual needs, the potential to socialize production through councils, communes, and cooperatives was highlighted. Through cooperatives, wage relations are eliminated, replaced by cooperative markets that emphasize solidarity over competition. As economic relationships democratize through sectoral organizations, self-management of the economy by the community develops. This results in an economy favorable to nature, women, and social justice. It was emphasized that the Democratic Communal Economy approach is not ethnically based, but rather recognizes a social and pluralistic economy. [7]

Based on such a theoretical content, Democratic Communal Economy, was implemented by commissions established in all regions where Kurds live immediately after the conference in Van.

However, with the end of peace negotiations in March 2015, these newly formed economic initiatives came under a major attack. The seizure of Kurdish municipalities by government trustees appointed from the center resulted in the liquidation of cooperative, women's economy, and ecology projects. Many cooperatives were closed, and with the withdrawal of the opportunities created by municipalities by the trustees, many means of production registered to the municipalities inventory and used by cooperatives or communes were confiscated. All these attacks occurred simultaneously with a major assault on nature, which is the foundation to Democratic Communal Economy. Simultaneously, numerous forest fires caused by security forces were documented by the Mesopotamian Ecology Movement.[8] However, recording the potential and memory of the Democratic Communal Economy that emerged during this period could shed light on potential peace policies that could be developed.[9]

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4 Demokratik Ekonomi Konferansı'nın sonuç metni ve kararları açıklandı: http://siyasihaber2.org/demokratik-ekonomi-konferansinin-sonuc-metni-ve-kararlari-aciklandi (Accessed 08.02.2016)

5 With the same motto, the First Economy Conference was organized in Rojava on October 16-17, 2015.

6 Demokratik Ekonomi Konferansı Van'da başladı: https://siyasihaber9.org/demokratik-ekonomi-konferansi-vanda-basladi/ (Accessed: 20.11.2023)

The Experience of Democratic Communal Economy in Bakur

The Van Economy Commission, which started by planting thousands of fruit trees, conducted a widespread initiative within the boundaries of the metropolitan municipality to expand urban gardens on a total of 300,000 square meters. While forming honey cooperatives in four villages, they collectively planted four tons of garlic. Metropolitan and district municipalities established economy commissions within their structures to collaborate with DTK and KJA.
In the production processes, landless and/or unemployed villagers from this region participated, sharing the products or income they obtained. In Van city center, women established the Bostancı Women's Cooperative (BİKAD-Koop) and produced strawberries, diversifying their business by making jam from the strawberries they produced. In 2015, BİKAD-Koop was creating self-sufficient economies for more than 300 women by producing various jams, pickles, tomato paste, bottled products, as well as noodles, bread, cakes, and dumplings in the dough workshop. Also, in Van, a cooperative market named Medya Tüketim Kooperatifi (Media Consumption Cooperative) was opened. Its aim was to bring local small-scale peasant production and cooperative production to the city. However, the market was closed before it could fully realize this relay.

The Bağlar Women's Cooperative, which operated in Diyarbakır Bağlar Municipality since the early 2000s, was expanded through collaboration with the KJA economy commission and the municipality. It was renamed Amed Cooperative and transformed into a textile workshop where 17 women survivors of violence engaged in production. The workshop, which sewed regional-cultural clothing, also produced authentic and daily clothing with the assistance of a designer. The women, marketing their products under the label "Eko-jin" (“Eco-woman), opened the first cooperative clothing store: “Ekojin”. The name Eko-jin was decided collaboratively by 11 women's cooperatives and communes. Throughout its operative period, the cooperative provided hope for many women survivors of violence, as each increase of 1000 Turkish liras in income allowed another woman to become a member.

Products from all cooperatives and communes under democratic communal economy began to be presented to the market under the Eko-jin name, with the primary goal of creating a space in the market. The women at Ekojin aimed to increase the number of communes and cooperatives, reaching a level where women's cooperatives could engage in barter.

With the support of Gültan Kışanak, who was the co-mayor of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality at that time but who is currently a political prisoner, an agricultural commission was established to revitalize agricultural research and communal farming.

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7 Demokratik Ekonomi Konferansı’nın sonuç metni ve kararları açıklandı: http://siyasihaber2.org/demokratik-ekonomi-konferansinin-sonuc-metni-ve-kararlari-aciklandi (Accessed 08.02.2016)
8 Cudi Yürüyüşü'ne çağrı: Ekolojik varlıklar savaş pratiğiyle yok ediliyor: http://mezopotamyaajansi35.com/GUNCEL / content/view/181486, (Accessed 20.112023)
9 Autogobierno económico en la autonomía democrática. El ejemplo de Bakur (Kurdistan turco)” https://cooperativa.cat/autogobierno-economico-en-la-autonomia-democratica-el-ejemplo-de-bakur-kurdistan-turco/, (Accessed: 20.11.2023)

The agriculture commission, consisting of 5 people, was disbanded by the government trustees before it could take action. However, just before its dissolution, the commission conducted significant research on the agricultural structure of the region.

The commission highlighted the despair of villagers in terms of production due to the conditions of war. It conducted approximately 20 days of data research in the Kocaköy district. The history of cultivation in Kocaköy, i.e., the agricultural products previously cultivated, was investigated. It was observed that agricultural production was uniformized in the form of wheat and barley production. Indeed, this was a prevalent situation in other regions of the Kurdish geography as well. The commission noted that they observed unequal land ownership in villages but found that the policy of communalizing the land for production was welcomed by various segments of society.
The Mersin Women's Commune, established under the leadership of KJA at that time, was formed by 9 greenhouse worker women coming together based on labour without any capital. The Mersin Women's Commune, where peasant women donated surplus production, created their common and initial capital by drying and selling donated mint and peppers. The women, making tomato paste with the donated tomatoes, formed a cooperative within two years under the name Eko-jin (Mersin).

Another important cooperative initiative under the scope of Democratic Communal Economy was the KED Research Cooperative. KED stands for labour in Kurdish. Established to compile the socio-economic knowledge of Kurdistan, conduct inventory studies, and carry out academic research, the KED cooperative embarked on its journey with the motive that knowledge should be produced locally. In addition to this, Democratic Communal Economy activities were carried out in other significant Kurdish settlements such as Batman, Mardin, Urfa, Siirt, and many more regions.

During this period, nearly 60 women's cooperatives were established in a very short period of time in different Kurdish provinces, including 9 in Diyarbakır alone, producing under the name Eko-jin. Today, only one of these cooperatives, the Lice Women's Cooperative in Diyarbakir, is able to continue its activities. While the KED cooperative still exists, its members can no longer live in the region, preventing it from conducting significant research. Even though these are rather minor developments, the debate over the Democratic Communal Economy and its implementation processes were participatory, providing solutions that supported local initiatives that could address many economic issues in the region at that time.
The conditions for implementing Democratic Communal Economy in Turkey have diminished due to the government policy of trusteeship, political oppression, and the criminalization of all Kurdish activities. However, the Kurdish Political Movement has not abandoned the project of democratizing the economy; it continues to develop this in Rojava today.

Social Economy in Rojava

Indeed, following this period, reclaiming the slogan of the Democratic Economy Conference in Bakur—“We communalize our land, water, and energy; let’s build a free and democratic life”— the First Rojava Economy Conference was held in the city of Rimelan from October 16 to 17, 2015.[10] The democratic-communal economy perspectives that first emerged in Bakur were discussed again at this conference, but under the title of social economy (aborîya ciwakî). According to the specificities of Rojava society, consensus was sought among

different social sectors. Meanwhile, the first experiences of communes and cooperativization were taking place both in Bakur and Rojava. In this sense, the Rojava Economy Conference did not discuss the organization and practice of the social economy purely theoretically; on the contrary, the first experiences of the Kurds were analysed together with other experiences in the world.

When the concluding documents of the Democratic Economy Conference and the Social Economy Conference of Rojava are set side by side, it is apparent that both stem from the same perspective and are thus related. However, there is a difference: in Bakur, the discussions on a future economy were based on a peace settlement yet to come. In Rojava, the Economic Committee approached the topic as part of the region's self-defence, considering the conditions of war.

In Rojava, the most local and smallest organizational unit of the democratic autonomy, which was declared in the framework of the Canton system in 2015 and took on a new form in the form of cantons and regions in 2017, is the commune. Communes are established based on discussions about questions such as what we produce, how we produce, and for whom we produce (TRASOL 2017). The commune assembly begins to build a founding policy based on collective needs. With the participation and moderation of the Cooperative Movement [11], the discussions in the commune assembly, held sometimes through lengthy debates and sometimes through short ones, not only focus on identifying needs but also encompass the production of tools, division of labor relations, at the commune or "Komingeh"[12] level. The economic committee, affiliated with the cooperative committee, proposes cooperativism as an economic and political self-organization project in the construction of democratic autonomy. If there is demand or if deemed necessary, the economic committees conduct educational activities to familiarize the communes with cooperativism. When the commune decides to adopt cooperativism, the economic committees support the organizational processes. In this way, cooperatives are established not as a top-down model but rather as an initiative emerging from the communes, approved by the assembly, and aligned with the needs and future perspectives of the commune (Aslan 2022: p. 285).

According to the perspective of Democratic Communal Economy, cooperatives established based on the collective needs and decisions of the society are organizational tools that eliminate the distinction between producer and consumer in the community.

Cooperatives established for this purpose enhance the community's capacity to determine what to produce and what to consume, thereby socializing the economy. The economy ceases to be an organization outside and above the community. By eliminating the wage-labor relationship, it redefines the concept of work as a collective and desirable activity, regaining its original meaning.

10 The Kurdish Movement established an organizational system on the basis of the KCK system as confederated peoples' congresses in each part of Kurdistan. Based on this system, perspectives and experiences are shared between economic committees.

11 In the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (Rojava), the Cooperative Movement refers to the joint activities conducted by the Cooperative Committee of the Social Economy Committee, the Cooperative Union (Yekîtiya Kooperatîfan), and Cooperative Houses (Mala Kooperatîfan) to develop cooperatives. The movement operates with the goal of "one cooperative for each commune."

12 It is a political and economic partnership formed by communes geographically close to each other in the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (Rojava). In essence, it operates based on the principle of jointly producing needs and services. The establishment of Komingehs is initiated by commune assemblies.

Care becomes central to the processes of labor once again (Abdullah Öcalan Sosyal Bilimler Akademisi 2012).
Cooperatives have a complementary and holistic relationship with other institutions and units of the democratic society.

The existence and functionality of democratic self-administration mechanisms, such as communes, assemblies, city councils, and congresses, require the presence of cooperatives (AANES 2016). Therefore, the self-administration of cooperative members alone is not sufficient for the democratization of economy. The decisive factor should be the community-commune. In Rojava, the cooperatives are not presented as an institutional model repeated uniformly everywhere but, on the contrary, emerge as different forms of collective practices within communes based on their decisions, needs, future aspirations, and capacities within the framework of democratic nation. In fact, cooperatives are not established as permanent structures but as an action agreement according to the needs of the period, verbally among commune members. This situation increases the capacity of communes to adapt to different and urgent needs under conditions of war, crisis, and embargo, contributing significantly to the management of processes such as the pandemic in Rojava. The decentralized and need-based production and distribution system implemented by communes facilitated social life, serving as a crucial indicator of the economic self-administration dimension of the democratic autonomy built in Rojava.

However, this perspective, which seeks a dignified, peaceful life for everyone living in Rojava and Northern Syria, needs to be supported in the creation of economic resources, models, institutionalization, and an integral education program that supports this institutionalization. In this regard, while the political actors who build constitutive politics have a great role to play, the support of institutions such as the United Nations and the European Union, which act with a sustainable development perspective, plays a major role in legitimizing the efforts made in this region. No doubt, this will stimulate people's efforts and hopes.

Conclusion

As understood from all these discussions aimed at developing the economic perspective of democratic autonomy, the goal of the Kurdish Political Movement is to build a free and dignified life with democratic autonomy, specifically designed for the Kurdish communities. This involves ensuring self-administration over the society's labor, production processes and forms, and needs; democratizing social relations by supporting and expanding communal life practices; and constructing a new life based on reciprocity and solidarity relationships rather than relations of domination. All of these align with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals for 2030.

To achieve these goals in Kurdistan, it is crucial that the wars and political repression conducted by states against the Kurdish people come to an end, and peace conditions are established through a process initiated and participated in by local actors. The damages caused by war, especially in economic life, need to be addressed, and for this purpose, international economic cooperation projects should be created, supporting the democratic, communal, and social economic perspective and efforts of the Kurdish Political Movement. In this regard, the indispensable support and involvement of European Union countries are crucial.

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Acknowledgement:

We are grateful for the insightful and engaged feedback provided by Joost Jongerden. We thank Ayhan Işık for his contribution to the initial discussions on this report. We highly appreciate the efforts of the EUTCC, Dersim Dagdeviren in particular, for bringing us together and creating such a space to share the insights from our individual researches.

To cite this report:
Sunca J. Y., Barış H., and Aslan A. (2023). A century of Republican practices and Kurdish alter-politics. EUTCC Report – 1. Brussels, EU-Turkey Civic Commission.

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