

# **La cuestión de la minoría kurda en el contexto de integración de Turquía en la Unión Europea**

*The Kurdish minority issue in the context of integration Turkey with the  
European Union*

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## **ABSTRACT**

The Kurdish minority issue has been most politically troublesome and challenging. It has influenced domestic and foreign policies of Turkey in a very effective way in the 1990s. Kurdish nationalism in Turkey is not a simple expression of discontent, but a movement that demands changing the boundaries of the Turkish entity to make room for an independent Kurdish state. Former president, Süleyman Demirel said: “*Opening of the Kurdish issue will lead up to disintegration of the state, so it is strongly connected with the state security*”.

**Keywords:** Kurdish minority, foreign policies of Turkey, European Union.

**JEL Classification:** D00, N15.

## RESUMEN

La cuestión de minoría kurda ha sido políticamente muy problemático y desafiante. Habiendo influido, en las políticas nacionales y extranjeras de Turquía, de una forma muy efectiva en la década de 1990. El nacionalismo kurdo en Turquía no es una simple expresión de descontento, sino que es un movimiento que exige el cambio de los límites de la entidad turca para hacer espacio para un Estado kurdo independiente. Como el ex presidente Süleyman Demirel dijo: “*La apertura de la cuestión kurda va a conducir a la desintegración del Estado, por lo que está firmemente conectado con la seguridad del Estado*”.

**Palabras Clave:** Minoría Kurda, Política exterior, Unión Europea.

**Clasificación JEL:** D00, N15.



## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The founder of the Republic of Turkey, Kemal Pasha Atatürk, wanted to unite all Muslims without any ethnical divisions and build a modern and homogeneous state. Kurds were named the Mountain Turks. Turkish state did not recognize Kurds as an ethnic minority<sup>1</sup>.

There are about 12 million Kurds in Turkey. They live mostly in the south - east Anatolia. Kurdish issue is strongly connected with the economical underdevelopment of this region of Turkey. Poverty and strong need of independency are the main reasons of the rise of ethnical terrorism in Turkey. Kurdistan Workers Party (Parti Karkerani Kurdistan - PKK) is recognized as a terrorist organization not only in Turkey but also in other European states and in the US. The war between Turkish government and the PKK has left more than 30,000 people dead<sup>2</sup>.

Kurdish issue is one of the most important problems connected with the process of integration Turkey with the European Union. Turkey is often accused of breaking the human rights towards the Kurdish minority. There is also concern in Europe, that Turkey with unsolved Kurdish problem will bring instability to the whole European Union.

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In 2002 the Parliament of Turkey passed a law which liberalized the policy towards Kurdish minority according to the EU standards. European Commission will be screening all improvements in implementation of this law. It is also important for Turkey to improve economical conditions of Kurds living in the Southeastern Anatolia region.

The Kurdish issue is one of the problems in international relations which can not be effectively solved by one state. There is too much at stake for both Turks and Kurds. The Kurdish question will become another century – long debate<sup>3</sup>.

## **2. HISTORY AND IDENTITY OF KURDS**

Kurds are the largest stateless community in the world. There are an estimated 30 million Kurds in a region of Asia that includes territory in Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Armenia (Map 1). More than half of the world's Kurds live in Turkey where they represent approximately 20% of the population<sup>4</sup>. The present situation of the Kurds can only be understood in its historical context. There is no definitive answer to the question

of Kurdish origins, except the fact, that Kurdish people has inhabited the mountainous regions north of Mesopotamia for a period of between two and four thousand years ago<sup>5</sup>. Some researches have suggested that there is a possibility that some Kurdish tribes could have moved from Europe to Mesopotamia four thousand years ago<sup>6</sup>.

Modern studies about the Kurdish people increased during the period of the decline of the Ottoman Empire. The roots of the Kurdish issue in the Southeast of Turkey go back as far as the XIX century when it was known as the “Eastern Question”<sup>7</sup>. The Ottoman Empire was organized along religious community lines. Thus, the Kurds, unlike the Greeks, Jews, and Christian Armenians, were not considered as minority but were full members of the Muslim majority<sup>8</sup>. Up until the beginning XIX century, there been de facto independent Kurdish Emirates within Ottoman Empire. Special status of Kurdish land, called “area under Kurdish rule” guaranteed the self-government of the Emirate<sup>9</sup>. The centralization of the Ottoman Empire since 1826 also affected the Kurdish Emirates which came out strongly against the conquest of their territories. After the military defeat of the Kurdish Emirates, Ottoman civil servants replaced the Kurdish rulers<sup>10</sup>.

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Ideological motives shape the arguments about the roots of the Kurds. Kurdish nationalists claimed that Turks and Kurds are different nations. They argue, that the Kurds are the first owners of the Anatolian territory and that many other nations followed them in these territories. Some of the Kurdish publications argue that the Greek, Hittite, Lydia, Assyrian, and many other Anatolian and Mesopotamia civilizations were originally Kurdish<sup>11</sup>. According to most Turkish scholars, Kurds are one of the Turkish tribes who lived in the mountainous regions, and call them “Mountain Turks”<sup>12</sup>. However, that cannot be disputed is the fact, that the people within this area of Asia today call themselves Kurds and identify with the particular area called Kurdistan. The region of Kurdistan historically known as Mesopotamia has been conquered by many nations and this has led to such a complex history that it is practically impossible to establish a true regional identity.

The historical evidence suggests that Kurdish society was essentially tribal. The tribal characteristic of Kurdish society may have changed, especially during the second half of the XX century, but it remains a cultural hallmark of the people<sup>13</sup>. It is suggested by historians that unlike the Arabs, Kurdish tribal cohesion is based on a mix of blood ties and territorial loyalty<sup>14</sup>. The Kurds speak different languages. The majority of the Kurdish - Sunni people in Turkey speak a dialect of Kurmanji. Less than 10% speak dialects known as Zaza, Sorani or Gurani<sup>15</sup>.

Another important factor in Kurdish identity is Islam. There is a strong loyalty to the sheiks and local leaders of religious brotherhoods. During the Ottoman Empire, Islam played a vital role in uniting the Kurdish and Turkish people. The Republic set up by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk aimed to homogenize the population of the country in order to



protect its unity. According to Atatürk, Turkey had to be made more homogeneous to sustain stability and security<sup>16</sup>. Turkey does not recognize a Kurdish minority and views Kurds simply as citizens of Turkey. This is a legacy of the strong assimilationist policies pursued by Atatürk at the time of the founding of the Republic of Turkey in 1923<sup>17</sup>. Atatürk was determined to create a new Turkish nation-state on the basis of a specifically “Turkish” national identity. As a result, all existing Muslim minorities, including the Kurds, were “granted a kind of Turkishness”<sup>18</sup>. Atatürk’s concept of Turkish identity was highly inclusive. Every person living within the borders of the Turkish Republic and accepting its basic principles could become a Turkish citizen. But becoming a Turk required the suppression of an individual’s ethnic identity. In short, Atatürk’s concept was extremely generous in that it allowed anyone to become a Turkish citizen<sup>19</sup>.

In the wake of World War I, the terms set by the Allies in the Treaty of Sèvres of 1920 partitioned Turkey, reducing it to one – third of its current territory, and promised the Kurds a country of their own. Atatürk rejected the treaty and started a “war of liberation” that led to the replacement of Treaty of Sèvres with the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. In response, Kurds launched an insurgency in 1925 with the goal of establishing an independent state. The rebellion was put down, and its leaders were hanged in the central square of Diyarbakir. After a series of uprisings that culminated in another rebellion in 1937, Turkey adopted measures, denying the existence of Kurds in Turkey and referring to them only as “Mountain Turks”. Kurdish language, culture and geographical place names were also banned<sup>20</sup>.

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### **3. PKK TERRORISM**

The Kurdish question has involved not only a growing Kurdish ethnic assertiveness in the form of identity politics which claims for the recognition of difference, but also a campaign of violence and terrorist activities of the PKK to achieve its objective of establishing an independent Kurdish state in southeastern Turkey<sup>21</sup>. The PKK was founded by Abdullah Öcalan in 1978. It was a Marxist-Leninist movement. It called for a democratic and united Kurdistan. Öcalan saw the establishment of a Kurdish state in southeast Anatolia as the first step toward the creation of an independent Greater Kurdistan which would include Kurds from Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria<sup>22</sup>. The PKK is a rigid hierarchical structure that operated with Stalinist discipline. Öcalan demanded that Kurds choose between loyalty to Turkey and support for the PKK. Brutal punishment was meted out to those who refused to cooperate. Between 1995 and 1999 its guerrilla teams were responsible for 21 suicide terrorist attacks<sup>23</sup>.

The United States listed the PKK as a foreign terrorist organization (FTO) in 2001. Soon after, Canada and the UK classified the PKK as an FTO. The EU added it to the terror list in May 2002<sup>24</sup>.

The PKK was run like a criminal gang. Financing came from a “revolutionary tax”<sup>25</sup> provided by Kurdish businessman in Turkey who were forced to pay or face the consequences, including murder or kidnapping. In addition, voluntary financing was provided by the Kurdish Diaspora in Europe through cultural associations and information centers, like Kurdish Employers Association, the Kurdish Islamic Movement and the Kurdish Red Crescent<sup>26</sup>. These organizations raised funds for the PKK and facilitated money transfers through subsidiary foundations in Switzerland, Britain, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark or Cyprus.

The PKK also financed its operations through drug and arms smuggling, human trafficking and extortions. In 1998 the British government maintained that the PKK was responsible for 40 % of the heroin sold in Europe<sup>27</sup>. Turkish officials maintain that the PKK was still receiving 150 million dollars in annual revenue as of 2005<sup>28</sup>. During the first half of the 2007, 225 people died as a result of attacks by the PKK<sup>29</sup>.

28 Öcalan was captured in Kenya in February 1999. He was found guilty of mass murder by a Turkish court and is serving a life sentence in isolation on İmralı Island on the Sea of Marmara. Öcalan declared a cease-fire on 1<sup>st</sup> August 1999, which lasted until June 2004, and most of the PKK guerrillas retreated to the mountains of northern Iraq, an area controlled by the Iraqi Kurds. Despite the cease - fire, PKK terrorist attacks increased from 584 in 2000 to 1500 in 2003<sup>30</sup>. From his prison cell Öcalan stated that he had give up his separatist ambitions and was prepared to endorse a resolution of Kurdish demands within the framework of the Turkish state<sup>31</sup>.

The KADEK (Kurdistan Freedom and Democracy Congress) organization was established in 2002 to provide a new image for the Kurdish movement, as well as to coordinate the leadership of its political and military wings<sup>32</sup>. Compatible with Öcalan’s position, KADEK declared that the movement’s goal had shifted from an “independent Kurdistan” to a “democratic Turkey”<sup>33</sup>. After the US Department of State, on 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2003, added KADEK to its list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations, KADEK was renamed Kongra-Gel (Kurdistan Society Congress), which was soon after also declared a terrorist organization by the US.

Former Chief of General Staff General Hilmi Özkök ruled out any negotiations with the Kurdistan Workers Party. He said, “*There cannot be any negotiation with the terror organization. I agree on that. You cannot talk with a person who took a gun and ascended the mountains*”<sup>34</sup>.



#### **4. TURKISH RESPONSE ON PKK ACTIVITY**

Turkish government put several southeastern provinces under martial law and declared a state of emergency in the late 1980s. It invoked article 14 of the constitution to crack down on activities that threatened the “*indivisibility of the state*”<sup>35</sup>. It also dismisses article 125 of the penal code, stipulated that “*any person who carries out any action intended to destroy the unity of the Turkish state or separate any part of the territory shall be punishable by death*” as well as article 8 of the Law for Fighting against Terrorism, which defined terrorism so broadly that it was used to criminalize any discussion about Kurdish problem<sup>36</sup>.

Turkey established army camps, police checkpoints, and military airports near to the border with Syria. Major military operations against the PKK were launched in 1989 and 1992. PKK activities peaked in 1993 when there were 4 198 reported clashes between the PKK and Turkish security forces<sup>37</sup>. By 1995, up to 150 000 Turkish troops and police were involved in seek-and-destroy missions within Turkey as well as across international frontiers.

Nowadays, Northern Iraq is the safe heaven for the PKK terrorism. It is the autonomous region since 1992 (Map 2). Independent Kurdish regime in northern Iraq would encourage separatist tendencies among Turkish Kurds, perhaps to a dangerous degree. Turkey insists that the territorial integrity of Iraq has to be maintained and continues to oppose the inclusion of the oil - rich province of Kirkuk into Kurdish territory. Turkey believes that only with the receipt of oil revenues from Kirkuk can a Kurdish state become economically viable<sup>38</sup>.

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There were many interventions of the Turkish Army to hunt for the PKK guerrillas in 1990s. On 21<sup>st</sup> of February 2008, 10 000 Turkish soldiers, supported by artillery fire, F – 16 fighters and Cobra helicopters, moved into Iraqi territory<sup>39</sup>. These troops had been concentrated in the south – east of Turkey for six months, near the Iranian border. Their objective was to displace the PKK fighters<sup>40</sup>. The Turkish Air Force bombed the PKK camps, and Turkish soldiers advanced 90 km into Iraqi territory.

The economic deprivation of the southeastern provinces of Turkey with high Kurdish population is a crucial problem, and breeds discontent that can nourish terrorism or other forms of political violence. In the last 15 years poverty increased 70%<sup>41</sup>. Moreover, regional poverty drags down the living standards of the entire country and thus creates a serious impediment to Turkey meeting European Union standards. In any case failure to resolve Kurdish issue will inevitably delay Turkey’s entry into the European Union, perhaps indefinitely. It is very important to improve the economical conditions of Kurdish society living in Turkey. Turkish government tried to undermine

popular support for the PKK by focusing on economic development of Southeastern Anatolia. From 1982 to 1992, it invested 20 billion dollars in the GAP (Southeast Anatolia Project) – a massive irrigation and hydroelectric scheme on Tigris and Euphrates rivers by building 20 dams, including great Atatürk Dam, the ninth largest in the world<sup>42</sup>. Its irrigation network was designed to service 1.7 million hectares, increase agricultural production and create 3.3 million jobs in Kurdish provinces: Gaziantep, Urfa and Mardin<sup>43</sup>. This has brought a new prosperity to both agricultural laborers and textile factory owners and employees in the area. Turkey also introduced a GAP Social Action Plan, emphasizing human development and social services. Another important reform is to stimulate investments in the Southeast, to enhance social services such as health and education. Projects should include the dismantling the tribal and feudal character of local society, which impedes development. Women can play a crucial role in improving social welfare and enhancing civil society<sup>44</sup>. Given the large size of families and the practice of multiple marriages among the Kurds, population planning programs are also needed.

The Kurds of the southeast also suffer from cultural, economic and political exclusion. In other words, the southeast is not only the most economically disadvantaged region of the country; but in addition, the cultural barriers and poor access to proper Turkish education have further deepened differences between Kurds and the rest of Turkish citizenry<sup>45</sup>. It is important for the government of Turkey to make several cultural gestures to the Kurds, particularly in the areas of the Kurdish language. Such step would undoubtedly attract Kurdish attention and encourage them to start looking at the state for further steps toward full acceptance of the Kurdish identity – via negotiations rather than by armed conflict<sup>46</sup>. Such steps by the state would very likely begin to weaken support for the PKK.

Another often sought cultural reform concerns the creation of institutes at universities for the study of Kurdish and Kurds<sup>47</sup>. Already, independent Kurdish cultural associations exist with branches in different cities in the country, especially in Istanbul and Izmir. Among the better known ones is the Mesopotamia Cultural Association. A potentially positive development is the recent licensing of the Kurdish Foundation for Research and Culture<sup>48</sup>.

Turkey cannot be expected to tolerate PKK terrorism forever. Turkey's already unstable domestic politics are facing another division following the government's new initiative to resolve the Kurdish question, a problem that has killed around 30 000 people in the past 25 years<sup>49</sup>. Pressure on the PKK could also be increased by cracking down on its international financing and propaganda system. To this end, Europe – based foundations and front organizations acting on behalf of the PKK should be shut down if it is shown that they support violence. The European Counterterrorism Group, a body composed of the 25 EU member states, Norway and Switzerland, should take the lead in investigating



illegal profits. The UN Counterterrorism Committee, which was established to deny funding to terrorist activities, could also request that the EU and member states suspected of hosting PKK front organizations report on efforts to cut off financing for the PKK<sup>50</sup>. Important part of Prime Minister Erdoğan's "Kurdish overture" is how to get the PKK to stop fighting without negotiating with their imprisoned leader, Abdullah Öcalan, who continues to hold sway over both his men and millions of ordinary Kurds<sup>51</sup>.

It is also important to solve the Kurdish issue using some political measures. Former president of Turkey, Turgut Özal (in years: 1989 – 93), recognized, that the PKK could be undermined by giving Kurdish political parties a greater role in national politics. He believed that reforms would moderate the Kurds and make them better citizens. He lifted the ban on the Kurdish language in 1991. President Özal died before he could implement the reforms he had envisioned for Turkey. President Abdullah Gül called for greater cultural rights for minorities, including official use of minority languages and underscoring the need for greater individual rights in the new constitution<sup>52</sup>. It will be the first Turkish constitution written by civilians and vetted by civil society. It will be harmonized with the European Convention on Human Rights. Gül was warmly received when he chose to visit Kurdish cities in the southeast as his first domestic trip after presidential elections.

## **5. KURDISH ISSUE IN THE PROCESS OF INTEGRATION TURKEY WITH THE EU**

Accession to the EU is a priority of the foreign policy of Turkey. On the October 2005, longstanding Kurdish problem potentially entered a new phase when the European Union formally initiated accession negotiations with Turkey. Although this process promises to be long and complicated, it also could be a turning point for the solution of the Kurdish problem in Turkey. The Copenhagen Criteria (1993) required for EU member states the stability of institutions guarantying democracy, the rule of law, human rights and protection of minority rights. There is no bargaining on these criteria. Turkey is required to accept them for entry into the EU<sup>53</sup>.

The governing Justice and Development Party (AKP), prepared short-, medium- and long-term action plans for the solution to the Kurdish issue since 2002. The most important reform faced by the AKP government is to create a new civil constitution of Turkey. It should include:

- Abolition of article 301 of the Penal Code, which makes it an offense to "denigrate Turkishness" or criticize state institutions;

- Abolition of article 215, 216, 217 and 220 of the Penal Code, which limit freedom of expression and have been used to aim at Kurds;
- Abolition of antiterrorism law, which allows too broad a definition of terrorism;
- Transformation of legal system; and,
- Cultural rights for minorities<sup>54</sup>.

To advance the goal of EU membership, PM, R. T. Erdoğan vigorously pursued legislative and constitutional reforms that liberalized the political system and relaxed restrictions on freedom of the press, association and expression. The government abolished the death penalty, revised the penal code, reinforced the rights of woman, reduced restrictions on minority language broadcasts, ended random searches without a court order and implemented a policy of zero tolerance toward torture. Turkey signed and ratified protocols 6 (requires to restrict the application of the death penalty to periods of war) and 13 (provides for the total abolition of the death penalty) of the European Convention on Human Rights<sup>55</sup>. The government's plan include easing remaining bans on Kurdish broadcasting, allowing turkified villages to regain their Kurdish names, setting up Kurdish language and literature departments in universities and scrapping laws under which thousands of young Kurds are jailed for allegedly acting for the PKK<sup>56</sup>.

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Erdoğan also recognized that the PKK problem could not be solved through military means alone. During a visit to Diyarbakir in August 2005, he said: *"Turkey will not retreat from the point we have reached. We will not step back from our process of democratization"*<sup>57</sup>. Erdoğan said that *"Turkey has to face this problem and solve it through democracy. (...) Time has come for a radical solution to the problem. We will take steps at any cost"*<sup>58</sup>. Justice and Development Party recently announced the "Kurdish plan", which aims to continuing talks with different segments of Kurdish society to build and foster reconciliation to solve the long-standing Kurdish issue<sup>59</sup>.

President Abdullah Gül has rejected the idea of the "road map" being prepared by outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party leader Abdullah Öcalan. Gül stated that *"the jailed PKK leader would not be a part of the government's Kurdish move, an effort to address issues of human rights and democracy on the path toward EU membership"*<sup>60</sup>. President said that the Kurdish issue was an internal problem and any solution must uphold the country's unitary structure: *"if a country does not overcome its own problems, others will misuse the issue on any given day"*<sup>61</sup>. The president added that *"Turkey's unitary structure must be strengthened, our unity is the top priority"*<sup>62</sup>.

Kerim Yildiz is the executive director of the Kurdish Human Rights Project in London and a member of the Board of Directors of the EU Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC), a nongovernmental organization promoting Turkey's EU candidacy as a way to solve



the Kurdish problem. Yildiz has demonstrated many problems that Turkey, the Kurds and the EU must face along the process of integration Turkey with the EU. On the one hand, Yildiz optimistically declares that for the Kurds, the stipulations in the field of human rights attendant to the accession process offer unparalleled scope to achieve long-term justice and security<sup>63</sup>. On the other hand, Yildiz warns, that questions must be asked as to whether Turkey has truly changed her colors, and whether the EU's decision to open accession talks was based on a genuinely objective appraisal of Turkish progress on democratization and human rights<sup>64</sup>.

As far as the political aspect is concerned, any solution or set of solutions will require substantial time to work out. Too many emotions are involved to permit quick or easy resolution of the problem. The two sides have to start talking to each other to establish a minimum common ground for substantive discussions, and for the Kurds particularly to establish a common set of goals among themselves. Initially, to insulate the government from unhelpful and destructive criticism, representatives of respected Turkish nongovernmental organizations (NGO), rather than state officials, should be selected to meet with Kurdish leaders not actively associated with the PKK. The participation of nationals of European Union countries in these discussions could also prove helpful<sup>65</sup>. Turks need to be aware, that their problems are not unique. Large numbers of other states in EU have faced and still face similar problems.

The international community has accumulated much experience and developed a wide variety of formulas and mechanisms in other countries that might prove relevant to an eventual Turkish – Kurdish solution<sup>66</sup>. The Great Britain promoted Turkey's right to be full member of the European Union. Whitehall has more experience than any other government in negotiating a reasonable settlement with a domestic terror organization, the IRA (Irish Republican Army). Representatives from Spain, as a country with memories of its own civil war, might also be considered. Inclusion of the representatives of other countries might provide them a useful educational experience in Turkish realities, but their participation should wait until Turkey's negotiations to join the European Union reach a more settled stage<sup>67</sup>.

## **6. FEDERAL TURKISH STATE OR INDEPENDENT KURDISTAN**

One of the most radical solutions is the federal conception of the Turkish state. While a number of Kurds in Turkey speak readily of federalism, few actually perceive the difficulties associated with such an arrangement<sup>68</sup>. First, there is a debate over the question of whether Kurds consider themselves a minority. Unlike Ottoman Empire policies toward Christians and Jews, legally established minorities within Turkey, the Turkish state has never had provisions for Muslims as minorities. The state probably will eventually grant recognition to the Kurds as a minority within Turkey. But the

Kurds reportedly are not willing to settle for such a minority status, because they are not in fact a minority at all but majority in large parts of Turkey. They seek the right to exercise their own local self-government as the majority in those regions<sup>69</sup>.

It is also the question of how the European Union will be looked in the future. Turkey could accommodate far more easily to the development of a Kurdish autonomous region inside Turkey when it will be the member of the EU, and the EU will be the federal structure. In that circumstance, Turkey will have to rethink entirely the concept of the state. Although, federalism is designed to transform countrywide minorities into majorities in their own areas, the number of provinces in which Kurds are a majority is much lower than the number of provinces with a sizable Kurdish minority<sup>70</sup>. Under the federal arrangement, the regions of Turkey in which Kurds constitute a majority could potentially be granted federal status, which numerous regional powers granted to a Kurdish capital in Diyarbakir, powers roughly equal to those in Ankara.

The federal solution gives rise to as many problems as it pretends to resolve. The question is: what regions would be considered Kurdish, what would be the cultural rights and minority protections granted to Turks in the Kurdish regions, and what would be corresponding Kurdish cultural rights be in Turkish regions? Nowadays nearly half of the Kurds in Turkey no longer live in their ancestral lands in the southeast but have moved to more western parts of Turkey. It might further aggravate inter-communal tensions.

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Both in Iraq and in Turkey, many Kurds state their desire to see an independent Kurdistan on any part of the ancestral homeland. Kurds in Turkey who may genuinely not wish to separate from Turkey may still harbor the desire to see Kurds in northern Iraq become independent. It may represent a form of vicarious independence<sup>71</sup>. Iraqi Kurds have enjoyed in fact independence since 1992 (Map 2). The autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan, protected by Americans, is often described by the Kurds as “the other Iraq”<sup>72</sup>. It stands as an interesting experiment in the Middle East, in spite of its endemic corruption, a high rate of unemployment, a low level of foreign investment, high rate of emigration to the West and Turkish military activity<sup>73</sup>. Iraqi Kurds are conscious about its economical weakness. They consider access to the Kirkuk oil fields as the only way to create its independent and self-sufficient state. But for now it is impossible. Almost everyone understands that Turkey could not accept such a solution, thus resulting in a resurgence of warfare and bloodshed<sup>74</sup>. A Kurdish state born under such circumstances would be quite isolated and unprepared for an independent existence.

It is very important to separate the Kurdish issue and the problem of PKK terrorism. From the one side, we have the economical and social underdevelopment of Southeastern Anatolia, where are the highest numbers of Kurdish population in Turkey.

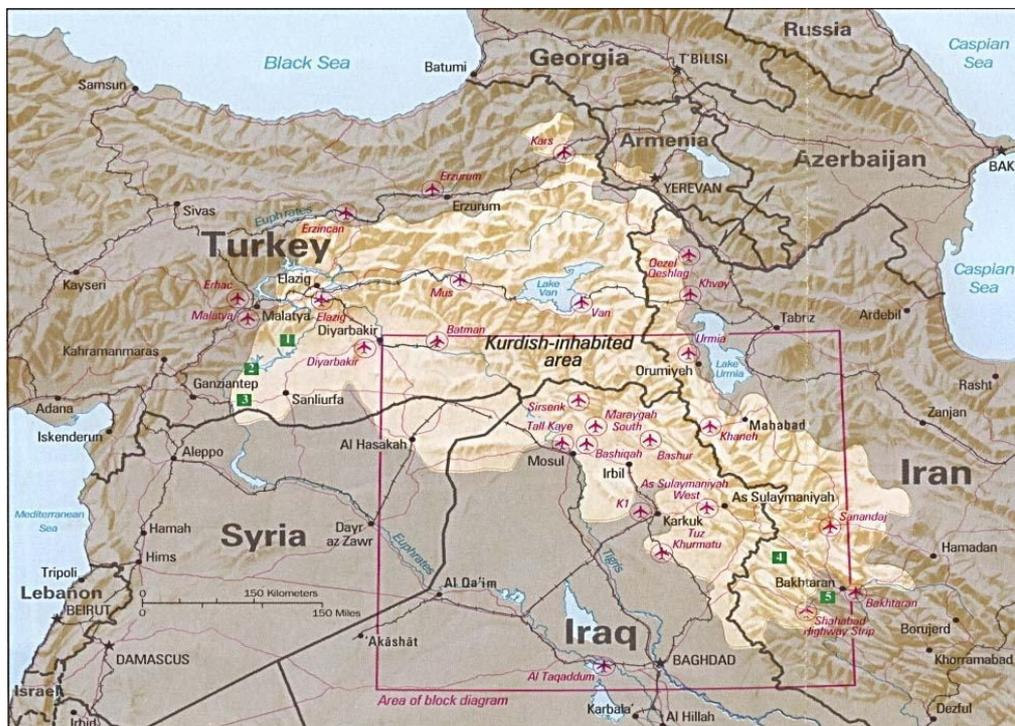


## The Kurdish minority issue in the context of integration Turkey with the European Union

From the other side, the PKK terrorism is a very dangerous movement not only in Turkey, but in the whole Middle East and even in Europe. It is a simple mechanism, that poverty and discontent lead to violence and aggression, but terrorism is something more. PKK is not an organization which has an aim to improve live conditions of Kurds. It is first of all the political, radical and criminal movement. Until PKK is not disarmed, Turkey cannot concentrate enough on internal political and social reforms which are necessary in the process of integration with the European Union and which are also beneficial for Kurds. During the war it is impossible to protect human rights or to limit the power of military in politics. Nowadays, many former leftist Turkish intellectuals stated, that it is not the human rights issue alone, but Kurdish expectations to use human rights violations as an instrument to put Turkey under pressure<sup>75</sup>.

For now, it is in nobody's interest to create an independent Kurdish state in the Middle East or anywhere in the world. In the contemporary international relations, territory and sovereignty are still important values. That is why Turkey will not change its borders and will not give any autonomy to the Kurds because it will be a denial of the idea of the Republic of Turkey founded by Kemal Pasha Atatürk in 1923. There is also no way, that any state in the region or the US and EU will force Turkey to do it.

**Map 1. Areas of high kurdish population**



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Source: [http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Kurdishinhabited\\_area\\_by\\_CIA\\_%281992%29.jpg](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/5/58/Kurdishinhabited_area_by_CIA_%281992%29.jpg) (acceded: 12.06.2009)

Map 2. Kurdish areas of northern Iraq



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Source: <http://media3.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/graphic/2008/11/23/GR2008112300231.gif> (accessed: 12.06.2009)

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