

**THE KURDISH POLITICAL MOVEMENT IN TURKEY:  
TRANSFORMATION FROM AN ETHNIC INTO A  
PROGRESSIVE PARTY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In 2012, the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) in the parliament decided to transform itself into a progressive party by adopting a more inclusive party program concerning the rights of various groups. As part of this idea, the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) was established. Their new political agenda mainly appealed to extensional rights for the minorities, and any other communities which are discriminated against. This political innovation shows that the Kurdish political movement has transformed itself into a broader model which aims to serve the interests of the whole society rather than just promoting the Kurdish interests. In this respect, I will mainly analyze the reasons, outcomes and contributions of this change within the framework of Turkey's political context. The method of analysis will rely on ethnic political party literature, in-depth interviews and discourses of the party delegates. My argument is that this transformation will have an important impact on reducing the ethnic based tension in the Turkish politics and also be a beneficial tool in reaching social reconciliation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Turkish political system is based on proportional representation. According to this principal, each group has the right to participate in politics without any restriction and discrimination. 550 members are elected through this system to serve a four year terms. A critical point regarding this system is the 10% threshold. This threshold requires political parties to obtain at least 10% of the nationwide votes based on the D'Hondt system. It is considered one of the most unfair systems because the rights of small parties are blocked (Louter and Lyons, 2015, June 1). If we examine the representation level of the Kurdish community, we can see that they are underrepresented in the Turkish parliament. The Kurdish community represents about 20% of the overall population, but a pro-Kurdish party was never permitted to enter parliament due to the threshold barrier. For this reason, their members chose to run as independent candidates and competed only in the pro-Kurdish provinces. They normally obtained most of the votes from their co-ethnics and became deputies in 2007 and 2011. The ethnic nature of the previously established pro-Kurdish parties have created difficulties for them to participate in mainstream politics. From 1990s to the 2007 general elections, they remained below the threshold, therefore they became more marginalized regarding their discourse and policies. Only the decision of transformation has changed the nature of the Kurdish political movement.

The citizens of Turkey have been suffering from the ongoing state of ethnic conflict between the Turkish State and Kurdish movement since the early 1980s. The military regime of 1980 banned the public use of Kurdish language (Ergil, 2000). In terms of this political conjecture, Kurds were discriminated and their identity was neglected by the junta. Due to this suppression,

ethnicity has become the predominant policy of the Kurdish political movement which in turn was raising an ethnically motivated discourse. After transition to democracy was achieved and the impact of military declined, the ban on Kurdish language was lifted (Ergil, 2000). Nevertheless, the state officials were cautious about the implementation. Many pro-Kurdish political parties were established from the 1990s onwards, but they were all banned because of their ethnic nature. After a long period of resistance against the state authority to defend the rights of the Kurdish community at parliamentary level, Kurdish politicians were elected to the parliament thanks to the support of their co-ethnics in 2007. After more than 20 years, Turkish politics became more pluralistic with the participation of independent pro-Kurdish delegates. Following this election success, they started to pursue more active politics and took part in the resolution process for the Kurdish question.

Ethnicity was always dominant in Turkish politics and the Kurdish political movement was ethnically based. Ethnic Kurdish people had always been represented in Turkish politics, but few of them had promoted pro-Kurdish positions in public affairs (Barkey & Fuller, 1998; Bozarslan, 1996). The situation, in which the Kurds participated in mainstream politics without representing themselves as passionate supporters of the Kurdish movement, changed in the early 1990s with the formation of consecutive pro-Kurdish parties that followed an explicitly pro-Kurdish discourse (Watts, 2010). Over the past two decades the pro-Kurdish parties were regularly banned for not publicly renouncing their ties to the armed fraction. In other words, the refusal of these parties to publicly criticize the armed struggle has enabled the Turkish authorities to classify pro-Kurdish parties as extremists (Barkey, 1998). Conversely, the current political context and resolution process for the Kurdish problem allow more flexible policies. In this respect, even though the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) does not have a negative stance against the armed fraction of the

Kurdish movement, called the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), the Turkish State does not take any deterrent actions against the existence and political participation of the party.

In 2012, the pro-Kurdish party in parliament, the HDP, underwent a transformation from an ethnic into a progressive party by adopting a more inclusive discourse rather than fostering the Kurdish nationalism. It was a voluntary transformation that may also reflect the attitudes towards the party. Their discourses mainly focus on the improvement of the social status of minorities, environmentalists, homosexuals and any other communities whose rights are undermined or ignored. This political decision shows that the Kurdish political movement has transformed itself into a broader concept and abandoned ethnicity-based politics. Compared to the previous ethnicity oriented discourse, the HDP seeks a universalistic program that aims to be affiliated with every segment of Turkish society, mainly the ones who suffer because of economic inequalities, discrimination and communal violence.

I argue that the political transformation of the HDP is an important milestone that is expected to reflect the state of ethnic conflict by means of reducing the tension and opening a way for a peaceful negotiation between the Turkish State and Kurdish community. Arguably, this political maneuver will have a positive contribution for the democratic consolidation in Turkey in terms of the inclusion of all actors into contemporary Turkish politics. Moreover, much has been written and used as relevant sources about the political movements on the basis of ethnic ties. Scholars have also analyzed the demographics of the societies to show whether multi-ethnic societies are more prone to form ethnic parties. Several ethnic groups exist in Turkey and it has to be addressed that the administrative mechanism, based on a strong unitary state, block the ethno-political actions of the political parties. There are scholarly studies regarding the ethnic policies and discourse of the former pro-Kurdish parties, but this study varies from the previous ones in

terms of its scope and concept that is going to be explained. The primary research question of this thesis is *how and why an ethnically based movement transformed its political agenda into a progressive one after three decades*. In the light of scholarly works about ethnicity, ethnic party politics and party changes, one of the primary goals of this study is to present new findings about this recent transformation.



# CHAPTER 1- RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

## 1.1. Case Selection

The reason that I choose to elaborate the Turkish case is to present the reasons and outcomes of this “*voluntary transformation*” of an ethnically based movement that has been struggling with the state authority for over 30 years. There are other examples under the category of transformation from an ethnic format into a progressive or mainstream party like the Movement for Rights and Freedoms Party (MRF) in Bulgaria, which was an ethnic party defending the interests of the Turkish minority at the beginning of its establishment. According to the Bulgarian constitution, ethnic parties are not allowed to compete in the elections, therefore the MRF had to transform its party structure. Since then, it has been trying to ensure minority representation without using ethnic rhetoric (Stefanova, 2012). Ethnic party bans can be found in a country’s constitution, electoral law or law on political parties and it can be implemented by administrative decree and/or judiciary. The aim of this rule is to keep ethnicity out of politics (Bogaards, Basedau, & Hartmann, 2010).

Starting its journey as an ethnic movement, the MRF has since played a pivotal role to balance the ex-communist left and anti-communist right and often participated as a partner in the coalition governments (Bogaards, 2004). The MRF is the first political organization that has emerged to champion the interests of Turkish political and cultural rights in the post-Communist Bulgaria. During the last decade of Zhivkov regime, Bulgarization policies aimed to block the identity of the Turkish community by using state-hand restrictions, therefore the MRF followed an ethnic discourse to defend the Turkish minority’s socio-cultural existence. The early party program addressed the demands for the freedom to use Turkic names and Turkish language, practice Islam

freely, right to immigrate to Turkey. However, they have broadened their political framework and claimed that the party appeals to all national minorities, opposed to “national chauvinism, religious fanaticism and Islamic fundamentalism” (Ishiyama and Breuning, 1998). In this respect, the party was structured to contribute to the unity of all Bulgarian people without differentiating any ethnic, religious or cultural communities in Bulgaria. Due to the strict measures in the Bulgarian constitution against ethno-political policies and the formation of an ethnic party, the MRF chose to follow an inclusive approach within the framework of the unity of the state rather than being involved in extremist or separatist actions. Thus, the MRF denied that it was an ethnic party, claiming that the party’s aspirations point to protect and defend the rights of all minorities not just the Turks (Ishiyama and Breuning, 1998). For this reason, the MRF was able to register and participate in the Bulgarian national elections. Even though they could legally represent the rights of the ethnic Turkish population, they were careful enough to convince people that they have been formulating nation-wide policies for everyone.

In the Turkish case, the scenario is different in terms of political trajectory. First of all, Kurdish people were considered as one of the integral parts of the Turkish nation and they were not legally recognized as a minority group according to the Lausanne Treaty, the agreement that led to the foundation of the modern Turkish Republic in 1923. This approach resulted in an inclusive definition of citizenship in legal aspects but also created an obstacle for the socio-cultural rights of the Kurdish community in practice (Koksal, 2006). However, Kurds emerged as the largest minority group considering the assimilationist policies of the Turkish State, which had been applied for over 70 years. After the establishment of the modern Republic, the main idea was to adopt a common culture and morality for all different communities in order to dissolve ethnic cleavages under the category of Turk (Koksal, 2006). Nevertheless, this policy failed because of

the linguistic and cultural differences of the Kurdish community. In return, the Turkish State redefined its policies and applied assimilationist measures towards the Kurds. These policies were applied with the support of excessive military force and the Kurdish armed movement emerged as a counter-reaction to the use of suppression and force.

The Kurdish movement increased its voice after the military coup of 1980. In the political context, the common nature of the formed and dissolved pro-Kurdish parties was to defend the Kurdish cause more actively in the popular arena. Thus, their ethnic agenda affected their survival in the political life. In the last two decades all pro-Kurdish political parties mainly followed the similar political strategy that focused on ethnicity based policies regarding the rights of the Kurds such as legal recognition of their identity, cultural autonomy, right to education in their own language and decentralization of the administrative system. These demands and ethnic rhetoric were seen as a challenge to the monolithic nation model of the Turkish State. In this context, Turkish Constitutional Court decided to ban all pro-Kurdish political parties, consecutively established from 1990 onwards, claimed that these parties have visible ties with the armed movement, therefore they are against the unity of the nation-state. The main indictment against the ethnic Kurdish parties stated that they have cultivated social differences by aiming to destroy the “inseparable unity” between the Turkish State and people (Kogacioglu, 2004). In fact, the pro-Kurdish parties have been affected by the PKK, because they have shared the similar popular base (Ergil, 2000). The annual congresses of the pro-Kurdish parties would become vivid celebration of the Kurdish identity and nationalist values (Watts, 2010). Their relatively radical stance triggered state-hand restrictions against their right to participate in politics.

Throughout the 1990s, members of the pro-Kurdish parties faced imprisonment and detainment that blocked democratic rights and political participation of the Kurds (Watts, 2010).

Starting with the democratization efforts for the Kurdish problem in the mid-2000s, both sides understood that giving incentives would be the only way for a feasible reconciliation. At the same time, several political reforms, called “democratization packages”, started to be implemented to adapt Turkish law into conformance with the European Union standards (Watts, 2010). Today, it is clear that the word “Kurd” or expressing “the Kurdish problem” is no longer a taboo considering the changing trajectory of contemporary Turkish political life. Within the framework of this idea, the Turkish government initiated a resolution process regarding the recognition of the fundamental socio-cultural rights of the Kurdish people. In conjunction with this maneuver, the Kurdish political movement also changed their discourse and party structure with the formation of the HDP.

## ***1.2. Methodology***

This thesis uses multiple methods including content analysis of the ethnic party literature, party programs and publications about the Kurdish movement, qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with party members and journalists, and critical discourse analysis of the party leadership. First of all, analyzing ethnic political party literature for the theoretical framework is necessary to compare and highlight the differences between the former pro-Kurdish parties and the current HDP. For this reason, my plan is to analyze academic studies such as Gunther and Diamond’s (2003) theoretical framework regarding the typology of the political parties and Dandoy’s (2010) typology for the ethno-regionalist parties. These studies contribute to map the transformation of the HDP from an ethnic to a social-democrat party. Then, data collection relies on the analysis of the election manifesto and party organization including membership procedures, leadership profile and the major statutes of the party.

Personal interviews are crucial to understand the decision of transformation and its underlying goals. This thesis includes several interviews with the party authorities, human rights activists, journalists and members of the civil society organizations, who are all well-informed about the characteristics of the Kurdish movement in every aspects. Besides these methods, analyzing the public discourse of the party cadres and leadership reveals their political agenda and also it is quite important to see the changes in rhetoric. In addition, this method of research mainly enlightens current political standpoint of the HDP compared to the previous decades. These methods will lead the reader to have an idea about the general structure of the party.

In the second chapter of the thesis, I will analyze the ethnic political party literature in order to clarify the main characteristics of the former pro-Kurdish parties which were established and subsequently banned in the last three decades. Mainly, I will figure out the question of *what were the motives and goals of the ethnically based parties* by looking at the literature of ethno-politics. In the third part, I will apply this framework for an historical evaluation of the Kurdish political movement in order to highlight how their policies were formulated in the past. The political and social conjecture were different in the 1990s, therefore analyzing the ethnic pro-Kurdish parties is necessary to observe the difference in structure. The comparison of the ethnic Kurdish parties and the HDP shows that *to what extend the current HDP and its discourse are different than the previous ethnic oriented Kurdish political parties*.

In the last chapter, which is dedicated to the transformation in general, I will present the different structure of the HDP to understand which factors led them to transform the structure of the party into a progressive political party. I will also discuss that *what could be the underlying reasons of the transformation into a progressive political party* by focusing on the HDP's motives and goals. In general, explaining the organization of the party will lead us to analyze and understand

*how the changing discourse of the HDP reflects the current state of the ethnic conflict* depending on current political climate. By analyzing these concepts, this thesis aims to provide an important contribution in order to understand the contemporary standpoint of the Kurdish political organization and the possibility that may help national reconciliation and integration in Turkey.

## CHAPTER 2- THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter examines the main concepts of an ethnic party, concepts that the pro-Kurdish parties has been characterized on for years. Early in the chapter, a general description about ethnic groups and parties is presented and then in the second one other crucial aspects are shown in order to differentiate the ethnic parties and its policies. The literature helps us to classify the formed and dissolved pro-Kurdish parties according to their policies, organization, social base, electoral logic and party structure.

### *2.1. The logic and formation of an ethnic party*

The formation of a nation can be explained by two forms of model, which are either “civic” or “ethnic” nationalism. The states can either exclude minorities or try to integrate them into their nationalist project (Koksal, 2006). In the case of exclusion from the state affairs, excluded groups might be polarized and challenged to the repressive policies of the central authority. The formation of an ethnic party might be explained by identifying this type of party as an ultimate voice or representative of an ethnic group which is suppressed and/or excluded by the state-hand regulations.

First, the concept of an ethnic party refers to a party that particularly preserves the rights and interests of a certain ethnic group. Chandra (2011) defines an ethnic group as “a subset of categories in which descent-based attributes are necessary for membership” (p.154). Second, an ethnic group is described by members of a certain group who identify themselves ethnically different from other communities (Birbir, 2007). It is also arguable that an ethnic group is identified as a group of individuals who share common culture, tradition, language, identity and territory for

many years. Third, Chandra (2004) states that ethnic parties, in general, claim to speak on behalf of a single ethnic category trying to unify previously dispersed groups. On the other hand, there is a concept of behavioral definition assuming that ethnic groups behave or do not behave, particularly in relation to other groups Brass (1991) points to the differences between cultural groups, which reveal themselves only in interaction with other groups. His evaluation focuses on the principle of self-consciousness of an ethnic group that uses cultural symbols for inclusion or exclusion from the group (Brass, 1991). In this sub-chapter, the definition of an ethnic group is presented in order to define and classify ethnic parties. Then, the concept of an ethnic party is discussed in general terms.

Ethnic parties act like a voice of an ethnic group by channeling demands through legal ways. Thus, it is important to identify their interests in order to prevent a potential conflict and separation of an ethnic group from the rest of the society (Lijphart, 1977). Another criterion is that party members do not have any intentions to attract and mobilize voters from other cleavages in the society. In this sense, Van Cott (2003) argues that “ethnic party is an organization authorized to compete in local or national elections; the majority of its leadership and membership define themselves as part of a non-dominant ethnic group and its electoral platform includes demands of this group” (p.3). These parties only aim to mobilize their own ethnic group’s members for the political competition. Chandra (2005) explains that, the politicization of ethnic divisions inevitably leads to the rise of one or several ethnic parties. Related to this, the emergence of an ethnic party could affect the political system of a fragmented society. As it is observable in many different societies such as Canada, Spain, Ireland, South Africa, Macedonia, India and Sri Lanka, ethnic mobilization could be risky for the democratic stability. Considering the polarization effect of



ethnic party politics, ethno-politics suggests profound pessimism for the accountability of democratic principles (Chandra, 2005).

The distinction between an ethnic party and non-ethnic party is based on the interests and policies of a political party. Gunther and Diamond (2003) state that “the purely ethnic party seeks only to mobilize the votes of its own ethnic group” (p.183). They also add that “the principal goal of an ethnic party is not any universalistic program or platform, but rather to secure material, cultural and political benefits for the ethnic group in its competition with other groups” (Gunther and Diamond, 2003, p.184). Ethnic parties always exclude some group of people whereas other parties try to be inclusive. They also give references to their ethnicity in order to mobilize their voters and provide full commitment to the party. Mozaffar and Scarritt (2000) focus on the support base of the ethnic parties and claim that ethnic parties get most of their support from one undivided side of a national dichotomous cleavage. Similarly, Horowitz (1985) argues that an ethnic party overwhelmingly attracts the voters of a certain ethnic group and only cares its interests. Thus, it is reasonable to claim that as long as a party seeks the political power to fight for certain rights and demands of one ethnic group and gets its support from a particular group, we can classify it as an ethnic party.

## ***2.2. Goals, Motivations and Social Base***

The appearance of ethnically based parties can be identified by looking at the promotion of ethnic nationalism as a political tool. Politicians tend to bolster the ethnically chauvinistic elements to mobilize one ethnic group against another. In other words, in some societies ethnic politics might lead to deepen and extend the divisions within the ethnic groups. Ethnic identity might also serve as a flexible information shortcut for political choices (Birnir, 2007). In ethnically mixed and/or

divided societies, ethnic diversity and political parties could mediate the expected political crisis in conjunction with the transition to democracy (Przeworski, 1991). In democratic countries, it is easier to convert the loyalty towards the ethnic identity into stable political party loyalties (Birbir, 2007). For this reason, the allowance of the participation of ethnic groups in electoral politics, which enables the access of every ethnic group to the public administration, is quite crucial for a stable democratic regime. A strict party or electoral system leads to devaluation of democratic regime, instability and even ethnic violence (Birbir, 2007).

In the case that the ruling parties are following inclusionary behavior, the ethnic minorities become less conflictual and act moderately. Conversely, they might become polarized and antagonistic towards the state if the ruling parties excludes the minorities from mainstream politics (Birbir, 2007). For instance, the ruling coalitions in Turkey did not cooperate and recognize the core interests of the pro-Kurdish parties, mainly the cultural and political rights, therefore the Kurdish movement became marginalized and threatened democratic stability. As long as ethnic groups are excluded from political affairs, the relationship between the ethnic camps become more antagonistic. The Kurdish movement also radicalized against the state authority because of the political situation, which was based on exclusion and denial, in Turkey. As a response, the state chose to suppress the political representation of the Kurds by implementing restrictions and banning their parties.

Gunther and Diamond's (2003) party typology discusses the features to distinguish ethnic parties. An ethnic party would aim to concentrate the mobilization of its co-ethnics in order to provide their full commitment. These parties major goal is to secure material, cultural and political protection of their own ethnic group against the other groups (Gunther and Diamond, 2003). Similar to the pro-Kurdish parties, ethnic parties often pursue cultural and linguistic preservation

and autonomy. Another classification shows territorial and identity aspects of these parties. Ethnic politics is about the concentration of a certain territory and an exclusive group identity related to a group with shared experiences and history (Dandoy, 2010). Ethnic parties have also claims for reorganization of the national state structure in the direction of autonomy or decentralization (Dandoy, 2010). They can challenge the existing political-territorial order and its distribution of power whereas progressive parties are in favor of national unity.

The social base of the party including leadership and cabinet composition is drawn from one major ethnic group. Elischer (2013) classifies this model of party as mono-ethnic party. This type of parties would like to create special privileges for their co-ethnics and install them in positions of power if they hold public offices. The benefit-seeking voters of these parties are expected to obtain greatest material and physical satisfaction from their own ethnic group's members, so creating advantages for their co-ethnics is an important policy condition for the ethnic parties. Furthermore, an "ethnic party", it is necessary to analyze the message that it sends to the electorate in terms of policies and promises. The party should also highlight fundamental policy areas to convince its co-ethnics in the election rallies (Chandra, 2004). According to Chandra (2004), individuals who belong to specific ethnic groups are more likely to support political parties on the basis of relative size of their own ethnic group. Chandra (2004) assumes that "the degree of success is related to which a party is able to capture the votes of members of its target ethnic category" (p.5). In this point, shared identity is the crucial aspect in order to see how ethnic parties attract voters and select their members.

Considering the fact that ethnic groups, especially minorities, are quite polarized in order to protect their existence, their members are mostly coming from the same community. In general terms, ethnic parties appeal to voters by promoting one ethnic category and make this policy central

to their political strategy (Chandra, 2005). These parties may champion the rights and interests of certain ethnic group(s), but they have to identify the common ethnic enemy to be excluded (Chandra, 2005). This is the way to hold their supporters and members in accordance with a single unifying goal. In the election campaign, ethnic parties can remain mute or not so active, because they trust their core supporters (Elischer, 2013). As long as their co-ethnics back up the party, they can rely on their votes. It can also be expected that ethnic parties use catch-all strategy as part of their electoral rhetoric, but either ethnic appeals are more dominant over catch-all issues or catch-all strategies are clothed in ethnic language (Elischer, 2013). In order to map the general features of the ethnic parties and progressive ones, table 1 helps the reader to understand the differences more clearly;

Table 1. Ethnic vs. Progressive Parties

| <b>Party Type</b>    | <b>Ethnic</b>  | <b>Non-ethnic / Progressive</b>  |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Appeal to            | One dominant ethnic group                                  | All groups in the society  |
| Fundamental goal     | Social, cultural and political rights of their co-ethnics  | Reform for a civilian constitution, more rights for all discriminated people |
| Political agenda     | Exclusive regarding the other ethnic groups                | Reform on the regional and state level                                       |
| Rhetoric             | Reference to a certain ethnic identity and/or values       | Mostly defend the socio-economic rights of the middle class and poor people  |
| Territorial approach | Autonomous or federal viewpoint                            | Territorial integrity  |
| Membership           | Belongs to the same ethnic group                           | Members from various different groups  |
| Leadership           | Drawn from one ethnic group                                | Equal opportunities to progress within the party                             |
| Area of contestation | Specific region where mostly populated by their co-ethnics | All regions of the country   |

*The source of these information are provided in Chapter 2.*

Progressive parties have an inclusive approach which attracts all people without differentiating anyone in the society. Their party program mostly addresses reforms in education, economics, social services and administrative level (e.g. constitutional change). Their branches can be found in all regions of the country and they have members from various ethnic or non-ethnic groups. In contrast, ethnic parties mainly include their core community largely to the party structure. In an ethnic party, factions are formed around ethnic lines headed by the community or tribal leaders (Elischer, 2013). This point clearly resembles why landowners and tribal leaders were influential in the Kurdish political movement. They were the ones who created the voting pool and helped to mobilize people for a certain political cause. Besides that, in numerical terms, small minority groups might also participate in ethnic parties, but they do not have much role, especially in the administration bodies (Elischer, 2013). Small minorities do have impact regarding the electoral capacity, but vast majority of support is related to the core ethnic group that the party is affiliated with.

## CHAPTER 3- HISTORY OF THE KURDISH POLITICAL MOVEMENT

This chapter is about the detailed analysis of the Kurdish movement from the first revolts against the state to the resolution process in 2000s. I identify crucial factors that led the Kurds to mobilize and resist the central government. Thus, I analyze respectively why they chose to form an armed organization and initiate a guerilla movement, what type of political discourse they have used in order to compete in Turkish politics and finally why they have had a transition period from ethno-politics to a progressive format. The evaluation of this movement should be considered within the framework of other Kurdish revolts from the 1920s onwards. The social and political consequences of the Kurdish uprisings affected the way the movement moved to a more hardline level. Obviously, the uneven treatment by the Turkish governments, which have never formally accepted the existence of the Kurdish identity, against the Kurdish community is the major criteria that led to the marginalization and radicalization of this movement.

### *3.1. Main Paths of the Kurdish Awakening*

Along with the Basques, Sikhs and Tamils, Kurds have also been labelled as a stateless nation and are referred to as the largest ethnic group without a nation state (Kirisici and Winrow, 2013). The Kurdish movement has been listed as an “ethno-nationalist” movement, which was seeking to establish an independent state with the formation of the PKK. Regarding the changing dynamics of the global world, the nature and goals of this movement have reversed from independence to democratic autonomy or federalism. This change in politics reflected the negotiation process between the armed guerillas and state authorities. The societal attitude towards the Kurdish problem was also affected by the changing discourse of this movement.

The modern Turkish Republic, founded in 1923, did not choose to develop national unity out of diversity, but instead the policy of uniformity and standardization were applied as the ultimate state policy (Ergil, 2000). The Kurds were considered as one of the core foundation stones of the Republic, so they were expecting some social and political rights that would provide a peaceful environment by bringing Turks and Kurds together under the same roof. Mainly, they wanted to have their self-autonomous regions where they could practice their own culture and traditions freely. Conversely, the first constitution, proclaimed in 1924, did not include any references to the Kurdish existence and identity. Thus, there was no exclusive rights for the Kurds and every citizen was identified as a “Turk” according to the 1924 Constitution. Additionally, the policy of “Turkification” urged everyone to learn and speak Turkish and forget their mother tongues or vernaculars they had spoken before (Gunes and Zeydanlioglu, 2014).

In contrast to other ethnic groups such as Bosnians, Albanians, Laze, Circassians, the Kurds did not get integrated. In other words, they did not connect themselves to the rest of the country and divided among tribal lines in their remote, mountainous region and remained unaffected by the regime’s policies of assimilation and modernization (Ergil, 2000). The military coup of 1960 represented the failure of the first democratization attempt in Turkey. Following the coup, the new constitution enabled democratic expansions on a constitutional basis, but it did not bring significant measures to formulate new policies for the Kurdish question. During the 1960s, the Kurds were allied with the leftists groups. They mainly organized under the umbrella of the Turkish Left and raised their demands for recognition and an end to various forms of discrimination (Ercan, 2013). In this vein, the Workers’ Party of Turkey (TIP), which was established in 1962 with a socialist agenda, played a significant role in terms of providing a legal opportunity for the Kurds to participate in party politics (Ercan, 2013). Yet, the Kurdish camp became quickly radicalized as a

response to the Turkish State's oppressive policies and insistence on denying the existence of the Kurds after the military coup of 1971. At that time, Kurdish activists and revolutionaries fled to Middle Eastern countries where they could get guerilla training.

In the frustration climate of 1978 depending on economic downturn and political crisis at the parliamentary level, a group of young Kurds decided to form an organization with the ideal of an independent Kurdistan. Their major inspiration was the revolutionary doctrines of Marx, Engels and Lenin, therefore the characteristic of this proposed movement should be dedicated to the principles of Marxist-Leninist model that was designed to build an anti-imperialist society led by a vanguard party (Marcus, 2007). In this context, a few young people led by Abdullah Öcalan, who is a passionate Kurdish nationalist and young dropout Political Science student, agreed to initiate an insurgency against the armed forces of the Turkish Republic. At the beginning, their project was seen as an illusion, which was unlikely to succeed. Because of the disorganization between the different fractions in the Kurdish community, the contradictory interests of the tribal leaders and lack of experience about the methods of guerilla action, they had serious obstacles regarding organization and members to recruit (Marcus, 2007). Even though the conditions were hard to set up a guerilla movement in the late 1970s, the PKK was able to mobilize many Kurdish people by using nationalist and radical rhetoric in the following years. The impact of the leftist ideas and youth organizations, which opted for more freedom in the 1960s and 1970s, certainly affected the origin of this movement. Therefore, intellectual, urban and educated members of the Kurdish movement were eliminated, ceding their places to younger, inexperienced, adventurist and radical cadres, who preferred a violent armed struggle.

Following the military coup of 1980, the Kurds faced wide-ranging restrictions in every aspect, namely from culture to identity. Thus, Öcalan's idea of armed resistance was supported by



more Kurdish people and the PKK was able to enrich its human capital and thereby its effectiveness. In conjunction with the policies of the military administration, which neglected the Kurdish reality, the PKK found a convenient environment to attract more people joining the movement for independence. In 1984, the PKK embarked on an attack on military targets for the first time and the Turkish security forces were engaged in a fierce struggle against the insurgency. Starting from that time, many locals in the Southeastern villages have been evacuated or deported as they were caught in the cross-fire between the PKK assaults and Turkish military operations (Kirisçi and Winrow, 2013). On the other hand, Turkish military was not skillful enough to respond to this hit-and-run type of war. For this reason, the Village Guard System, which was implemented in 1985, employing various Kurdish tribes to create an autonomous paramilitary force of militiamen, was introduced to prevent the growing impact of the PKK (Bozarslan, 2000). At the same time, the PKK grew rapidly in size and popularity, because of the high pressure of the central administration, which was dominated by the military, and the prohibition of all expressions related to Kurdish identity (Ergil, 2000).

### ***3.2. The First Pro-Kurdish Ethnic Party- The HEP***

In the late 1980s, Kurdish intellectuals and politicians were looking for a civilian solution at the parliamentary level. This means that the goal was to find out a legitimate solution for the Kurdish problem without using arms. For this reason, they decided to work under the umbrella of the biggest socialist party competing in Turkish politics, which was the Social Democratic People's Party (SHP). They normally preferred cooperating with a social-democrat party instead of right wing parties which precisely refused to elaborate the Kurdish question as a noteworthy problem. For this reason, they became the candidates of the SHP in the general elections and this alliance

proved its success mostly in the pro-Kurdish provinces where the SHP's Kurdish candidates decisively won the elections. The problem appeared when some of the Kurdish deputies decided to attend a conference in Paris to discuss the Kurdish problem globally. Even though the SHP leadership did not give permission and strongly opposed for the attendance of their party members, 7 ethnically Kurdish deputies of the party attended the conference without taking the possible sanctions into consideration. This action led to their expulsion from the SHP (Ölmez, 1995).

The Kurdish reality was started to be discussed in Turkish politics in the early 1990s, but still there were serious taboos which prevented the recognition of Kurdish identity. Furthermore, the decision to expel pro-Kurdish attendants of the Kurdish Conference triggered a collective action inside the SHP in which 12 pro-Kurdish provincial chairmen resigned from their positions and blamed the party leadership. They were not the only ones who were disappointed. Some leftist members and deputies of the party left the party as well. These resigned people gathered to discuss another political formation that aimed to include all discriminated members of the society, but the leftist wing did not attract enough support and mostly the Kurds became the dominant ethnic group in the party structure. In other words, generally the Kurds supported this formation and the central program were slipped towards the Kurdish question. The party composition remained very narrow, focusing only on Kurdish interests. In this political environment, the first legal pro-Kurdish political party, the People's Labor Party (HEP) was established in 1990 (van Bruinessen, 1996).

This new political attempt began as a social-democrat oriented political movement for granting the basic freedoms of every citizen in Turkey. The core points, explained in the party program, pointed to 4 crucial principles, which were the problem of democratization, economic downturn, cultural rights issue and foreign policy problems (Ölmez, 1995). These were all related to the general problems of the state. Nevertheless, the first congress of the party showed that only

Kurdish people were in favor of this movement and they were only interested in the problems of the Kurdish community. Considering the pessimistic attitude of Turkish leftists, who were not involved in the party formation, the HEP remained a Kurdish party even though its president was a Turkish politician. One of the HEP members, Osman Özçelik, stated;

“We were aiming to form a Turkish party for all discriminated groups, but in time Turkish members had concerns about the nature of the party, so they just left. The reason might be related to our heavy focus on the Kurdish problem, but note that several oppressive policies of the state might have led to polarization of the Kurds and disengagement of ethnically Turkish members” (Ölmez, 1995, p.104-105).

Turkish politicians were also afraid of the state response to this party. They simply did not want to be labelled as in cooperation with the armed movement, the PKK. They were also concerned that only Kurdish people were in favor of this movement, so it would only serve as a legal voice of the Kurdish question. In this respect, the HEP was not formed as a Kurdish party on paper, but the attitude of Turkish politicians, who were not willing to participate, and the overwhelming support of the Kurdish locals affected the party's scope. The first actions of the HEP were not only related to defending the Kurdish cause, but also formulating policies to reduce impoverishment, unemployment and improve the conditions of poor people, students, discriminated journalists and intellectuals. In brief, the party program failed to convince people that the HEP was not a party which only promoted ethnic Kurdish nationalism (van Bruinessen, 1996). Although these attempts were made, it was hard to change perceptions of ordinary citizens about the characteristics of this party, labelling as an outcome or extension of the Kurdish resistance or movement. Over time, the HEP's tendency to follow pro-Kurdish demands increased and other inclusive policy areas, which were declared during the formation of the party, were forgotten. After

this, the Kurdish issue and policies regarding unarmed solution and peaceful reconciliation became the ultimate politics of the HEP.

### ***3.3. Ethno-politics and conflict in the 1990s***

After the formation of the HEP, the SHP offered them an election alliance in order to be more active in the pro-Kurdish provinces. Though, the nationalist/Kemalist wing inside the SHP was not in favor of this alliance at all. They were harshly criticizing the members of the HEP by claiming that they had contact with the PKK and they were speaking on behalf of a “terrorist” organization (Marcus, 2007). Following the 1991 general elections, the HEP members were forced to resign from the SHP and this disengagement led to return to ethnic politics within the framework of Kurdish nationalism. In 1993, the HEP was outlawed by the Constitutional Court, therefore the first legal representation attempt of the pro-Kurdish political movement failed.

The Court claimed that the HEP became the center of illegal activities based on the given speeches of the party members and allegations brought against individual members in separate trials (Kogacioglu, 2004). Although, it was quite easy to condemn Kurdish deputies that they would amount separatist ideas by proclaiming the right to use Kurdish publicly. As a counter-reaction before the dissolution of the party, another pro-Kurdish political party was established and members of the HEP were transferred to the new party called Democracy Party (DEP). This party was totally devoted to the Kurdish problem because the Kurds were still seeking for a solution in legal perspectives. The composition and members of the DEP belonged to Kurdish people and the party program only focused on how to prevent the state of ethnic conflict and find a permanent solution for reconciliation. This party showed much less sensitivity towards mainstream Turkish

politics, rather the radical leadership cadres were quite supportive of the PKK (Güney, 2002). In spring 1993, the PKK declared a bilateral cease-fire, but after the death of Turkish President Özal, brutal and bloody clashes started again. Yet, Özal's death marked a sharp return to the earlier position (Güney, 2002). The attacks of the secret service, counterinsurgency, constantly increased because the main motto was "as long as terrorism would not be exterminated, it is impossible to sit and discuss anything about the Kurdish question" (Cemal, 2014; Marcus, 2007).

After the DEP was outlawed, the successor ethnic pro-Kurdish party, People's Democracy Party (HADEP), competed in the 1995 elections and got almost all of its support from the Kurdish region. In fact, the HADEP shared the common base of supporters with the PKK, meaning that many HADEP supporters are also supported the armed clashes (Barkey, 1998). For the Kurdish political movement, the capture of Öcalan was seen as a breaking point or dissolution/weakening period of the PKK. However, the HADEP remained loyal to the PKK and Öcalan. Their first congress had turned into a glorious support for Öcalan (Güney, 2002.) The radicalization of the HADEP's stance again led to the closure of the party in 2004. Following the capture of Öcalan and ban of the HADEP, the Kurdish political movement had decided to change and remodel their policy of ethno-politics based on Kurdish nationalism, so they have tried to broaden their agenda into more inclusive approach in order to be represented in a legal framework without pushing constitutional limits.

### ***3.4. Attempts for the “Turkishness”- The case of the DTP and BDP***

The concept of “Turkishness” addresses the phrases of integration of ethnic groups to the existing system in harmony. This means that the difference in ethnic identity does not create cleavages as long as every citizen has equal rights and freedoms under the umbrella of the Turkish Republic. For the Kurdish political movement, the end of Cold-War period and collapse of ideological base of the PKK led to a mild level approach instead of radical viewpoint. Basically, they promoted the idea of “living together in the same country” without any claims for secession. In this vein, Democratic Society Party (DTP), which was the other successor party, was founded in 2005. The main argument of the party was against status-quo that pointed to adoption of several democratic principles.

According to performance theory of party change, parties are faced with two types of change, which are either changes of leadership or changes in organizational characteristics (Janda, 1990). The pressure for change will depend on political performance. The poorer performance brings greater pressure for change. As Panebianco (1988) argues that electoral defeats stimulate party changes, parties will reorganize its structures if they are dissatisfied with the results. Due to the fact that the pro-Kurdish political parties were never successful enough to enter parliament during the 1990s, the need for a new political agenda emerged in the mid-2000s. Even though, there were several other reasons, the need for a successful result to get representation right at parliamentary level led to an attempt toward the “Turkishness”. This attempt can be seen as a demand for more power in legal politics.

The DTP’s party program did not refer to Kurdish ethnicity, instead it expressed the importance of multiculturalism, equality, justice, freedom and peace (DTP Parti Program ve Tüzüğü, 2007). The principle of “multiculturalism” could be evaluated as an attribute to the Kurds.

In the program, it has also identified that the DTP is a democratic leftist mass party based on aforementioned principles (Kavak, 2012). The main emphasis was about maintaining peaceful and democratic politics within the framework of universal values and international law (Kavak, 2012). Nevertheless, the elections proved that they have got almost all of their votes from one ethnic group. As Horowitz (1985) evaluated an ethnic party as a party that only attracts one ethnic group and got most of its support from them, we can classify the DTP as another ethnic party. Chandra's (2004) definition of ethnic party highlights the political agenda of the party that focuses on autonomy, rights and freedoms of an ethnic group. Therefore, considering that the Kurdish question is the primary agenda and they got almost all of their votes from the Kurds, it is not much realistic to say that the Kurdish political movement completely transformed into the "party of Turkey" format at that time.

Actually, it was a serious attempt for becoming a progressive party if we analyze legislative proposals and parliamentary studies of the party. For instance, the DTP and then BDP deputies offer 267 resolution packages during the 23th period of the National Assembly (2007-2011). The main proposals were given about economics (44 times), environment (28), labor conditions (22), unknown assailants (22) and healthcare (21), and there was no direct proposals referring the Kurdish identity (Kavak, 2012). These were mainly about personal rights and freedoms for all citizens. The party program also addressed the importance of democratization in every field such as in judiciary, parliamentary, social, economic and cultural levels. The core argument was to restructure the democratic system of Turkey, so at least it is a step or move toward the "Turkishness" (Kavak, 2012).

Of course, the softened political environment affected the shift from radical ethno-nationalist stance to a mild-level of discourse. Considering the fact that the government guaranteed

some of the fundamental rights of the Kurdish community in terms of linguistic, cultural and political perspectives, the DTP (then BDP) members started to cooperate with the government. In this respect, the BDP members acted as mediators during the official negotiations between the state and the imprisoned PKK leader Öcalan. In conjunction with this role, the BDP chairman, Selahattin Demirtaş, publicly called on the PKK to lay down arms by stating “This fight must end. We shouldn’t sit idly and watch our youth kill each other. Those who regard negotiations and talks as betrayal of the country are also responsible for these deaths. We are in a period in which we need to defend the notion of peace more than ever” (Bayrak, 2012, June 19). With this speech, he offered to stop violent conflict and seek for a peaceful resettlement in cooperating with the government. Nonetheless, both the DTP and BDP had an ethnic consciousness due to they were the ultimate representative of the Kurds and the Kurdish question in the legal arena. The DTP’s deputies Sırrı Sakık and Ahmet Türk stated that “The Kurds are seeking for a democratic solution. We are fighting for much broader freedoms for all people, but we have also a separate agenda for the demands of our (Kurdish) community”. Türk also added that “We do not have any problems about “Turkishness”, but the state level understanding is totally different. The state pushes for being “Turk” as pre-requisite of the “Turkishness” concept” (Kavak, 2012). In contrast of this approach, the Kurds do not want to give up their identities that creates a deadlock in politics.

Meanwhile, the actions of the provincial authorities, banning public celebrations on the day of Kurdish traditional festival of Newroz fueled the demonstrations and feelings of revenge and exclusion among Kurdish people (Tezcür, 2010). Then, the ban of the DTP triggered renewed insurgency of the PKK. In this vein, state pressure on the successor party BDP’s members and deputies increased. When we look at the BDP, they also attracted supporters from other political fractions like leftist parties. Even though, other ethnic groups than Kurds were still outnumbered,



there were some leftist members like Ufuk Uras and Ertuğrul Kürkçü, who contested on the side of the BDP (Celep, 2014). One of the reasons that we can label this party as another ethnic party is that the BDP announced only 61 independent candidates in 39 provinces, from the cities in the pro-Kurdish Southeastern Anatolia, rather than nominating wide range of candidates in every region. These candidates have participated as independent in order to exceed the 10% threshold level (Moraitis, 2011, April 10). Nevertheless, it has claimed that they have nominated the candidates from radical wing (hawks) of the Kurdish movement, so it could be evaluated as they wanted to push more in order to get their demands. (Today's Zaman, 2011, March 23). This change has reflected the discourse and policies of the party in general. Thus, their speeches in the parliament mostly addressed the human rights violations against the Kurds, the state's failure to follow an inclusive policy, poor socio-economic conditions in the pro-Kurdish regions.

Table 2. Main pro-Kurdish parties (1990 to 2012)

| <b>Party Name</b> | <b>Political Agenda (Addresses to...)</b>   | <b>Leadership and Membership Composition</b>   | <b>Ties to the PKK</b>  |
|-------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>HEP</b>        | The problems related to democratization, economic downturn and foreign policy                   | A Turkish President & composition of leftists Turkish and Kurdish members at the beginning   | Supported by the PKK and never renounced its ties                 |
| <b>HADEP</b>      | The Kurdish minority rights and democratization problem in Turkey                               | Mostly the members of the Kurdish movement with very limited number of leftists              | Tried to keep its distance from the PKK, but never ignored it     |
| <b>DTP</b>        | Gender equality, freedom of expression, decentralization of power, and complete democratization | Members from the Kurdish movement, small leftist parties, other ethnic groups and minorities | Did not support armed actions, but never rejected the PKK reality |
| <b>BDP</b>        | Similar to the DTP  | Members from the various leftist parties, ex-DTP cadres, other ethnic groups and minorities  | Had a direct dialogue with the PKK leadership                     |

*The source of these information are provided in Chapter 3.*

When we analyze the general characteristics of the pro-Kurdish parties, as described in table 2, we can categorize these parties as ethnic parties due to the fact that the main features of ethnic parties (see table 1) overlap with the aforementioned characteristics of the pro-Kurdish parties. For years, the pro-Kurdish parties were the center of Kurdish rights and their support base mostly remained limited with the Kurdish people. Starting with the formal dialogue with the jailed PKK leader Öcalan, a new era of politics, away from ethno-national principles, has started. Then, the Kurdish movement found convenient political ground to broaden its politics. Even though, the party program of the BDP highlighted the aim for the “Turkishness”, the passionate and partisan actions of their members about the Kurdish question affected the public opinion negatively (Çakır, 2011). The concept of the “Turkishness” is an outcome of the ideological shift from the idea of an independent Kurdistan to a reconciled society (Kavak, 2012). This idea constitutes the grassroots politics of the pro-Kurdish parties, namely the DTP and BDP, during the 2000s and provides the ideological basis to the current transformation.

## CHAPTER 4- THE TRANSFORMATION

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Kurdish movement were trying to operationalize “Turkish mass party” or “Party of Turkey” with a broadly based, non-ethnic perspective in the early 1990s, but the impact of the state of ethnic conflict and the Turkish state’s policies based on neglecting the idea of “Kurdish identity” delayed this shift. After the AKP government’s reforms to provide democratic rights for the Kurds and show an initiative for a democratic reconciliation, the Kurdish movement finally found the right political climate to broaden its policies towards other groups in the society. In this chapter, I identify the actual reasons, goals and outcomes of the Kurdish political movement’s transformation in a more inclusive format concerning the rights of all discriminated people in Turkey.

In order to understand the reasons behind this political decision, I conducted several interviews with party members, political analysts, journalists and NGO activists in Turkey during the period of April and May 2015. The main goal of these interviews is first to understand the underlying reasons of the transformation and then present different opinions about how this new policy is reflected to current Turkish politics and resolution process. These in-depth interviews provide unique perspectives on popular perceptions of the current transformation that will be discussed in this chapter and conclusion. This chapter first analyzes the formation of the HDP, evaluates the reflections and party organization, and ends up with the impact of this political move on the state of ethnic conflict.

#### ***4.1. Establishment of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)***

Following the normalization and reconciliation attempts and declining role of the military on politics, the BDP initiated the process of transformation. Compared to the tense political climate and state oppression toward the Kurdish political activities, the government was interested in communicating with the imprisoned PKK leader Öcalan for a permanent solution. In this context, the HDP was established in 2012 that adheres to equality and freedom for everyone. The HDP's program declared that the actual reason for the state of ethnic conflict is the democratization problem of Turkey (HDP Parti Tüzüğü, 2012). In the meantime, Öcalan sent a message for Newroz celebrations in 2013 saying that “now it is time to lay down arms and formulate ideas for negotiation” (Cemal, 2014). This message is an open call for a peaceful bargaining process.

According to Cemal's (2003) interview with the PKK leader Öcalan in 1993, the Kurdish movement's fundamental demands addressed the democratization of Turkey and new constitution making to provide extensional rights for the Kurds such as recognition of their identity and culture. Öcalan also stated that “the state chose to suppress the Kurds by using arms, therefore we had to arm ourselves and respond in the same vein. Due to our legal political parties being banned and political participation right prevented, we had to take up arms” (Cemal, 2003, p.46-47). From 1993 onwards, the PKK has tried to finalize armed resistance and moderated its aims to initiate a negotiated resolution process to the conflict (Gunes and Zeydanlıoglu, 2014). Eventually, the establishment of the HDP with a concept of a progressive party rather than promoting ethnic motives would show that the Kurdish movement does not want to foster radical Kurdish nationalism anymore.

The principles of the Peoples' Democracy Congress (HDK), which is an alliance of several different groups and/or fractions, state that the only way to overcome the democratization problem

and create harmony and social reconciliation between citizens is to come up with broadened policies (HDK Tüzük, 2014). This means that the government should initiate necessary reforms via a new constitution in order to reach more democratization for all discriminated groups, not just the Kurds. Hence, the HDK attempted to incorporate the Kurdish problem into mainstream politics and bring together various political organizations under one banner that led to the formation of the HDP. Major policy areas are the rehabilitation of the PKK, decentralization and empowerment of local government, extension of human rights, and a non-exclusionary definition of Turkish identity. During the establishment of the HDP, every fraction under the roof of the HDK participated in this new formation. It has to be noted that representatives of other ethnic groups, such as Circassians, Albanians, Arabs, Armenians, Pomaks, Greeks, Zaza and Roma people joined to be a part of this multi-ethnic structure.

The outcomes of this format change certainly affect the party structure and this transformation has an historical explanation. The HDP's co-chairman of Beyoğlu district, which is one of the most populated areas in Istanbul, Ahmet Teke claims that from the formation of the HEP in 1990 to the HDP, the pro-Kurdish political parties' agendas have issued an appeal to the rights of all Turkish citizens for a better democratic system (personal interview, April 8, 2015). According to his claim, since the formation of the HEP, this movement has been included other ethnic groups and formulated policies for improving the rights and freedoms of every Turkish citizen. For this reason, he refuses to compare the Kurdish political movement with the political wings of other armed movements such as the IRA and ETA. He explicitly says that "there are no similarities between the pro-Kurdish parties and the parties affiliated with the IRA and ETA, which are respectively Sinn Fein and Batasuna". As an example, he states that in the general and local elections the DTP had several Turkish candidates to become a party of Turkey. Furthermore, Teke

argues that the members of other ethnic groups had nominated and represented as part of pro-Kurdish parties. In the HDP's framework, minority groups declared their support and also their candidates were on the candidacy list. He proposes that the HDP is able to unify all groups on a common ground, therefore it becomes the ultimate representative body for all minorities and discriminated groups. The HDP's universalistic agenda provides a unique representation right not just for Kurds, instead all groups have extensive political rights. For instance, the party applies representation quotas that allows a limited number of representatives for the all ethnic groups and also women, workers, and homosexuals. In this point, Teke says that because of this quota rule, many influential members of the Kurdish political movement, who are ethnically Kurds, did not enroll as candidates.

Based on Teke's viewpoint, there is no data to label the HDP as an ethnic party, because the Kurds are not the ultimate rulers of the party considering the fact that more than 40 different organizations, including leftist, environmentalist groups, unions and LGBT activists, united with the party. In fact, the previous pro-Kurdish parties were alienated from the central administration. Because of the exclusion from mainstream politics, these parties have radicalized by using an ethnic discourse. Conversely, today's political atmosphere and recent developments lead to the realization of the "party of Turkey" format. It is also noteworthy that the HDP has nominated candidates in every regions and the composition of these candidates differs in terms of their ideology, identity and political background. I have contacted Irfan Aktan, who is one of the leading journalist about the Kurdish question in general, and his idea is not much different than Ahmet Teke's viewpoint. Aktan is pretty sure that the HDP is sincere about their claims lead to the "Turkishness" of the party. In our interview via skype, he emphasizes;

“I do not believe that the HDP’s goal is to mislead people just to get more votes in the general elections. Since the early 1990s, the Kurdish political movement has been trying to adopt a discourse for larger masses in Turkey, but it was not implemented. Now, the HDP knows that they need to take all regions’ problems into consideration in order to be represented in the parliament” (personal interview, April 22, 2015).

Aktan also points to the major goal of the party, which is to spread their inclusive discourse to the masses, especially in the Western cities instead of limiting their campaign in the pro-Kurdish regions. Similarly, member of the HDP and human rights activist Cezmi Özdemir states that the HDP has a great chance to put the idea of “Turkishness” into effect, because there is no more armed conflict. His thought was mainly about the positive outcome of this transformation that will decrease the tension between the state and Kurds. He also refers the mutual respect for different values by saying; “every member of the HDP has right to defend his/her own political view without having any negative reactions or being exposed to any sanctions” (personal interview, April 27, 2015). For this reason, the HDP’s composition of different groups makes this “Turkishness” policy more visible in public. In another interview, the ex-BDP Beyoğlu district chairman Hayri Eser discusses the same critique;

“This process first started in 1993 when the legal pro-Kurdish political party aimed to participate in politics, but the state’s policies of non-recognition and continuation of armed struggle prevented this attempt. In 2011, the HDK showed its inclusive approach for a reliable solution and then with the formation of the HDP the process is completed. To be sure that the HDP will prove its sincerity regarding its progressive concept based on social-democratic values” (personal interview, April 8, 2015).

The establishment of the HDP is the first step of a changing political moves both for the Turkish mainstream politics and Kurdish political movement. Its leader, Demirtaş, declares that “our party is able to accomplish the biggest leftist coalition under its roof since the TIP had done in 1960s” (Ne Oluyor, 2015, April 30). This alliance is a sign of the HDP’s inclusive political strategy to attract more supporters. For the first time, it seems that there is a room for change and both sides are sincere about their positions to find a permanent way of disarmament. The HDP’s role is to convince people that this party will work for reconciliation. In any way, this political formation, aiming to be the biggest socialist bloc, brings hope for the further democratization steps in Turkey. The new format of the HDP has promising features in the sense that the Kurdish political movement does not have any separate political agenda anymore and they are ready to integrate themselves into mainstream politics.

#### ***4.2. Reflections to the Transformation***

If we analyze the reasons why the Kurdish political movement, backed by armed guerillas, decided to transform itself into a progressive or mass party format, a likely candidate is “living together in peace”. The members of the party, Ahmet Teke, Hayri Eser and Cezmi Özdemir, both argue that the Kurds want peace, because they have been suffering for over 30 years and losing their loved ones. Hasan Cemal, an experienced journalist about the Kurdish movement, mainly addresses the Kurdish demand for peace. He explains this argument as follows;

“I have been following the resolution process very closely. It is crucial to observe common-will of the Turkish President Erdoğan and the PKK leader Öcalan. Without their political effectiveness, this process would be failed. The Kurds were looking for a peaceful transition during the 1990s, but the state did not recognized any of their rights. Now there is a hope for



reconciliation, because the state, at least, allows some rights and freedoms. For this reason, the Kurds would think that political integration via the HDP triggers normalization and democratization in Turkey” (personal interview, April 28, 2015).

In other words, the Kurds have been waiting for the right time in which the central administration should be ready to recognize the Kurdish reality sincerely. After 20 years, the political climate allows such an initiative to be formulated.

An influential Kurdish journalist, Davut Uçar has been working for the pro-Kurdish *Özgür Gündem* newspaper since its establishment. Uçar’s main arguments are;

“The program of the pro-Kurdish parties were not ethnically based at all, but their resemblance on public media showed them as ethnic parties. Though, their main focus was the Kurdish movement, but the reason was the state’s denial of our identity. Since the dialogue has started with the PKK, the Kurds understood that there is enough political will to achieve necessary steps for democratization, so they decided to integrate themselves in legal aspects. This transformation was a proof of the Kurds’ intention of participating under the same roof with equality.” (personal interview, April 11, 2015).

It is clear that the Kurdish movement carefully evaluated the changing global political dynamics. After the Turkish state’s move towards peaceful negotiations, they have convinced that armed resistance and ethnic politics would lead neither peaceful transition nor reconciliation. Thus, their new political discourse is not totally and directly related to the Kurdish question, instead they always state that the HDP will contribute to the democratization problem in Turkey.

In contrast, some journalists are critique about the sincerity of the HDP’s new progressive format. Taha Akyol, editor-in-chief of *Hürriyet* newspaper, denies that all explained reasons for

transformation are not enough concrete so far. Despite the HDP's arguments addressing the "Party of Turkey" concept, Akyol highlights the connection between the triangle of the KCK, a political wing labelled as an illegal unit, PKK and the party by saying "The HDP still stands on the doctrines of the KCK and they are not acting independently. It means that the HDP does not respect liberal values, instead they defend a communal model of state, which is not democratic at all" (personal interview, May 13, 2015). He believes that it is early to call the HDP as a progressive party considering its relations with these "illegal" units. He continues his criticism pointing to fundamental aim of the HDP;

"The underlying goal of this party is to form a Kurdish nation-state. It is clear that they want a state ruled by the totalitarian measures of the PKK, but today's world is not a place for a successful guerilla war as Ho Chi Minh and/or Che Guevara achieved. That is why they know that they have to follow democratic ways. The HDP aims to unify the Kurds and then attract other segments, especially anti-establishment people" (personal interview, May 13, 2015).

His another claim addresses the importance of the HDP's representation in the parliament. In this respect, Akyol asserts that "There are signs of a slow transition to "Turkishness" and I wish parliamentary values will be more effective on this movement if they will enter the parliament". His definite argument labels the HDP as a leftist-Kurdish party for now. On this point, another journalist Halit Kakinç shares Akyol's idea whether the HDP is sincere about becoming a progressive party. According to his opinion, it is still early to say that the HDP is different than its predecessor pro-Kurdish parties, classified as ethnic. He argues in parallel to Akyol's idea about the nature of this party in which overwhelmingly backed by the Kurds with limited numbers of Turkish leftists. He explains his current opinion about the HDP;

“We hope to distinguish the HDP from other pro-Kurdish ethnic parties, but it is too early for such a decision. It is still a transition process and they have to realize that promoting ethnic-nationalism is quite dangerous for the whole country. For me, there is an intention to become a “Party of Turkey”, but currently their primary goal is to exceed the election threshold and their new discourse is shaped by this political agenda” (personal interview, April 23, 2015).

These two intellectuals’ are both not satisfied or convinced with the current standpoint of the HDP and they are waiting for the post-election period in order to elaborate their political agenda more detailed either in parliamentary level or out of parliament.

When we put the ideas of the party members together, they mostly argue that this transformation has been designed since the early 1990s, but because of the state-level regulations and conflict it was delayed. They certainly think that the HDP is a proof of the Kurdish movement’s project to pursue mainstream politics in harmony for increasing the democratic values in Turkey. They do not claim anything about secession or independence while there are still common suspicions about their further political agenda. In general, if we focus on the inclusive discourse of the party leadership, membership profile and different fractions supporting the party, we can say that there is a complete transformation in politics, but there are also counter-opinions in which classify it as a slow transition period. Even though the HDP is able to convince some Turkish people with its new format, it is not easy to satisfy everyone. To convince more undecided voters, the party’s election program manifesto appears to be very progressive as the party embraces not only Kurdish interests, but also other fundamental rights and freedoms as well as gender equality.

#### ***4.3. New Political Discourse and Election Program***

It is necessary to analyze the political agenda and dominant discourse to show the HDP's difference in format. For the 2014 Presidential elections, the HDP co-chairman Selahattin Demirtaş was nominated as a candidate for the presidential race. The HDP cadres designed a campaign in which concentrated on the economic problems of all Turkish citizens as well as the Prime Minister Erdoğan's increasing tendency toward totalitarianism. There was neither ethnic reference to the Kurdish identity nor ethnically charged pro-Kurdish language during the campaign, so Demirtaş was able to get support from various segments of the society (Bayrasli, 2014). His campaign took in shape within the framework of "New democratic life" slogan that addressed the need for more democratization and equal rights and freedoms for people. As we can analyze, the program, backed by the HDP, was prepared according to the liberal democratic values and it was a proof that they were looking beyond the Kurdish vote (Tremblay, 2014).

As a party, the HDP also applies the same policy, "call for a New Life", before the general elections of 2015. The framework includes various approaches regarding the problems of unemployed people, farmers, disabled people, university students and women. The slogan addresses the idea that all people should benefit from the fruitful outcomes of new democratic principles in Turkey. That is why the "New Life" project focuses on all groups, existing in the society, and their socio-economic well-being. The program refers democratic improvement and peaceful society as regards to reconciliation process in Turkey (HDP Election Manifesto, 2015). It is basically against the monolithic ideology of the state, categorizing people under the same identity and neglecting different identities, therefore it highlights that the differences are our common values and all faiths should be respected by the state. It offers that proposed democratization process by adopting a civilian constitution will also reflect the Kurdish question in a positive

manner. The election manifesto also includes economic privileges for unemployed and poor people. The concern is mainly about the economic status of people rather than their identities or ethnic problems. Women's rights is also a crucial aspect of the manifesto. As part of the "New Life" ideal, women are identified as the most valuable part of the society. The core idea is; "If women are free, the society is more democratic and free", therefore the party promises to provide extended rights for women. In order to apply this idea, they use quotas in which half of the nominated candidates should be women (HDP Election Manifesto, 2015).

Another striking propaganda tool is to stress "550 candidates in 81 provinces" as part of "Great Humanity project". It is also a call for a democratic and free society without having any state-hand restrictions on people's lifestyle. The importance of 550 candidates addresses the HDP's presence in everywhere as a "party of Turkey". Previous pro-Kurdish parties did not choose to run in every regions except the region where their co-ethnics supported independent candidates. After reading its election manifesto, one can easily realizes that the priority is not the rights and interests of the Kurdish community. Conversely, just few times the Kurdish identity is mentioned, but again all stated points are not referred exclusively for the Kurds. The need for a new constitution concerning on social care programs, right to strike for workers, restrictions against de-forestation, freedom for ethnic identities and peaceful foreign policy are the determined policy areas. The word "Kurd" related to the Kurdish question only mentioned for 7 times in the program (Aba, 2015, April 22). We can understand that general problems of the state are evaluated as core policy areas. Deputy candidates Meral Beştaş and Sezai Temelli summarize their main policy areas and political agenda as follows;

"Our election manifesto mainly focuses on regional representation rights and economic downturn of the rural areas. We are expecting the support of everyone who

are suffering both socially and economically from the actions of the government. Therefore, we consider our party as a socialist mass party depending on our political conjecture.” (Tarafsız Bölge, 2015, April 22).

Similar to their expressions, co-chairman Demirtaş states recently;

“We have same political program for every regions of Turkey. The HDP does not have any secret or separate agenda for the Kurdish provinces. We are in favor of unity and brotherhood in Turkey, therefore we are all against the polarization among people. No matter what the election results will be, our party will remain as the ultimate voice of all discriminated people in Turkey. The HDP’s unchangeable principle is to defend the social, cultural and economic rights of all people in our country” (Tarafsiz Bölge, 2015, 27 May).

In the light of the election program and the discourse of the party members, which always marks that Turkey needs more democratization for the masses, we can argue that there is a wish to attract more support from different segments of the society. The core areas in the election program are as follows; women rights, education, economic development, unemployment and equality. It means that they have policies for the development and well-being of the whole nation and references for living together. This attempt can be evaluated as a huge step to pursue peaceful negotiations regarding the Kurdish question as well. In other words, they want to catch as much as more people to pursue their political goals in legal perspectives. That is why they have a broad range of network in all provinces.

#### ***4.4. Membership and Organization***

The HDP focuses on mostly people from the side of economically disadvantaged families, who live in suburban parts of the cities. By looking at the party's cadres and organizational schema, we can understand the current characteristics much better. Firstly, it has a diverse membership profile that is an indication of the plurality that their members claim to represent. In this respect, the HDP's membership procedure does not have any limitations or complicated procedures. The organization is different than previously established pro-Kurdish parties considering that the HDP has broadened its network from pro-Kurdish regions to all places around the country. This enlargement is considered as a direct outcome of the transformation process.

Due to his administrative position in the party, Teke draws the general lines of the party's formation. He explains the characteristics and composition of the party members;

“Our party is open for everyone and we do not have a specific restrictions for membership. We have a broad range of members from nationalists to liberals and even radicals. Therefore, we have been receiving many applications for deputy candidacy. About 1.500 people from every ethnic groups have applied so far and our membership profile is increasing day by day. We are applying quotas to provide equality for everyone to be selected for the candidacy list. Normally, this procedure leads to an inclusive candidacy list” (personal interview, April 8, 2015).

For the organization of the party, of course they have used the structure of the BDP, but the HDP allows that every group has right to determine its own policy and the party is the ultimate body that acts as a voice of proposed policies. For instance, women and youth assemblies can take a decision and the party leadership puts their policies into effect. In every region the HDP is organized and

opened its branches everywhere in Turkey. Beforehand, the pro-Kurdish parties generally established their offices where they have got active support of their co-ethnics. He continues that there is no despotic regulations and everyone is free to say anything in their party councils. This explains that the HDP does not have strict rules as part of party discipline which limits the discourses and actions of its members.

For the HDP, it is definitely not easy to open offices and recruit members in every regions, because of the past impressions. Still, many Turkish people are not enough convinced that the HDP is not a Kurdish party, which has affiliations with the armed wing and its actions. For this reason, there are some obstacles for the organization of the party due to the party members and branches have been facing several attacks during the election campaign. For instance, party offices were attacked and bombed in Mersin and Adana, two largely populated port-cities, by unknown people (Hürriyet Daily News, 2015, May 18). These attacks clearly show that the HDP does not rescue from its past pro-Kurdish nature in the eyes of some groups, therefore the party becomes the main target of nationalist groups. Another story is about a candidate from Rize, which is a port city in the Black Sea region and mostly populated by fiercely nationalist and conservative people. Recently, the HDP's Rize candidate, Selda Karafazlı, was threatened and disowned by her relatives because of her candidacy. She was charged to become a supporter of the "terrorist organization" by joining the HDP (Pangea Today, 2015, April 21). Still, the HDP's public impression is not enough persuasive or remains insufficient to convince everyone.

Cezmi Özdemir works in Ataşehir district and he is among the staff whose are responsible for the coordination and propaganda of the party. In our interview, he explains the current attitude towards the party's campaign and organizational structure by stating;



“In our district, we have board members from every components of the HDP. We are willing to include them to participate in administrative positions. For sure, we do not have privileges for ethnically Kurdish oriented members and also the members of the BDP. In contrast to this understanding, we always encourage all of our members, no matter their ethnical or political background are, for taking responsibility in any field. Some people may think that this party is just an outcome of the Kurdish movement, but it is not the official idea of the party administration” (personal interview, April 27, 2015).

In general, the party members perfectly know that the democratization problem of Turkey cannot be solved if the Kurds do not get support from the other segments of the Turkish society. This logic leads them to ally with other groups and they have mutual rights and positions inside the party mechanism. The different components of the HDP work under the umbrella of this party and they have also new members who do not belong to the Kurdish community. “This time even the religious clerics will support the HDP and vote for our party” according to Özdemir’s claim. This is one of the clearest example of the HDP’s success to attract different groups which previously declared supported other political parties. In every platform, the HDP members highlight the importance of the party’s organizational composition that would be expected to reflect their increasing success in mainstream politics. The main advantage for the HDP is the party’s inclusive approach that allows every citizen to express their political viewpoint freely. In the HDP cadres, we can encounter many people from different social, ethnic and political backgrounds. These people can be considered as a resemblance of Turkey’s demographic composition. Thus, it is obviously an outcome of this new political formation in contrast to the previous decades’ ethnic politics, which is overwhelmingly supported by the members of one ethnic group.

#### ***4.5. Impact on the current state of ethnic conflict***

The HDP's transformation was completed in the late 2012 and the armed wing of the Kurdish movement, PKK, declared bilateral cease-fire in spring 2013. There is a connection between the transformation and the PKK's decision to lay down arms for a peaceful negotiation process. The government's decision to contact the PKK leader and openness policies for the Kurdish community definitely trigger a normalization period between the parties, but also the Kurdish political movement's decision to give up radical and ethnically based discourse is another reason that would fasten the reconciliation attempts. The general argument, after conducting several interviews about this topic, points to positive consequences of the transformation to mainstream politics. In this sense, Turkish people would be able to observe how sincere the Kurdish movement is.

The party members claim that the HDP's mild level of discourse and inclusive policies are helpful to reduce prejudices and antagonism towards the Kurdish movement. For instance, Ahmet Teke points to the importance of the possibility of being selected as a deputy from other regions of Turkey, except the pro-Kurdish ones. This would prove the success of transformation in the sense that even Turkish people are in favor of the HDP. He argues that HDP will remain as part of bilateral negotiations between the state and armed movement, therefore the changing attitude and discourse of the Kurds will also reduce tension between the parties. Another claim is about the necessity of change in party structure and politics in order to maintain peaceful relations with the state administration. Both Ahmet Teke and Hayri Eser agree that the change comes with the leadership of Demirtaş and new political agenda will prevent the risk of a repeated armed conflict. Nevertheless, the party is very critical about the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission for the past crimes, committed by both sides in the past decades.

Regarding the outcome of this transformation, I asked Hasan Cemal to evaluate the current spectrum. He is quite sure that the Kurdish movement does not prefer involving in another armed conflict against the state. Two years ago he went to the PKK's headquarter and his observations are very positive about long term outcomes of this transformation. Cemal highlights that as long as the government takes a step forward toward more democracy, the Kurds will work for peaceful reconciliation. He expresses;

“The state should recognize the legitimacy of Öcalan as the ultimate leader of the Kurdish movement. Then, a Truth Commission should be established and rule of law should provide justice for the victims. The transformation of the Kurdish movement with the HDP is just a beginning of peace politics, but it brings hope for non-violent future and democratic politics” (personal interview, April 28, 2015).

In parallel with his opinion, journalist Irfan Aktan believes that the HDP's new political formation will contribute to the normalization of relations, but the primary responsibility belongs to the state. He supports his argument by claiming;

“The resolution process is not just maintained by the HDP. The state has also crucial tasks to do such as granting the freedom of press and speech, and also abolishing all political restrictions. I think the state is still not ready to fulfill all of these, so permanent solution is not only related to the actions of the HDP, but also the state's ability to reform” (personal interview, April 22, 2015).

As discussed in the previous chapter, experienced journalist Taha Akyol evaluates this change as a transition to become a progressive party. Nevertheless, he is hopeful about their progress and its positive reflection to peaceful dialogue. As he discusses the threshold issue, he

emphasizes that if the HDP will enter the parliament, the state of ethnic conflict will be more likely terminated. That is why the government should have changed the 10% threshold rule before the elections. As Ahmet Teke's addresses that if the HDP will not pass the threshold, the Kurds may question the legitimacy of the National Assembly. Obviously, this action triggers several incidents between the security forces and Kurdish locals. The HDP member Cezmi Özdemir has the same opinion arguing that the Kurdish community will show its reaction in case of the HDP's exclusion from the Turkish parliament. Obviously, the election results will be deterministic about the future of relations between the Kurdish community and state.

Overall, the importance of the HDP's parliamentary representation becomes quite critical for the sake of peaceful resolution process. The presence of the HDP in mainstream politics will hinder the danger of ethnic clashes and reduce the possibility of tense relations. From this point onwards, it is definitely not logical to withdraw peaceful negotiation process. When we look at the HDP's electoral strategy and discourse of its leadership, again it cannot be categorized as an ethnic party, instead it corresponds more likely to a progressive party based on social-democrat principles. The features of the HDP such as party program that appeals to all people in Turkey, inclusive political goals and policies for everyone, members from different groups and leadership composition which includes members from various ethnic or non-ethnic groups prove the progressive characteristics. Ethnic parties have exclusionary approaches in politics whereas the HDP does not. It has branches and offices all around Turkey and the party does not claim anything against the national unity. Furthermore, social-democrat parties have formal ties with NGOs and have empowered their members by involving them in decision making process (Schumacher, de Vries, and Vis, 2013). The HDP has applied the same formation that corresponds with social-democrat features. Its election manifesto, political program and ultimate principles reveal the

intention to catch up more voters and change its image in the eyes of people. Considering its cadres, which includes people from different political fractions and ethnic groups, and social base, which attracts supporters from all regions of Turkey, the HDP shows its difference compared to ethnic political parties (Cengiz, 2015).

Analyzing the data reveals the fact that HDP members are keen on participating in politics rather than involving themselves in radical actions toward the state. I argue that the HDP's political effort unifies the members of the Kurdish political movement with the other segments of the society. My study illustrates that the notion of an umbrella party, which would not give the image of a Kurdish regionalist party, has allowed an opportunity to become a mainstream actor in Turkish politics and this format can not only contribute to state of ethnic conflict, but also Turkey's democratization. Under the category of movement parties, I can address Gunther and Diamond's (2003) *left-libertarian party* concept which fits to the new format of the HDP. The HDP rejects the paramount status of economic issues and instead favors social solidarity and participatory institutions similar to left-libertarian parties. There is no single hegemonic ideology or programmatic preferences and the party's agenda address multiplicity of issues rather than a single arena. Additionally, there are no barriers to membership, which is open to all people willing to join. By looking the general features of the HDP, discussed and analyzed in this chapter, such as party program, manifesto, membership and organization, it can be categorized under this concept rather than being an ethnic party.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored the recent fundamental change of an ethnically based political movement to a progressive party. It has demonstrated how it is possible to transform a long-lasting ethnic movement into a progressive one, which factors lead this voluntary change and how it contributes to mainstream politics. Analyzing ethnic party literature and the pro-Kurdish parties, which have followed an ethnic political discourse in terms of Kurdish nationalism, shows the main paths leading to the transformation. In-depth interviews highlight two approaches regarding this new format of the HDP. One approach evaluates it as a slow transition process and the other classifies it as a complete transformation. The main point of focus in understanding the dynamics of this transformation is the changing political climate in Turkey and the Kurdish movement's adaptation to this change at the time of new political order in the 2000s. Personal interviews and analysis of the HDP's changing structure show that the HDP will be aiming to consolidate its position as a leftist progressive political party and this political perspective will be helpful to overcome past attributes of the ethnically based Kurdish movement. I argue that this format will reduce misperceptions and prejudices toward the Kurdish community as well.

The transformation to a progressive/ mainstream party has been planned by the Kurdish politicians in order to raise their voices in legal framework rather than involving in conflict. The reason to consider the pre-HDP period as one of ethno-politics is related to political discourse, agenda and general structure of the Kurdish movement's parties. Considering the fact that the Turkish state always neglected their identity and socio-cultural rights, their political journey has been connected to the PKK's armed actions. Before the formation of the HDP, the Kurdish political movement focused on its own region, highly populated by Kurdish inhabitants, as an area of

contestation in politics. For this reason, their candidates competed in this region, public meetings were generally organized in there and the party discourse mostly addressed the problems of their co-ethnics. State administration evaluated ethno-politics as an open threat to the integrity of the state, so this understanding has blocked the political actions of the Kurds for years. Additionally, they were overwhelmingly supported just by the Kurds instead of other ethnic groups. This format clearly corresponds with Chandra's (2004) definition regarding membership and electoral base of an ethnic party addressing that an ethnic party gets majority of its support from its own ethnic groups. Pro-Kurdish parties also used the symbols of the Kurdish nation as a propaganda tool to mobilize Kurdish voters as much as possible. In other words, they had been using cultural symbols to include the Kurdish community for their cause. Other community interests were not considered, therefore it was an obstacle to connect with the rest of society. Of course, making claims about the Kurdish movement in Turkey was historically subjected to a politics of denial. While the Turkish mainstream politics has left no room to compete for the Kurds, their political organizations became much more dedicated to extremism and radical discourse of nationalism.

The formation of the HDP is the final point of an ongoing project of the "Turkishness", meaning that to become a mainstream party. During the 2000s, there was a move to achieve a transition from an ethnic discourse to an inclusive approach, but the problem of sincerity between two sides and the state's unwillingness about the recognition of the PKK leader as an official representative of the Kurds prevented the complete transformation. If we compare the current format of the HDP with the past pro-Kurdish parties, the HDP does not focus on the Kurdish issue as its primary concern. The reason for renewing its cadres, political strategy, party branches and manifesto is to show that in contrast to the previous ethnic pro-Kurdish parties, the HDP has much broader political spectrum. The party members I interviewed pointed to the inclusive agenda of the

HDP and also the composition of the party in terms of its membership and organization is the resemblance of being a progressive party.

The Kurdish political movement carefully analyzed the irrationality of their extreme Marxist-Leninist ideology in the post-Cold War era. The collapse of their ideological basis and changing global political trajectory showed that independence or establishment of an autonomous region would be neither realistic nor applicable. Meanwhile, state-hand efforts for reconciliation and democratization softened up Turkish political environment. As political conditions improved and restrictions were lifted during the 2000s, the Kurdish movement was evaluated as a normal actor in Turkish politics. Thus, they had the chance to transform the movement. This is not one-sided transformation, the state made a step to which Kurds responded with a new political agenda and format. These developments are totally related to each other. Once the state engaged in the democratization process, the Kurdish political movement gave up ethnic politics. The need for success and representation in the parliament also led to a change in party structure, organization and goals parallel to the performance theory of party change (Janda, 1990).

At time of writing, the HDP is able to exceed the threshold by getting 13% of the popular votes according to the latest election results (Uras, 2015, June 8). As it has discussed in this study, its success depends on its ability to convince wide range of undecided voters, who are against the authoritarian tendencies of the President Erdoğan. If the HDP is able to maintain this success depending on its inclusive approach and new discourse, it will definitely contribute to peaceful relations on the way to reconciliation between the state and Kurdish community. This new political innovation of the HDP forms a crucial point in the Turkish Republic's history. Now for the first time in the history of the state, there is real hope for peace and social harmony between the Turks and the Kurds.



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