

# A Sisyphean Task? Resuming Turkey-PKK Peace Talks

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## I. Overview

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Locked in their deadliest violence in two decades, the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) should urgently resume peace talks. The return to a military-based approach to the conflict and domestic political polarisation, fuelled by a spillover of the Syrian conflict, have dismantled the achievements of peace talks undertaken during the 2.5-year ceasefire which collapsed in July 2015. Bloody urban battles in the south east have since then given the conflict a new, unpredictable momentum. The failure to secure peace has cost more than 550 lives – up to 150 of them civilian, including that of the well-known human rights lawyer and Diyarbakır bar association head Tahir Elçi on 28 November. Turkey faces a critical choice: to advance its military strategy against the PKK in a fight that is bound to be protracted and inconclusive, or to resume peace talks. Whichever course it chooses, however, a comprehensive solution to the Kurdish issue will necessitate addressing longstanding Kurdish rights demands.

With a new government in place after the 1 November election, now is the time to reverse the spiral of mistrust between Ankara and the disparate Kurdish movement, represented, at times interchangeably and without clear mandates, by the legal Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), now in the parliament, as well as the outlawed PKK and its jailed leader, Abdullah Öcalan.

The resumption of violence between the Turkish state and the PKK benefits the violently extremist Islamic State (IS). In Syria, Ankara worries that the Democratic Union Party (PYD), the PKK's Syrian offshoot, will transform its gains against IS into a contiguous land corridor along Turkey's southern border. This perceived threat has at times overshadowed Ankara's focus on the fight against IS. Since May, four alleged-IS attacks targeting pro-Kurdish activists in Turkey – including the country's deadliest ever bombing, on a peace rally in Ankara – have strengthened the perception among Kurds that the state does not protect them. The debate on these incidents underscores the need for Ankara to widen its domestic crackdown against IS. It also reflects deepening social cleavages not only between Turkish and Kurdish communities, but also along other sectarian and cultural fault lines. If left unbridged, these may undermine Turkey's fragile social cohesion.

The new government has declared that it will not restart talks with Öcalan. Its strategy is instead centred on fighting the PKK, particularly until its recently empowered urban structures are eradicated, while pursuing a unilateral, vaguely defined, reform agenda pertaining to Kurdish rights that minimises engagement with the

Kurdish movement and its main legal political actor, the HDP. An approach that marginalises the HDP and its reform-minded constituency with an interest in resolving the Kurdish issue by legal means risks further channelling Kurdish nationalism into armed struggle.

After three decades of fitful deadly conflict, both sides understand a military confrontation will not secure victory but believe themselves in a strengthened position to maximise gains. They are focused on weakening the other as much as possible, while waiting for the Syria quagmire to settle before considering a return to a ceasefire and peace talks. Under pressure from the spillover of the protracted Syrian conflict, as well as the IS threat, they should urgently end violence in the country's population centres and agree on ceasefire conditions.

Free from electoral pressures for four years, the new government needs to formulate a concrete reform agenda to address Kurdish rights demands – including decentralisation and mother-tongue education – that can be advanced within legal structures, political parties and parliament. To restore trust, it must also ensure the effective investigation of past and present human rights abuses and prevent recurrence. The PKK and Kurdish local authorities should cease making declarations of autonomy that only alarm Turkish public opinion and harden Turkish politicians.

Talks with the PKK should resume in parallel, with a view to obtaining the withdrawal of its fighters from Turkey and agreement on mechanisms for amnesty and reintegration of those who, without arms, would like to stay or return. Öcalan has underlined the need for a more structured format for the peace talks that would also bring in other PKK figures and the HDP, as well as a monitoring mechanism. To achieve a mutually agreed roadmap and timeline, the government needs to clarify its position on institutionalising the process so that the cyclical effort to resolve the conflict does not resemble the mythical endless attempt of Sisyphus to roll a boulder to the top of the hill.

Turkey's allies in the West, who remain primarily focused on the Syrian crisis and its regional security and refugee consequences, should not dismiss the risks posed by a swiftly deteriorating conflict in Turkey. In their own interests, they should encourage Ankara to reassess its approach to the Kurdish issue.

Their November summit, which was primarily geared to the migration crisis, committed Turkey and the European Union (EU) to re-energise their relationship and enhance political and financial engagement. It created momentum to follow through on difficult deliverables, including reducing the flow of Syrian refugees to Europe, progress toward visa liberalisation for Turkish nationals wishing to enter the EU and opening of new chapters in the negotiations for Turkey's EU accession. At the same time, the flare up in the PKK-Turkey conflict has complicated the U.S.-led coalition's fight against IS, especially because Turkey refuses to collaborate with the People's Protection Units (YPG), the military wing of the PYD. Ankara-PKK peace talks could create parameters for a more constructive relationship between Ankara and the PYD, enhancing the international anti-IS efforts.

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## II. The Process Unravels

### A. *Talking Peace, Preparing to Fight*

During the 2.5-year ceasefire, when peace talks were ongoing, both sides simultaneously prepared for fighting, in case negotiations failed. This set the stage for resumption of violence in July 2015.<sup>1</sup>

In February 2013, one month before Öcalan called for a ceasefire, and a limited withdrawal of PKK fighters from Turkey took place, pro-PKK media announced formation of the Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement (YDG-H).<sup>2</sup> It grew rapidly into an armed, urban youth militia with the capacity to draw security forces into indiscriminate street battles in many cities in the south east. Since the summer of 2015, the urban conflict has been defined by street clashes; YDG-H has dug trenches and built barricades, pledging to bar police from entering “autonomous” cities and districts. Despite its rapid rise and indications of close links, the PKK denies controlling or aiding the group, though acknowledging support for its cause.<sup>3</sup> In this period, Turkey’s military consolidated its position, continuing to build highly-fortified outposts and dams that the PKK considered an effort to destroy its supply routes.<sup>4</sup>

Turkey’s security bureaucracy remained unconvinced of the merits of the politician-led peace process.<sup>5</sup> In 2014, military officials applied to carry out 290 operations against the PKK in the south east, though in what the government says was an attempt to safeguard the process, only eight were approved.<sup>6</sup> “The government left the south east to the PKK”, said a Diyarbakır human rights activist critical of the PKK. “It was known that the youth wing of the PKK was being established in the region”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Previous Crisis Group analysis on peace talks between the Turkish state and the PKK includes five reports since 2011: Crisis Group Europe Reports N°s 213, *Turkey: Ending the PKK Insurgency*, 20 September 2011; 219, *Turkey: The PKK and a Kurdish Settlement*, 11 September 2012; 222, *Turkey’s Kurdish Impasse: The View from Diyarbakır*, 30 November 2012; 227, *Crying Wolf: Why Turkish Fears Need Not Block Kurdish Reform*, 7 October 2013; and 234, *Turkey and the PKK: Saving the Peace Process*, 6 November 2014.

<sup>2</sup> “YDG-H Çatı Örgütü İlan Edildi” [“The YGD-H Umbrella Organisation Announced”], Sterk TV, 24 February 2013, <http://tr.sterk.tv/2716-idgh-cat-orgutu-ilan-edildi.html#.VIYent8rLGJIn>. The first local chapters appear to have formed in March–April 2013. An online video in July 2013 showed a founding ceremony on Diyarbakır’s outskirts. Presence in other cities was announced with similar videos throughout the year. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5kfXGRCsU](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5kfXGRCsU).

<sup>3</sup> In a 30 November 2015 interview with the BBC Turkish service, PKK leader Cemil Bayık denied ties with the YDG-H: “It’s a youth organisation; it’s not the PKK”. However, former members say the PKK organised its foundation. A Crisis Group researcher, working in a different capacity at the time, was told in the embattled town of Cizre that the local YDG-H militia was reinforced by regular PKK fighters. In December 2012, just months before formation of YDG-H, Murat Karayılan, leader of the Group of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), hinted to a PKK congress that “a great responsibility had fallen on [Kurdish] youth” and called for a “youth revolution” to oppose ruling party (AKP) policies in the south east. “YDG-H Kurdish Youth of Diyarbakır”, 30 December 2012. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=Edep5-dgj94](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Edep5-dgj94).

<sup>4</sup> “In the last three years, the Turkish state increased its [security] ten-fold. The main logic was Kurds should not use the [peace process] opportunities that are emerging. Therefore, Turkey wanted to build dams to prevent Kurds from using such opportunities”. Crisis Group interview, Nilüfer Koç, KNK co-chair, Berlin, 22 September 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Crisis Group interview, Turkish security bureaucrat, Ankara, 17 November 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Figures published by *Hürriyet* based on local military sources. “Talep 290, izin 8” [“290 requests, 8 approved”], 19 September 2015.

<sup>7</sup> Crisis Group interview, Diyarbakır, 16 October 2015.

Ankara's delayed reaction to Syrian Kurds' need for military help in September 2014 was a turning point for the Turkey-PKK conflict. As IS militants besieged Kobani, a Syrian border town, Kurds across Turkey sought to go to the aid of its Kurdish defenders. The government blocked their passage, igniting outrage among the Kurdish movement.<sup>8</sup> Anti-government protests broke out in mainly Kurdish south-eastern provinces, 6-8 October, resulting in 50 deaths.<sup>9</sup> Eventually, on 29 October, the government did allow passage to Syria of peshmerga fighters connected to President Masoud Barzani of the Kurdistan region of northern Iraq. The YPG, the PYD's military wing, announced on 26 January 2015 that it had freed Kobani. The advances of pro-PKK Kurds in Syria and the growing cross-border solidarity among Kurds fuelled concern in Ankara, however, and led to increased security measures in the south east. Moreover, they marked the deepening of antagonism between the ruling government party, AKP, and the HDP. As elections neared, their rivalry to win Kurdish votes peaked.

The Turkish military and government were united in concern over the possibility of a Kurdish corridor along the 900-km border with Syria.<sup>10</sup> They feared as well that PYD/YPG success in Syria was creating momentum that would translate into rising recruitment potential and support for separatism among Kurds in Turkey. Ankara justified its delayed response to the siege of Kobani by saying that it considers both IS and the PKK (as well as the PYD) as terrorists, with no distinction between them.<sup>11</sup> The widely-held view within the Kurdish movement that Ankara was covertly supporting IS was strengthened and became the main pillar of the movement's political campaign against the government.

## *B. Return to the "Public Security" Paradigm*

After Kobani, both sides doubled down on security strategies. The Turkish military was deployed to cities across the south east for the first time in two decades, and the YDG-H urban youth militia established itself further, declaring "autonomy" in Şırnak's Cizre and Diyarbakır's Sur districts. Responding to the Kobani protests and increasing PKK/YDG-H activity in the south east, the government introduced an internal security law that vastly expanded police powers to detain demonstrators and use deadly force during protests. Approved by parliament in March 2015, it also allowed provincial governors to bypass prosecutors and judges to order arrests. The Kurdish

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<sup>8</sup> Selahattin Demirtaş, HDP co-chair, said, "[President] Erdoğan said Syria was Turkey's internal matter. If that is so, what is happening in Kobani is also our internal matter .... If there is a massacre in Kobani, [the international community] will be responsible for it. You are the ones who made IS become a menace for these people. You can't abandon the Kurds in Kobani, or the Turkmens, Arabs and Turks in Telafer". "Jailed PKK leader calls for speeding up peace process, warns of 'massacres': HDP co-chair", *Hürriyet*, 9 October 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Most of the fighting was between pro-PKK and pro-HüdaPar groups. HüdaPar, a Kurdish pro-Islamist party, is widely regarded as a political revival of Hizbollah in Kurdish-speaking regions in Turkey. In the 1990s, it was used as a proxy by the Turkish state to murder scores of PKK supporters.

<sup>10</sup> Turkey has been asking for a no-fly zone and refugee safe haven along a 98-km strip of the Syrian border, which the Kurdish movement views as another attempt to prevent PYD expansion.

<sup>11</sup> President Erdoğan said, "you [the Kurdish movement], are going to visit Kobani, and at the same time say that Turkey is silent. Where are the ones coming from Kobani taking refuge [referring to Turkey accepting refugees]? Turkey is opening its doors .... The ones who are involved in the PKK terror are trying to embrace this [sentiment]. For us PKK is what IS is". "İŞİD ne ise PKK da odur", ["PKK is what IS is"], *Al Jazeera Turk*, 4 October 2014.

movement voiced concern as well over the implications of an earlier (October 2014) National Security Council decision, taken under President Tayyip Erdoğan's chairmanship, that:

The Turkish state will struggle to fight against illegal structures who operate under a legal appearance ... [and] determination will be shown to prevent provocative actions geared towards harming the positive atmosphere created by the peace process, and all measures to ensure public safety and security will be taken.<sup>12</sup>

While a charged, highly-polarised debate on the internal security law was ongoing and mistrust building, the government and the Kurdish movement launched a last-ditch effort to salvage the process. On 28 February 2015, they jointly announced a ten-point statement, the "Dolmabahçe consensus", which aimed to "set the main principles over which negotiations should take place".<sup>13</sup> This was the first time the parties had revealed the overall parameters of their confidential talks.<sup>14</sup> Despite being symbolically important, the text had been watered down to the lowest common denominator, ending as a broad stipulation for a pluralist governance structure, without a concrete roadmap or timeline.

While briefly raising hope for the process' rejuvenation, the consensus proved a bitter pill for both sides. Hours after the announcement, Selahattin Demirtaş, an HDP co-chair, said the Kurdish movement's struggle had produced it, but the government had to act on democratisation and freedoms if it wanted concrete results.<sup>15</sup> On 3 March, Duran Kalkan, a top PKK figure, said the text had only laid out "conditions of no [military] action until the elections", and that the main agenda of the AKP was to

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<sup>12</sup> [www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/30-ekim-2014-tarihli-toplantı](http://www.mgk.gov.tr/index.php/30-ekim-2014-tarihli-toplantı). "The return to a security-oriented approach was based on the 30 October 2014 National Security Council meeting where a decision of effective fight [against terror organisations] was taken. The internal security law and other security measures followed that decision". Crisis Group interview, İdris Baluken, HDP deputy chair, Diyarbakır parliamentarian, Ankara, 18 November 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Hişyar Özsoy, HDP Bingöl parliamentarian, speech at Civaka Azad Conference, "A New Actor in the Middle East: The Kurds – From an Instability to a Democratisation Factor", Berlin, 23 September 2015. The statement, as explained that day by *Hürriyet* ("Kurdish peace call made amid row on security bill"), included: (1) definition and content of democratic politics; (2) defining a democratic solution's national and local dimensions; (3) legal, democratic guarantees of citizenship; (4) state-society relations and how to institutionalise the issues; (5) the resolution process' socio-economic dimensions; (6) handling democracy-security ties during that process to sustain public order and freedoms; (7) legal solutions and warranties for policies on women, culture and ecology; (8) developing a pluralist democracy to define identity; (9) defining a democratic republic, common homeland and nation with democratic criteria and creating a legal and constitutional warranty within the pluralist democratic system; and (10) writing a constitution that internalises all democratic moves and transformations.

<sup>14</sup> "The Dolmabahçe consensus was a very important step for us. For the first time Öcalan's text that had been agreed on with Qandil was read out with HDP MPs on TV. This was an important step for Turkey". Crisis Group interview, Turkish government official, Ankara, November 2015.

<sup>15</sup> "If the government has been backed into a corner, who did this? Above all, this is [the achievement of] our struggle. This is not an initiative meant to rescue the government, but one to provide a democracy and freedom manifesto and opportunity to the society of Turkey. This is how it should be perceived. If disarmament, withdrawal, ceasefire and similar things are happening, it is a gain for peace-lovers in Turkey. It is not a favour ... by AKP .... If the government wants to get results, it must take steps in ... democracy and freedoms". Press statement, T24, 28 February 2015.

win elections.<sup>16</sup> The government's reading of both remarks was that the Kurds were not serious about the process.<sup>17</sup> Both sides accused the other of using the talks as a delaying tactic to strengthen their position.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, the government announced on 18 March agreement to discuss establishment of a monitoring committee to oversee peace process implementation. The Kurdish movement said there was also agreement on its composition, but President Erdoğan, apparently not satisfied with the names, objected two days later: "I do not have any information about it. I read about it in the newspapers .... I want to clearly state that I do not look positively on such a thing [establishment of a monitoring committee] ... Such things are not right".<sup>19</sup> The committee was never convened.

On 22 March, one day after Öcalan called for the PKK to convene a disarmament congress, Erdoğan announced he also disapproved of the Dolmabahçe consensus.<sup>20</sup> The Kurdish movement says he backed away from both measures because, as 7 June parliamentary elections neared, "polls were telling him that the Kurdish movement was benefitting from the process, strengthening HDP, while the AKP was losing votes".<sup>21</sup> According to the Kurdish movement, the monitoring committee was to observe a meeting between Öcalan, HDP members and state representatives on Imralı Island, where Öcalan is imprisoned, on 5 April. They stress, however, that the government did not bring the committee to the island. HDP members and Öcalan have not met since. Remzi Kartal, co-chair of the PKK/Kongra-Gel, said:

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<sup>16</sup> "Duran Kalkan: Somut Olan Çatışmasızlığın Seçime Kadar Süreceğidir" ["Duran Kalkan: What is concrete is that the no-action condition will continue until elections"], *Bianet*, 3 March 2015

<sup>17</sup> "Right after the Dolmabahçe consensus was announced, Demirtaş of the HDP and Duran Kalkan of the PKK made a destructive statement against it .... After those, we realised they have no intention to lay down arms. It all appeared a delaying tactic". Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, November 2015. Then Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç told the press: "I am telling you one thing, which my friends both inside and outside of the HDP would appreciate too: Whatever obstacle has so far been raised in front of the resolution process, among those responsible for these obstacles, the primary one is Selahattin Demirtaş .... Look at the facial expression of Mr Demirtaş just one hour later [after the consensus was announced]. It showed distress, anger and hatred". *Hürriyet Daily News*, 3 March 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Istanbul/Ankara, September/October 2015. In previous Crisis Group Europe reports, this was raised and warned against. See N°234, *Turkey and the PKK: Saving the Peace Process*, 6 November 2014.

<sup>19</sup> "Media reports suggest that the sides agreed on nominations for the committee, which was to consist of trusted opinion leaders, public figures and academics from Turkey. <http://t24.com.tr/haber/izleme-heyetinde-yer-alacak-isimler-belli-oldu,294488>. "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Haberim yok, olumlu bakmıyorum" ["President Erdoğan: I didn't know, I don't approve"], *HaberTürk*, 20 March 2015. According to Pervin Buldan, HDP parliamentarian and member of the delegation to Öcalan on Imralı Island, "the names were leaked to the media somehow. With the names being shared with the public, the President objected ... because the names were agreed between the state delegation and us and Öcalan, not between the government and the President. The President wanted some other people in the monitoring committee and wanted to intervene on the composition of the list. But this was not accepted, and in a way he was excluded from the preparation of the list. When people were put on the list he didn't want to see there, he didn't like it". Press statement, Doğan News Agency, 20 May 2015.

<sup>20</sup> On 21 March, the annual Nevruz celebrations, Öcalan called on the PKK to convene a disarmament congress "to determine political and social strategies and tactics in accordance with the spirit of a new era". "Renewing call to end Turkey conflict, Kurdish rebel leader hails new era", *The New York Times*, 21 March 2015. "Gov't and HDP should not be in same picture, says Turkish President", *Hürriyet*, 22 March 2015.

<sup>21</sup> Crisis Group interview, HDP official, Ankara, November 2015.

The monitoring committee was supposed to come to the April meeting [with Öcalan] this year. Both sides were supposed to put forth their ten-point proposals, start negotiations. Closed-circuit negotiations needed to be more public. The monitoring committee was not brought to Imralı Island. Öcalan got mad and said there will be no such meeting again if monitors were not present. He also told the group [the Imralı delegation, HDP deputies], they might not be able to see him for a long time.<sup>22</sup>

From the start, the sides' expectations had been different. The government wanted to induce disarmament or withdrawal of PKK insurgents without making firm commitments, especially on decentralisation, a key Kurdish demand. The PKK hoped the process would consolidate its influence in the south east and coerce Ankara into implementing concrete reforms. No clear end goals for talks were defined. Divergent understandings and irreconcilable expectations coupled with the lack of a concrete roadmap made the process fragile and motivated both sides to accelerate their back-up plans in case of failure.

### *C. The Ceasefire Collapses*

Fuelled by the failure of the Dolmabahçe consensus and simmering Kurdish anger over Kobani, animosity between the AKP and HDP rose sharply in the run-up to parliamentary elections on 7 June 2015. Demirtaş had received 9.8 per cent in the August 2014 presidential poll, a rather unexpected success that prompted the HDP to contest the parliamentary elections as a party instead of fielding independent candidates as in the past. It was able to capitalise on the resentments especially of young Kurds in the south east, who tied their hopes for a rejuvenated peace process to its electoral success.<sup>23</sup> It also attracted votes from liberal, leftist segments in the country by arguing that Erdoğan's ambition to change the government system into a presidential one with weak checks and balances could only be prevented if the HDP crossed the 10 per cent electoral threshold to enter parliament.<sup>24</sup>

The campaign period saw a surge of political violence, especially against the HDP, and a sharp, destructive discourse emerge on both sides.<sup>25</sup> In an outcome that deepened AKP anxieties, the HDP won an unexpectedly high 13.1 per cent of the total vote, securing 80 members in parliament, while the AKP, with 40.9 per cent and 258 members out of 550, was without a majority for the first time since 2002.

When efforts to form a coalition government failed, Erdoğan called new elections for 1 November. The inter-election period was one of the most violent periods in

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<sup>22</sup> Crisis Group interview, Brussels, 14 October 2015. The Kongra-Gel name has been used interchangeably with that of the PKK since 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Crisis Group interview, Vahap Coşkun, Kurdish academic, Diyarbakır, 18 October 2015. 32 per cent of HDP voters in the June election were between eighteen and 25, according to a study by Turkish pollster KONDA. "HDP ve MHP yeni seçmenden beslendi" ["HDP and MHP sustained by new voters"], Al Jazeera Turk, 28 July 2015.

<sup>24</sup> If HDP had not made it into parliament, the AKP would likely have had a sufficient majority to take a proposal to change the government system to a referendum.

<sup>25</sup> Scores of nationalist attacks on HDP rallies and election offices marred the campaign; in May 2015, twin bomb attacks on the party's offices in Adana and Mersin provinces wounded six. On 5 June, a bomb killed five at an HDP Diyarbakır rally. The suspects in both bombings claim IS allegiance.

Turkey's modern history.<sup>26</sup> On 11 July, the PKK declared it was ready "to mobilise all means necessary, including the guerrilla forces" to stop the building of military outposts and dams. The government interpreted this as an end to the PKK's ninth unilateral ceasefire. On 20 July, when an alleged IS bomber killed 33 pro-Kurdish activists in the majority Kurdish border town of Suruç, the Kurdish movement accused Ankara of collusion. On 22 July, PKK insurgents claimed the murder of two police officers.<sup>27</sup> Two days later, Turkish warplanes began to strike multiple PKK targets in Turkey and northern Iraq, and all-out fighting subsequently broke out in the south east. The PKK and local Kurdish parties declared autonomy in eighteen south east towns between August and October 2015.<sup>28</sup> The PKK also proclaimed autonomy in Istanbul's northern neighbourhoods of Gazi and Gülsuyu in August.

Following the ceasefire's collapse, most fighting has been concentrated in south-eastern urban centres, where security forces have declared over 62 urban curfews, ranging in duration from several hours to two weeks. Between July and 15 December, violence claimed the lives of 194 security officials, at least 221 PKK insurgents and as many as 151 civilians. The distinction between combatants and civilians has become blurred in the urban warfare.<sup>29</sup> Thousands of residents across the region have been displaced.<sup>30</sup> Though the state says operations against the PKK have been effective, it has been unable to wrest control of any town or city centre from the

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<sup>26</sup> Regional tensions accompanied the breakdown of the ceasefire. On 10 June, People's Protection Units (YPG) forces seized the border city of Tell Abyad, uniting two Kurdish cantons, boosting the confidence of Kurdish militants and increasing Ankara's fears about a potentially contiguous Kurdish state let along its southern border. Two pro-government papers published the headline "The PYD is more dangerous than [IS]" several days later.

<sup>27</sup> Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK) leader Karayılan denied any link between the killings and the PKK in a 1 December BBC interview. However, a PKK website recorded the attack in its 22 July summary of actions against Turkish forces. It attributed the attack to the Apocu Fedai Timi, but did not dissociate the group from the PKK: "A retribution operation was carried out against two police officers" the text read. "Adıyaman'da Çatışma, Türk Ordusundan Yoğun Hareketlilikler" ["Fighting in Adıyaman, extensive movements from the Turkish military"], hezenparastin.org, 22 July 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Figures drawn from Crisis Group's open-source database.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. Based on open sources it has been possible to establish that 49 of the 151 south-eastern residents killed between July and 14 December were males, sixteen to 30 years of age. Presumed to be militants by the state but declared civilians by the HDP, their deaths remain murky and are often unreported in the mainstream media. "Many who fight are sixteen. Are these terrorists or kids? It is difficult for the state to label a sixteen-year-old a terrorist ... we should not consent to that shortcut. These kids ... are carrying RPGs [rocket-propelled grenades], [but] they are not automatically terrorists. They are a 'new category' ..., we need to ... create a new definition for it". Crisis Group telephone interview, Metin Gürcan, security analyst, ex-Turkish military adviser, 26 November 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Beginning in August 2015, security forces have called 62 curfews in twelve towns and urban districts in the south east. A few communities have borne most of them; the districts of Nusaybin, Cizre, Lice and Silvan and Sur district in Diyarbakır have had more than three each. Nusaybin had a recorded fourteen-day curfew in November, and Cizre had eight days in September during which 21 residents were killed. Silvan has had six since August, including ten days in November, when tanks were deployed to the city centre and thousands were forced from their homes. It was the first time in over two decades that conflict in the south east has led to major civilian displacement. The conservative NGO MazlumDer, which has criticised both sides, estimated that as many as 25,000 were temporarily displaced by a ten-day curfew in Silvan. "Silvan report by Mazlum Der", T24, 17 November 2015.



YDG-H decisively.<sup>31</sup> The move to urban centres distinguishes the current violence from the July 2011-March 2013 flare-up, which was largely in the mountains and affected fewer civilians.<sup>32</sup>

The Kurdish movement asserts that security teams linked to the president and/or remnants of the “deep state” are stirring up the region.<sup>33</sup> The HDP and the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) submitted a parliamentary motion of inquiry about the “Esedullah team”, which they say, based on reports by locals, is a paramilitary group with alleged links to the police that threatens civilians and vandalises Kurdish neighbourhoods with militarist, ultra-nationalist graffiti.<sup>34</sup> Reports of rights violations and violence by security forces have become commonplace; a particularly grave case concerns the death of Hacı Lokman Birlik, a militant whose body was filmed by security officials as it was dragged behind a police car on the streets of Şırnak in October.<sup>35</sup> Investigations have begun, but the fear of unresolved rights abuses and killings raise Kurdish fears of paramilitary tactics the state used in the 1990s.

While fighting has raged in the south east, spillover from Syria has continued to fuel anti-state sentiment among HDP supporters. In the single deadliest terrorist attack in Turkey, two IS-linked suicide bombers attacked an Ankara peace rally on 10 October, killing 103 mainly pro-Kurdish activists. Between June and 15 December 2015, 708 individuals, including 290 civilians were killed in PKK-Turkey clashes and alleged IS bombings.<sup>36</sup>

The Kurdish movement accuses the AKP and President Erdoğan of igniting violence and creating instability to gain nationalist votes.<sup>37</sup> Government officials attribute the escalation of violence to PKK hardliners who felt threatened by the HDP’s June electoral success and initiated fighting to ensure they retained the whip hand in

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<sup>31</sup> On a Crisis Group consultant’s visit to Cizre in October 2015, a month after an eight-day curfew, Kurdish militants patrolled sandbagged checkpoints; Kurdish flags and Öcalan pictures hung in the streets.

<sup>32</sup> According to Crisis Group’s open source database, the first seven months of violence in 2011 claimed 325 lives, including 38 civilians. In the past seven months of fighting between the PKK and Turkish security forces, 563 have been killed, including 151 civilians.

<sup>33</sup> Crisis Group interviews, PKK figures and HDP officials, Brussels and Ankara, October and November 2015. The “deep state” refers to a clandestine network of security and intelligence officers and political groups linked to the state structures that, among other actions, tortured and murdered Kurdish activists in the 1980s and 1990s, sometimes using proxies.

<sup>34</sup> “They point guns at women and children. They force men to lie face down and then stomp on their hands, feet and backs. They know no law. Their faces are covered, and no one even knows who they are”. HDP lawmaker Çağlar Demirel quoted in “Who are Allah’s Lions?”, *Al-Monitor*, 25 November 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Another example is the case of Kevser Eltürk, a militant whose corpse was reportedly stripped naked and photographed by security forces in August.

<sup>36</sup> Crisis Group open-source figures. 86 of 194 security-force deaths Crisis Group tracked were from improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Most others occurred in security forces-PKK gun battles. At least six vehicle-borne IED suicide attacks were carried out in 2015, one on an Istanbul police station. Since 1 October, eight of eighteen recorded IED attacks have occurred in urban areas, further endangering civilian lives.

<sup>37</sup> “President Erdoğan aims at the realisation of a ‘Turkey-type presidential regime’ which will render him the sole political authority in Turkey. In order to achieve this, Mr Erdoğan needs his party ... to secure the majority ... in the parliament to form a single-party government. Pushing the HDP under the electoral threshold ... stands out as a straightforward tactic ... to achieve this, the AKP adopted ‘escalation of violence’ as a strategic approach”. Press statement, HDP co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, 12 October 2015.

the south east.<sup>38</sup> In any event, the result of the 1 November election deepened those mutual suspicions. The AKP won 49.5 per cent, enough to comfortably form a single party government. The HDP, disempowered by armed conflict, lost nearly a million votes compared to June, though its 10.7 per cent share of the total kept it in parliament.

HDP officials attribute their losses to an unfair, insecure electoral environment: they were unable to hold mass rallies after the Ankara bombing; provincial offices were attacked; an intimidation campaign hindered party representatives from appearing in mainstream media; and thousands of pro-Kurdish activists were detained and hundreds arrested.<sup>39</sup> The AKP's reading of the results was expressed by one of its parliamentarians:

Seeing the unitary nature of the country under threat, both Turkish nationalists and Kurdish constituencies rallied behind the AKP. ... The people in Silvan, Cizre, Nusaybin did not stand behind the democratic self-rule ideal that the PKK is propagating. If they had stood behind it, we would have seen a completely different, much more violent scenario that could even have led to a civil war.<sup>40</sup>

Internal political divergences over two elections in five months during which the ceasefire collapsed thus led to the burning of painstakingly-built political bridges.

### III. False Confidence

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In his first post-1 November speech, President Erdoğan redefined the “process” with Kurds as the “National Unity and Brotherhood Process”. This, he indicated, combines a militaristic approach to the PKK with an agenda of engagement with Turkey's Kurds more generally – a notion already used in the past and that, as in 2011, marks a distinction from the direct talks with the PKK. The president said:

Operations in and outside the country against the terrorist organisation [PKK] are continuing, and we will not halt these .... Until all members of the terrorist organisation are liquidated, either by surrendering or leaving the country, we will continue this struggle. Until all [PKK] structures in cities are brought down, our security forces will continue operations.<sup>41</sup>

According to government officials, civilian casualties and prolonged disruption of normal life are turning the south east against the PKK.<sup>42</sup> Members of the Kurdish movement dispute this, arguing that the urban warfare has caused residents to per-

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<sup>38</sup> Crisis Group interview, AKP parliamentarian, Ankara, 18 November 2015.

<sup>39</sup> The Human Rights Association (IHD), sympathetic to the Kurdish movement, estimates ten HDP members were killed in more than 175 attacks on the party before the June election. “HDP'ye Yönelik Bombalı ve Silahlı Saldırıları Kınıyor, Sorumluları Lanetliyoruz” [“We condemn the bombings and armed attacks against the HDP and denounce those responsible”], 6 June 2015, [www.ihd.org.tr/hdp-ye-yonelik-bombali-ve-silahli-saldirilari-kiniyor-sorumlulari-lanetliyoruz](http://www.ihd.org.tr/hdp-ye-yonelik-bombali-ve-silahli-saldirilari-kiniyor-sorumlulari-lanetliyoruz). It said over 5,000 pro-Kurdish persons have been detained, over 1,000 arrested and 114 attacks conducted against the HDP after the 7 June election. “İHD: 7 Haziran'dan bu yana 602 kişi hayatını kaybetti” [“IHD: 602 lives lost since 7 June”], T24, 12 November 2015.

<sup>40</sup> Crisis Group interview, Ankara, November 2015.

<sup>41</sup> Speech, 4 November 2015, to mayors, Presidential Palace, Ankara, Crisis Group translation.

<sup>42</sup> “The public supports the state's operations. So [they] will continue, because if [they stop], even more weapons and bombs will come back to the cities”. Crisis Group interview, AKP parliamentarian, Ankara, November 2015.

ceive the state as more hostile than ever.<sup>43</sup> There is some truth to both arguments. The 2.5-year ceasefire had given many Kurds in the region hope for a peaceful existence, and many hold both sides responsible for the new fighting.<sup>44</sup>

Both sides are confident their international position is improving. The PKK is ready to capitalise on the successes of its affiliated groups in Syria to bolster its position vis-à-vis Turkey. The West's growing reliance on the YPG in the struggle against IS has increased the legitimacy of the PYD (Democratic Union Party)/YPG and given momentum to their aspiration for a PYD-run project of Kurdish autonomous enclaves in Syria.

The deterioration of Moscow-Ankara relations since Turkey downed a Russian fighter jet on 24 November may have further elevated PKK confidence. In the days following, Cemil Bayık, executive council member of the Union of Communities in Kurdistan (KCK), issued a statement supporting the Russian position, and Moscow signalled the potential for its direct support to YPG forces in Syria.<sup>45</sup> These developments raise concerns PKK hardliners will feel their hand stronger and see less interest in returning to peace talks with Turkey.<sup>46</sup>

Ankara, meanwhile, views its regional stock as rising and sees its critical role in the fight against IS as insurance against PKK ambitions in Syria.<sup>47</sup> Washington, after obtaining opening of the Incilirk Air Base to U.S.-led anti-IS coalition forces in July, would like Turkey to seal a crucial stretch of border across from IS-held Syrian territory.<sup>48</sup> At the same time, the PYD, which lacks will or legitimacy to occupy and govern majority-Arab cities in northern Syria, appears to have reached its natural limits.<sup>49</sup> Turkey, a Turkish expert said:

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<sup>43</sup> A group within state security forces wrote on a wall in Silvan, 9 November 2015, referring to the grey wolf, a symbol of Turkish nationalism, "Kurdun dışına kan değdi, korkun" (The wolf has blood on its teeth now, beware). "Silvan'da Sokağa Çıkma Yasağı Sona Erdi" ["Ceasefire in Silvan ended"], *Bianet*, 14 November 2015.

<sup>44</sup> Observations by Crisis Group researcher, Diyarbakır, October 2015.

<sup>45</sup> According to YPG officials, Russia has offered to direct support to YPG forces, potentially as part of a deal that would include increased cooperation between the YPG and Syrian regime. The YPG has thus far refused, in part to avoid damaging its military relationship with the U.S. Russia has also conducted airstrikes against anti-IS Syrian rebels who have clashed with the YPG north of Aleppo; according to the YPG, Russia has not coordinated such strikes with its forces or leaders. Crisis Group interviews, Qamishli and Hassakeh, December 2015.

<sup>46</sup> "KCK's Bayık: Turkey downed the Russian plane to protect IS", *Firat News Agency*, 26 November 2015. YPG officials in Syria emphasise that their forces are not a party to the PKK-Turkey conflict; some argue privately that PYD/YPG has been negatively affected by the end of the Turkey-PKK ceasefire and would benefit from resumption of the peace process. Crisis Group interview, YPG official, Qamishli, 2 December 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Particularly since October 2015, Turkey has dramatically ramped up its domestic crackdown on the group. According to a Crisis Group open-source database, Ankara has arrested 92 and detained at least 685 on suspected IS links. Security forces claim to have killed twelve IS militants since October, while two police officers have been killed in shootouts with the group. In cooperation with nations in Europe and the Middle East, Turkey maintains a list of 26,000 foreign nationals barred from entering the country for suspected IS ties.

<sup>48</sup> "US urges Turkey to seal border", *The Wall Street Journal*, 27 November 2015.

<sup>49</sup> See Crisis Group Middle East Report N°151, *Flight of Icarus? The PYD's Precarious Rise in Syria*, 8 May 2014.

... is a strong state. Its strategic importance for the U.S. and the West will always outweigh the PKK's or the PYD's. Europe needs Turkey for the refugee crisis, and the U.S. needs Turkey to be able to fight IS more effectively.<sup>50</sup>

Nevertheless, however strong their convictions may be about favourable opportunities, neither side stands to win a decisive advantage at home or abroad.

Both PYD/YPG and Ankara are emboldened by their strategic importance for Washington, the former as the most effective fighting force against IS in Syria, the other as a critical NATO ally that can aid in mobilising Sunni forces in Syria. However, the flare up in the PKK-Turkey conflict complicates the U.S.-led coalition's fight against IS, especially because Turkey refuses to collaborate directly or indirectly with the YPG. Bringing the PKK and Ankara back to the negotiation table could potentially open the way for a more constructive PYD-Turkey relationship, enhancing the anti-IS efforts. Washington should use its leverage over both the YPG/PYD and Ankara to condition its military and political support in Syria to parameters that PYD and Ankara can agree on, such as separating more clearly the link between PKK and PYD.

For the EU, the Syrian refugee crisis and Turkey's role in helping manage it have been a key focus. Their November summit committed Turkey and the EU to re-energise the relationship and enhance political and financial engagement. It identified measures to address the migration and refugee crisis, indicated movement toward visa liberalisation and opened possibilities for revitalisation of Turkey's accession process, including the opening on 14 December of Chapter seventeen of that process, on further economic integration. This positive outlook is fragile, however. Risks range from confidence breaking down over the migration deal's implementation to slow progress on requirements for visa-free travel, opening negotiations on Chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (justice, freedom and security) of the accession process or the Cyprus question.<sup>51</sup> While there is strong potential in this relaunched relationship, the cycle could turn vicious if individual elements do not fall into place.<sup>52</sup>

#### **IV. Conclusion: The Way Forward**

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The new cabinet's program, announced on 25 November, commits to neither addressing any particular Kurdish rights demands nor going back to peace talks with the PKK, but rather includes vague references to the entire nation needing to be on board in determining the steps to take. Officials suggest they will bypass the most prominent Kurdish actors, Öcalan/PKK and HDP, in favour of alternative groups, including traditional clan structures, religious leaders, smaller parties and middle-class busi-

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<sup>50</sup> Crisis Group interview, Turkish foreign policy expert, Ankara, November 2015.

<sup>51</sup> The 35 chapters of the EU *acquis* form the basis of the accession negotiations for each candidate country. Fifteen chapters have now been opened in the accession negotiations with Turkey, one of which has been provisionally closed (completed). Talks to reunify that island resumed in May 2015. Resolution of the Cyprus problem would remove a major obstacle to Turkey's accession. A referendum on reunification may be held in spring 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Crisis Group interview, EU official, Brussels, December 2015.

ness circles.<sup>53</sup> This tactic, familiar from pre-AKP eras, is likely to backfire. Many of the groups with which they plan to engage are at odds with the HDP and the PKK, and selective engagement risks marginalising those who have been radicalised by urban crackdowns. The HDP, now in parliament, can be a constructive counterpart on issues pertaining to Kurdish rights, though it has no sway over the PKK.

Direct negotiations with the PKK, in parallel with a genuine reform agenda that engages with legal actors in Ankara and the parliamentary opposition key Kurdish rights demands, such as enshrining mother-tongue education and decentralisation in a new constitution, remains the only viable way to end the three-decade insurgency. Postponement drives the death-toll on both sides higher and plays into the hands of the common IS enemy.<sup>54</sup>

Worryingly, there are sharply divergent views about the conduct of future talks. The Kurdish movement and the AKP both oppose a repeat of secretive negotiations between Öcalan and state security officials. AKP representatives believe the PKK no longer listens to Öcalan, so there is little point in dealing with him, at least until the PKK is weakened.<sup>55</sup> The regionalisation of the conflict indeed appears to have cost Öcalan some influence, as have his fifteen years in jail, significantly separated from the broader Kurdish movement.

PKK representatives hold that Öcalan remains their chief negotiator, however, and say that the state never responded to his proposals with concrete ones of their own. They argue that he must be allowed to talk with others in the organisation's leadership as needed. The negotiations should be more inclusive, they assert, with relevant figures brought to the table depending on the issue – for example, other representatives of the PKK leadership should be brought into the discussion on monitoring a ceasefire, NGOs and other experts on forming a truth commission and opposition parties on constitutional changes.<sup>56</sup> The way the talks took place previously cannot continue, a well-known PKK figure insisted: “There is no point in stringing each other along. Either we sit at the table in a serious way, or the conflict continues”.<sup>57</sup>

An HDP parliamentarian, who was part of the delegation visiting Öcalan in April 2015, suggested that President Erdoğan, in particular, rejected moving from “dialogue” to actual “negotiations”, as the government would not have been able to back-

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<sup>53</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Ankara, November 2015. AKP officials explained to Crisis Group that in their summer meetings with groups from the region, grievance was expressed about the HDP being treated as the sole representative of the Kurds.

<sup>54</sup> See Berkay Mandıracı, “Islamic State’s Threat to Turkey”, Crisis Group blog, 19 October 2015.

<sup>55</sup> Crisis Group interview, Turkish official, Ankara, November 2015. A minister of the new cabinet explained: “During the peace process, they [presumably the PKK] saw the compassionate hand of the state. Good will was exploited. We have now pulled out our strong hand. The operations have been 70-80 per cent successful. In a few months, the success rate will reach above 90 per cent. Turkey needs to continue these operations with determination. This method of combatting terror will not change for at least two or three years. The process regarding the legitimate demands of Kurdish citizens will continue though. [These demands] will be taken into consideration in the work toward a new constitution”. “Bakan Müezzinoğlu *Hürriyet*’e açıkladı: Yasaklı bölgelere haftalık nöbet” [“Minister Müezzinoğlu explained to *Hürriyet*: Weekly watch in banned regions”], *Hürriyet*, 13 December 2015.

<sup>56</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Remzi Kartal, Kongra-Gel co-chairperson, and Zübeyir Aydar, KCK executive council member, Brussels, 14 October 2015.

<sup>57</sup> Crisis Group interview, Zübeyir Aydar, Brussels, 14 October 2015.

out of the process once the talks had a more institutionalised structure.<sup>58</sup> The build-up of distrust has resulted in a PKK demand for the state to reply in writing to Öcalan's proposals and for audio, visual and written recordings, so proceedings cannot later be denied.<sup>59</sup>

No topic has been more divisive than that of a role for a neutral observer – a “third eye”, to bear witness to the talks and possibly also determine responsibility for breaches of agreements by conducting independent investigations and making public announcements. An independent third party functioning as a monitor in PKK-Turkey talks could institutionalise the process and make it less vulnerable to manipulation. Government representatives have repeatedly expressed opposition to a foreign monitor.<sup>60</sup> Kurdish movement representatives hold that this reluctance is rooted in a desire to monopolise the process so it can be used for political benefit. Figures close to the AKP say the PKK should be most worried about such a concept, as its leaders are the ones unaccountable to any constituency and whose violations (eg, of a ceasefire) would be revealed.<sup>61</sup> Reviving the monitoring committee to which the government agreed but the president objected may be the key to reconfiguring a more solid process.

Also needed is a more structured, institutionalised format for talks, built around a clear timeline. Independently, the government should likewise focus on regaining, with democratic advances, the confidence of a wider segment of society, including HDP supporters. Shedding overconfidence based on its electoral victory and perceived geostrategic advantage, it should return to a rights roadmap that concretely addresses Kurdish demands, including – besides key points of decentralisation and mother-tongue education – a fairer anti-terrorism law, a new definition of citizenship free from ethnic references and lowering of the 10 per cent electoral threshold.<sup>62</sup> That there will be no election for four years and the HDP is in parliament offers an opportunity to formulate a broad platform, though the former factor may reduce the sense of urgency the situation requires.

To counter the growing concern that it has adopted a security-dominated approach to the Kurdish issue, the AKP must also end politically motivated arrests and the security forces' perceived impunity, including by effectively investigating past

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<sup>58</sup> “Each time the government faced a point from which they would not later be able to reverse course, they back out. This happened after Dolmabahçe, and then with regard to the monitoring committee in April. But each time, their propaganda machine makes up other reasons, like saying Qandil was not going to follow Öcalan's word anyway”. Crisis Group interview, İdris Baluken, HDP deputy chair and parliamentarian, Ankara, 18 November 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Crisis Group interviews, PKK and HDP representatives, including Remzi Kartal, Zübeyir Aydar and İdris Baluken.

<sup>60</sup> On 18 November 2014, Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said, “there cannot be an eye from outside the country. We tried it with the Oslo process. That was a process with a facilitator. We have seen the results. It did not work. This is Turkey's issue. It has to be discussed among Turkey's citizens”. “Davutoğlu: Çözüm sürecinde yabancı göz olmaz” [“Davutoğlu: There cannot be a foreign eye in the resolution process”], Al Jazeera Turk, 19 November 2014. The “Oslo Process” refers to the first significant talks between the PKK and the Turkish state, which took place secretly between 2008 and 2011.

<sup>61</sup> Crisis Group interviews, Turkish official and former member of the Wise Persons Group composed of opinion leaders tasked with meeting locals throughout 2013 to spread the government's peace agenda, Ankara and Istanbul, November 2015.

<sup>62</sup> These points were outlined in detail in Crisis Group Europe Report N°227, *Crying Wolf: Why Turkish Fears Need Not Block Kurdish Reform*, 7 October 2013.

and present rights abuses. Simultaneously carrying out its crackdown on IS is essential to sustain credibility with Kurds domestically and the West externally.

Finally, a ceasefire that saves civilian lives and allows talks to resume where they left off is necessary, but insufficient in isolation from a broader strategy for peace. The PKK and the Turkish state should pursue a ceasefire as the essential basis for a consolidated and clearly-defined peace process.

**Istanbul/Brussels, 17 December 2015**

Appendix A: Map of Turkey





## Appendix B: Glossary of Terms

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**AKP** – Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party): Turkey's ruling party, currently led by Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.

**CHP** – Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Republican People's Party): Turkey's largest opposition party.

**HDP** – Halkların Demokratik Partisi (Peoples' Democratic Party): The main legal party representing the Kurdish national movement in Turkey.

**IS** (formerly ISIL) – The Islamic State, formerly Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant: The best known of the jihadi militant opposition groups fighting in Syria and Iraq, it generates strong criticism for its authoritarian tactics, public executions, ideological extremism and vicious sectarianism.

**KCK** – Koma Ciwakên Kurdistanê (Union of Communities in Kurdistan): Created by the PKK in 2005-2007, it is an umbrella organisation for all PKK affiliates in Kurdish communities in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Syria (including the PYD, see below) and the Kurdish diaspora.

**Kongra-Gel** – Kongreya Azadi u Demokrasiya Kurdistan (Kurdistan People's Congress): A name used interchangeably with PKK since 2001.

**KNK** – Kongreya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê (Kurdish National Congress): Established after the arrest of Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, the Brussels-based group organises meetings of Europe's pro-PKK Kurdish diaspora and lobbies both European and Belgian parliaments.

**PKK** – Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Workers' Party): Co-founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan, it started an armed insurgency in Turkey in 1984. It is banned as a terrorist and drug-smuggling organisation by Turkey, the EU, the U.S. and a number of other countries.

**PYD** – Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat (Democratic Union Party): The Syrian Kurdish affiliate of the PKK/KCK, founded in 2003.

**YDG-H** Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareket (Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement): Created as a pro-PKK urban youth group in February 2013, it founded armed branches in cities throughout the south east of Turkey in 2013-2014.

**YPG** – Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units): The military wing of the PYD.