

# Quaderns de Construcció de Pau

## Turkey and the Kurdish question: Reflecting on peacebuilding

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Peacebuilding Papers (*Quaderns de Construcció de Pau*) is a publication of the School for a Culture of Peace (Escola de Cultura de Pau). Its objective is to disseminate the research conducted in this institution on peacebuilding and to bring it closer to the interested public. These research papers will follow three basic lines of work. First, they will offer academic analyses of a variety of topical issues. A second series of documents will make proposals to facilitate intervention by actors involved in the various aspects of peacebuilding. Finally, monographs will analyse current armed conflicts, situations of tension, peace processes or postwar rehabilitation processes, based on field work by researchers from the School for a Culture of Peace.

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## SUMMARY

The Kurdish question in Turkey is one of the most pressing challenges in the republic of Turkey, while the interrelated armed conflict involving the PKK armed guerrilla is among the oldest ongoing wars in the world. This report argues that the conflict over the Kurdish question (broadly understood in all its dimensions) has reached over the years a phase in which ambivalent synergies coexist. On one hand, multiple processes and factors at different levels and fields have led the conflict to a stage of conflict-resolution opportunity. That is, there are conditions opening the door to the peaceful resolution of the conflict, which implies peace efforts at this stage are strategic. However, on the other hand, and as the 2009-2010 period has shown, there are multiple obstacles and risks, including non-inclusive and non-comprehensive approaches to the conflict which could perpetuate it or lead it to less tractable conflict expressions and further antagonism. This report reflects on this junction and its dilemmas and challenges, specifically in terms of peacebuilding, including building sufficient consensus on how to deal with the Kurdish issue and on how to engage with and anchor conflict-resolution processes.

## 1. Introduction

The so-called Kurdish question<sup>1</sup> is one of the main conflict issues in Turkey, and one that has seen profound transformations in the last decade. The Kurdish question refers to a complex conflict over which there is not a unique understanding or a unified narrative, and that has different dimensions. The Kurdish question is often characterised as having two main interconnected levels. On one hand, it consists on a problem of accommodation of plurality, specifically Kurdish identity demands, into the Turkish state. These identity-based demands are multidimensional and include demands for non-discrimination in the political, social, cultural and economic spheres and, in turn, the right for an active and equal participation as Kurds in all those fields. This problem of accommodation of plurality has historical roots and has been present in Turkey at least since its establishment as a republic in the first decades of the XX century.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, an armed conflict between the Kurdish armed group PKK<sup>3</sup> and the State started in 1984, and with different intensity levels it has been alive up to present time. It has had a high human and social cost, including around 40,000 deaths,<sup>4</sup> at least nearly a million of internally displaced persons,<sup>5</sup> specific gender impacts (e.g. sexual violence against women), high levels of trauma and significant economic costs.<sup>6</sup> This violent campaign was preceded historically by other experiences of violence involving the State and Kurds.<sup>7</sup> Root causes of the armed conflict involving the PKK and the State are interconnected to the general framework of discrimination and plurality challenges of the first dimension, while the armed conflict has also its own dynamics and specific actors. This continued presence of various forms of violence throughout time has contributed to the lack of a culture of peace in Turkey. The two dimensions mentioned here are closely interrelated and therefore solutions need to be also interrelated, comprehensive and multidimensional. In addition, there is an international dimension to the conflict, which manifests itself in different ways at the level of armed conflict and of the general Kurdish question.

All of this has made the Kurdish question a complex, deep-rooted and emotional conflict, interlinked with the historic process of state and nation-building in Turkey, and that has generated chronic prejudices, mistrust and

1 The label given to the conflict is in itself a matter of conflict. Using one term or another (e.g. Kurdish question or southeast conflict) has often been seen as adopting a specific position in the conflict. However this report will use the term "Kurdish question" to avoid reducing the object of study to a limited geographical setting and so as to reflect broader aspects of it beyond territory. Nonetheless, the author of this report maintains an independent position and does not associate herself to any given group or interested party in the conflict.

2 In fact, the Kurdish question goes back in time beyond the XX century, being a conflict issue for centuries (TESEV, 2011), even if the transformations of the XX century in Turkey have strongly influenced the direction of the issue up to present time.

3 PKK is used in this report as the generic name generally used to refer to the Kurdish armed group. In 2002, the group changed its name into KADEK, as part of its transformation into non-violent strategies, even if maintaining an alleged self-defence force or armed wing (HPG). In 2003 the group changed again its name to Kongra-Gel. However, in order to simplify the understanding of the content of this report, this document will not use PKK/KADEK/KONGRA GEL, but rather PKK.

4 The International Institute for Strategic Studies estimates in 41,680 the death toll since 1984. <http://www.iiss.org/publications/armed-conflict-database/> [consulted 21.06.11]. Media reports oscillate between 40,000 and 45,000 deaths. According to the conservative estimations of the Uppsala Conflict Database Project, the armed conflict has produced a death toll of at least 26,054 since 1984.

5 Figures are different depending on the sources, even if an accepted estimation is a balance of between 950,000 and 1.2 million people, according to a 2006 study by Hacettepe University's Institute of Population Studies, which is also mentioned by HRW. (HRW 2010).

6 The armed conflict has had an estimated cost of more than 200 billion US dollars (Ünver 2010: 2)

7 While the armed conflict between the State and the PKK started in 1984 and can be seen as a differentiated war, distinct from previous experiences of violence, it is still relevant to take into account the existence of previous violent dynamics involving Turkey and the Kurds, as they add to the historical memory of suffering and casualties, prejudices, and mutual mistrust between the State and the Kurdish population, among other things. While analyses tend to emphasize the distinctive nature of previous Kurdish rebellions, highlighting that they were based on religion in contrast to PKK rebellion, this report considers it important to emphasize certain continuation in terms of the symbolic meaning (resistance of Kurds towards repression by authorities) attributed to them by Kurds among the current Kurdish nationalist movement. As a local journalist highlighted in an interview for this report, throughout the history "Kurds were not silent, they were speaking through guns", in the understanding that guns were mainly a means (violent means) to communicate demands. Therefore, from a conflict-transformation perspective, solutions to the conflict would need to take into account the local perception among many Kurds of the need to be given space in the legal political field to defend their projects. In turn, the historic recurrence to violence by Kurds requires big efforts to demystify and delegitimize the use of violence as means to achieve political objectives. The enormous distrust between State authorities and the Kurdish nationalist movement is not easy to bridge.

suffering. Its multi-dimensionality results also in certain complexity in terms of actors (e.g. actors at socio-political level and actors at armed conflict level, and relations between them, including power relations), as it happens in other conflicts. The Kurdish question is a lasting one but it has evolved and transformed itself, while remaining a core issue in Turkey waiting for a solution. That is, while it is no longer the open war of the 90s, and it has de-escalated since then to phases of a low-level and medium-level armed conflict, it has remained directly or indirectly at the centre of the political, social and security imaginary in Turkey.

Evolution of the conflict (at armed level and at general level) has taken place in multiple directions and dimensions up to present time.<sup>8</sup> The amelioration in the situation of Kurds in Turkey is highlighted by local and international observers. Legal or *de facto* changes have taken place in Turkey reducing discrimination and open violence (e.g. lifting of the state of emergency; reduction in human rights violations, such as torture; lifting of some restrictions on linguistic rights; establishment of a state TV channel with 24 hours in Kurdish). However, many restrictions for the development and implementation of the Kurdish identity and their well-being (e.g. restrictions in linguistic rights, including prohibition of public education in mother tongue and access to health services in Kurdish; socio-economic inequalities; difficulties for political engagement at formal level, including difficulties linked to the electoral threshold and the legal provisions for dissolution of political parties; restrictions to media in Kurdish) as well as the continuation of direct violence implies that the Kurdish question remains as a main challenge for Turkey to address. And as a challenge, it has also specific dimensions, such as its gender dimension, including specific impacts of violence related to the conflict on women, as different to men; specific impacts on Kurdish women, as different to Turkish women; peace initiatives carried on by women; participation of women in PKK guerrilla and future challenges for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of women combatants, amongst others.<sup>9</sup>

There is a need to address questions in the light of new realities without losing the long-term perspective and root causes. Some of the questions this report addresses have mainly to do with how to move forwards and how to deal with the complex

cul-de-sacs in which the Kurdish question, as many other conflicts around the world, seems often to get trapped. Some of these questions include: is there willingness to reach a comprehensive and agreeable solution? how to deal with the use of violence? Has the security approach been transformed into a more comprehensive one? how to build consensus or agreement on how to proceed towards conflict-resolution?, how to move from exploratory talks or from preparatory ground into a consolidated process of conflict-resolution? who should dialogue with whom and about what?, how to overcome polarisation and politization of conflict-resolution initiatives?, how to promote the transformation of the conflict in a way that addresses also the specific needs of Turkish and Kurdish women and that does not exclude them from peacebuilding and from the benefits of a potential peace dividend?, amongst others. Questions as such are not unique to the Kurdish question, even if each conflict has its own causes, dynamics and paths towards conflict-resolution. What is a common trend is that armed conflicts are seldom solved through violence.

This report argues that conflict over the Kurdish question has reached a phase in which ambivalent synergies coexist. On one hand, multiple processes at different levels and fields have led the conflict to a stage of conflict-resolution opportunity. That is, there are conditions opening the door to the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Those factors include structural changes in multi-level transformative processes, which allow foreseeing potential positive sum scenarios. However, on the other hand, and as the 2009-2010 period has shown, there are multiple obstacles and risks, including non-inclusive approaches, erratic and defiant strategies that can fuel antagonism and less tractable expressions of violence. This report reflects on this junction and highlights elements of both dynamics, and as a result argues that some main current challenges have to do with building sufficient consensus on how to engage with and how to anchor conflict-resolution processes and with bridging the gap between the sides. It is understood here that differences over the issues at stake should be part of the discussions of a following comprehensive process. Moreover, there is apparently a significant degree of flexibility regarding issues at stake. Ultimately, this paper concludes that transformations and processes taking place in Turkey potentially favour a peaceful exit to the conflict, much more clearly than in the past, and much desired by the population of Turkey, which nonetheless will be long and complex. The whole Turkey would benefit from a peaceful resolution of the conflict of the Kurdish question, gaining coherence between domestic and international policies, reinforcing democratization and plurality, and offering a possible model in the region and abroad. For that to happen, obstacles and confrontation dynamics need to be addressed.

<sup>8</sup> There is extensive literature on the evolution of the conflict. This report does not go into detail in the history and evolution of the Kurdish question, as there is extensive literature on that, but rather focuses on a conflict-resolution perspective with a practical orientation at current stage.

<sup>9</sup> Specific information on the gender impacts of the armed conflict and, more generally, the Kurdish question on women as well information on women peace initiatives can be found in the Database on Conflict and Peacebuilding of the School for a Culture of Peace, at <http://escolapau.uab.es/conflictosypaz/genero.php?paramidioma=1&idgenero=29>

This report is structured as follows. First, it analyses and reflects on the current junction and its ambivalence, including a specific reflection on the cul-de-sac of the use of violence. In doing so, it deals with issues related to the use of violence as well as to ceasefires. Secondly, it addresses challenges related to peacebuilding, including the vacuum in trust-building measures. Besides, the report mainstreams a comparative perspective by means of introducing elements and reflections coming from the study of armed conflicts and peace processes around the world; and it also mainstreams elements related to the gender dimension.

This report is the result of field and desk research on the Kurdish question, as well as it draws on the analysis on armed conflict and peace processes around the world carried out by the Escola de Cultura de Pau (School for a Culture of Peace).<sup>10</sup> It is not conceived as an exhaustive report on the Kurdish question, but rather as reflections to add to the current debate on peacebuilding in Turkey and to the literature on the field.

## 2. War and peace dynamics in the Kurdish question: addressing the junction

The year 2009 embodied the hope and desire for peace, the tensions between different approaches to the Kurdish question and the enormous difficulties for conflict-resolution. As a way of illustration, in the course of that year, Turkey saw new dialogue calls by the PKK; the launching of a Government's commitment to address the Kurdish question (the so-called Kurdish Opening, renamed Democratic Initiative and later on National Unity and Brotherhood Project); the high performance of pro-Kurdish DTP political party in local elections; the extension of a unilateral PKK ceasefire; the continuation of clashes and attacks, including some highly deadly attacks, by all sides, despite PKK unilateral ceasefire; the launching of massive police operations against Kurdish politicians, activists and individuals accused of being part of the KCK; the illegalization of the DTP; and the rise and decline of social hopes over peace, among other developments. The year 2010 was a continuation of this ambivalence and paradoxes.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The School for a Culture of Peace carries out research on armed conflicts, socio-political crises and peace processes around the world. One of its projects is the ECP Database on Conflict and Peacebuilding (<http://escolapau.uab.cat/english/conflictandpeacebuilding/index.php>).

<sup>11</sup> More specific information on the course of events of 2009 and 2010 can be reached at the ECP Database on Conflict and Peacebuilding (<http://escolapau.uab.es/conflictosypaz/ficha.php?idfichasubzona=25&paramidioma=1>), or in specific literature on those years, including Ünver and Karaveli (Karaveli: 2010, Ünver: 2010), amongst others.

In retrospect, the last years can be understood as a laboratory of different approaches to deal with and to solve the Kurdish question at a time when the sides realise that there is no military solution to the conflict,<sup>12</sup> or at least not an exclusively military solution to the conflict. In fact, as some local analysts point, there is increasing consensus on the existence of the Kurdish question – regardless of the name used to refer to it–, which is increasingly –but apparently not fully yet– understood as a multidimensional conflict and as one that has included historic discrimination against Kurds; consensus on the need to deal with it; and on the impossibility or unfeasibility of an exclusively military solution to put an end to violence. However, as local analysts highlight and as developments of the last years show, there is not yet broad convergence over how to solve this multidimensional conflict, neither in terms of process and format (how to move towards a solution, how to proceed?) nor in terms of content (which solutions to which conflict issues?). The result is a risky junction which can be protracted in time or addressed in different ways.

Some fundamental ideas that arise from the ground with regards the current junction are: a) there is a lack of convergence on how to solve the conflict in terms of strategies, which can be linked to different factors, among them the existence of a guerrilla that still uses violence and that is considered as a terrorist group by the State, as well as the factor of ambivalence by the State and Government, which have tried so far, to no avail, strategies of elimination of the PKK and of isolating and marginalising it, while a third way –dialogue– could be potentially a new strategy;<sup>13</sup> b) this lack of convergence on how to move forwards slows down the process, increases frustration and fuels periodical cycles of tension; c) disagreement over solutions to the issues at stake also slows down the searching of how to proceed towards conflict-resolution and, amid the lack of a consolidated process, the sides often opt for harsh public discourses on the issues at stake, even if their positions are in practice much more flexible; d) some of the main mechanisms through which current difficulties are materialised are through the neglecting of responsibility and putting

<sup>12</sup> There is increasing convergence by local analysts that all sides to the conflict, including the Army, realise that they can not win over the other exclusively through military means.

<sup>13</sup> Some observers identify the Kurdish Initiative launched by the Government as a move that tried to bypass the Kurdish nationalist movement, including Abdullah Öcalan. In fact, the timing of the initiative and its launching seemed aimed to “pre-empt [Öcalan’s] plan and announce a counter ‘Kurdish Initiative’” (Ünver 2010: 3). Some of the criticism from the pro-Kurdish DTP (succeeded by BDP) towards the Government was based also on that perception of a willingness to bypass and isolate the Kurdish movement, as showed by the massive detentions of Kurdish politicians and activists during 2009. However, at the same time there were elements of engagement hand in hand with the initiative, such as negotiations over the return of so-called Peace Group in October 2009 (Ünver 2010) and alleged talks with Öcalan, which implies the plan of the Government and the State was not just to bypass the Kurdish nationalist movement.

the burden on the opposed party to the conflict, as well as through zero-sum and defiant confrontation approaches (e.g. non-inclusive positions, pre-conditions, “agreement or war” threats), which pose the risk of totally alienating the other side; e) current structural favourable conditions require visionary leadership among the main parties as well as among other sectors (political opposition, business circles, regional players, etc.), with a sense of historical responsibility and courage, so as to take the risks of seizing this period of historical opportunity for peace in Turkey, and to work towards building a comprehensive process of conflict-resolution. While charismatic and rational leaders are in place currently among Turkey’s main actors to the conflict (e.g. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan; President Abdullah Gül; PKK’s leader Abdullah Öcalan<sup>14</sup>), this has not resulted so far in a substantive and sustainable process, but rather in erratic approaches and power politics; f) a critical mass in favour of dialogue and that promotes the building of bridges and the opening of spaces for dialogue would contribute to the solution. The latter would be more strategic if it builds on heterogeneous sectors, through more plural constituencies, avoiding reducing it to the usual lobbies identified with each side.

At the core of the junction there are thus two crossroads, one referring to methodology and process, and the other referring to the substantive issues of the conflict and the solutions. Regarding the first, the failure of unilateral and non-comprehensive previous approaches might open the door for future inclusive approaches in which all the main sides to the conflict (as well as other interested parties) directly or indirectly participate or are somehow included and/or acknowledged. However, this junction over the methodology and process includes also certain previous disagreement over the actors (who to engage with). Reports of State-PKK talks suggest the State realises that a definite solution requires BDP or PKK engagement but it might still be afraid or wary of this. Regarding the junction on substantive issues, positions seem to be more flexible than at first glance but they require a climate of inclusive engagement. In any case, two core issues cannot be avoided and which seem linked to a double solution model: “peace for DDR” and “peace for democratisation”. Both are interlinked and one might not take place without the other, even if timings could vary. Importantly, both have specific gender dimensions, including in terms of strengthening gender equity for women of all communities and backgrounds in Turkey, as well

as of taking into account specific gender aspects of future potential DDR measures. Besides, concrete provisions of each broad block (what, how, when, for who, with which guarantees, etc.) would be part of the discussion. Besides, it should be taken into account that the Kurdish junction is related to the general democratic junction Turkey faces, and as such, some of the main issues might be framed in ways that do not reflect a specific identity-based or Kurdish approach. The Kurdish side can see this as an opportunity and not necessarily as the neglecting of the specific Kurdish conflict.

The years 2009 and 2010 symbolised this lack of a common vision (or one that brings together sufficient political and social support) on how to proceed towards peace and conflict-resolution in terms of process. That would explain why the interpretation and evaluation of developments in this period differ among stakeholders, and would also explain the changing of mood, expectations and discourses over the course of those two years, during which the bottle was seen both as “half-full” and “half-empty”. This ambivalence and lack of agreement over how to proceed has taken place at a time when paradoxically the main sides (the State and the Kurdish nationalist movement) have expressed their readiness to address the Kurdish issue, even if by different ways, and can even point to parallel processes, one led by the Kurdish nationalist movement and the other led by the Government and the State. In fact, the question of whether they are ready and willing to engage with each other has not been fully answered yet.

This readiness connects with what seems to be at least a basic level of willingness to address and solve the issue, as local analysts identify and as evidenced by developments over the years, even if consensus on the best way to do it has not yet been reached. Reports of contacts between the State and PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan, the peace proposals by PKK, the launching of the democratic initiative by the Government, and the PKK ceasefires, among other elements, are indicators of the willingness to address the issue. Despite so, the ambiguity and erratic approaches question that level of willingness and the readiness and preparation to compromise on agreeable terms.

After more than two decades of armed conflict between the State and the PKK, and especially in the post-1999 period, it seems clear that there are scarce possibilities of putting an end to the armed conflict through violent means, and that at the same time reforms towards democratization that do not acknowledge the deep issues at stake in the Kurdish issue (e.g. education in mother tongue and discussions on decentralization, regardless of the final solutions) or that are not the result of

14 Even if PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan is often portrayed as a megalomaniac, some observers point that he is also a rational and cunning character. On the other hand, there is not consensus on whether he is still an effective leader or only a spiritual leader. In any case, he remains a unifying figure for the whole Kurdish nationalist movement.

inclusive processes in which all sides feel somehow included or acknowledged have scarce possibilities of providing sustainable solutions. Insistence in disconnected or maximalist strategies seem to be, up to certain point, the result of insufficient willingness to go to the core of the conflict or to assume the political risks, in tune with the usual positions of force in preliminary conflict-resolution stages in any given conflict and in tune with the fear to lose power positions acquired so far. This partial or insufficient willingness would also explain this erratic approach to conflict-resolution, at least to some extent, as if the sides would be testing their forces and their ability to influence others.

Besides, other factors seem to have contributed to these erratic conflict-resolution approaches, such as polarisation amid the population and between political parties, which can be connected to their struggle for power and the legacy of the Kemalist state ideology; the accumulated prejudices in society towards acknowledgement of plurality; the use of violence and the accumulated human cost; and the lack of a culture of peace and peace resources, including scarce second-track diplomacy initiatives, among others. Other factor refers to the lack of experience in the methodologies or processes of conflict-resolution and peace negotiations. That would imply specific obstacles for the Kurdish nationalist movement, while the Turkish State can more easily rely on its accumulated capabilities of external peace diplomacy.<sup>15</sup>

Nonetheless, despite the handicaps identified in the current junction there seems still to be a significant amount of will and context of opportunity to address and solve the Kurdish question in Turkey. It is this willingness that must be strengthened and channelled towards a consolidated process of conflict-resolution. The new post-electoral period in Turkey in 2011 may see more concerted and dialogue efforts between the sides and actors to the conflict to search for ways out of the current junction.

One of the elements of this junction, which is an issue to solve as part of a process of conflict-resolution and which is related to a future peace framework of "peace for DDR" (to be completed by "peace for democratisation"), is that of the use of violence and the armed struggle and, in turn, challenges of solving those. Some elements of this security dimension will be dealt with in the sub-sections that follow.

## 1.1. Armed struggle and armed conflict: a way out?

The war between the State and the PKK, including the use of violence by the PKK, has become both an obstacle for conflict-resolution – as violence raises social and political tension and it hinders readiness to compromise and dialogue and poses difficulties (legal and practical ones) to engage with main actors–, and a subject matter for conflict-resolution –as it is simultaneously a consequence of root causes and a cause in itself of further conflict. The respective unilateral requirements between the sides for a halt in violence (expressed in terms of unilateral demands by the PKK for a stop in army military operations and unilateral demand of the State for the "silencing" of PKK arms) have not produced results so far in terms of clear advances towards peace. Instead, the situation has often resembled a problematic cul-de-sac, based on a circle of violence, in which violence fuels more violence and in which arms are seen as a survival guarantee by the PKK. Thus, after decades of violence and lack of military effective solutions, some kind of negotiated deal that includes or results in the end of violence seems as the most viable way to address the existence of several thousand PKK armed combatants<sup>16</sup> and their use of armed struggle for political goals.

Guerrilla movements and armed groups find themselves in a difficult position in the XXI century, in which other ways of political struggle take prevalence all over the world, from South America to Asia, including civil disobedience, nonviolent strategies and formal politics. The use of violence is losing ground, morally and strategically; societies are tired of violence, and classic insurgencies are recognising that pattern. Often the result is that the use of violence ends up being counter-productive for the groups' alleged political goals and loses legitimacy in view of the existence of other legitimate, legal and nonviolent ways of struggle. This is also the case in Turkey in relation to the Kurdish issue, both in relation to the use of violence by the PKK and violence by Turkish security forces. But even if death tolls have de-escalated in the XXI century,<sup>17</sup> the armed conflict remains active, fuelling suffering and distress and feeding prejudices, fears and "images of the enemy". The difficult question is how to deal with the use of violence and how to find an exit for it. Certain pragmatism, realpolitik and creativity are needed for that.

<sup>16</sup> Figures of PKK combatants vary depending on the sources. Estimations oscillate between 5,000 and 10,000, according to some local observers. Besides, according to some observers, supporters or sympathizers of the armed group include about a hundred of thousands people, of which many would be ready to take up arms in case of clear necessity.

<sup>17</sup> According to the data of the IISS, there were around 200 deaths in the year 2001, 50 in 2002, 30 in 2003, 170 in 2004, 751 in 2005, 294 in 2006, 338 in 2007, 580 in 2008, 113 in 2009 and 230 in 2010.

<sup>15</sup> The fact that Turkey has become an active international player in terms of international peacebuilding and peace diplomacy contrasts with its reticence to solve the armed conflict between Turkey and the PKK through dialogue.

The decreasing appeal of the use of armed struggle is also related to another new element: the increasing self-assertion of Kurdish identity by the Kurds through political struggle and civil action, which results in the perception of the existence of other ways to pursue their demands, including politics at formal level, social mobilizations and also civil disobedience campaigns. According to local observers of the Kurdish question, Kurds are increasingly less fearful of asserting their Kurdish identity and of confronting the State in this new context of increased self-assertion. That would amount to a “Kurdish awakening” after years of fears of repression and violence by the State, according to some observers. Indicators such as recent defiant campaigns (e.g. boycotts by the Kurdish movement) are an example. This observation refers to the Kurdish nationalist movement and their sympathizers,<sup>18</sup> while many other Kurds are not mobilized in that way or do support other strategies and different political options.

Besides, the PKK itself has over the years transformed its strategies, allegedly subordinating armed struggle to political strategies. Thus, along the XXI century, the PKK has shifted its armed strategy, prioritising an allegedly self-defence type of armed insurgency over offensive tactics. Some of the factors related to that are a transformation of vision, objectives and means; an understanding of the impossibility of a military victory over the Army; evolution of global and regional dynamics; gradual diminishing of support, including increasing economic difficulties; increasing generational strains, etcetera. In practice, all this has resulted in periods of unilateral ceasefire, even before 1999. According to the PKK, there have been ceasefires in 1993, 1995, 1998, 2000-2004, 2006, 2009 and 2010. These have been accompanied by demands for a negotiated solution to the conflict as well as demands for the halting of military operations against the PKK by the Turkish army. However, even during PKK ceasefires there has been violence, both by the State and the “deep state”, who has always dismissed PKK ceasefires, as well as violence by the PKK itself or other Kurdish actors, whether in offensive or defensive terms.

Despite the general increasing questioning of the use of violence, both in Turkey and around the world, the PKK armed forces in the southeast of Turkey and northern Iraq still have broad direct or indirect support among large segments of population. This support relates to many factors: Abdullah Öcalan’s leverage over many Kurds; self-identification with PKK’s demands and social

agenda –which has resulted in transformation of social realities in the region into more egalitarian relations, including gender relations, at least at certain level–, lack of opportunities and precarious conditions for a large proportion of Kurdish youth in the southeast (poverty, unemployment, experiences of violence directly by themselves or in their families, etc.), personal and collective experiences of displacement, trauma and suffering linked to the Kurdish question, and involvement of one’s own relatives in the HPG and PKK, among other elements.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the use of violence and coercion has also been highlighted by some observers as an additional factor in that mobilising capacity that the PKK retains.

Consequently, the continuation of the armed struggle in the Kurdish regions in Turkey is still a reality, surrounded by factors that facilitate a significant degree of support to PKK combatants or, at least, support to their demands and, surely, to their spiritual leader, Abdullah Öcalan. This in turn, provides the PKK with a significant potential capacity of survival, regeneration and, consequently, of destabilization and perpetuation of violence, which should not be underestimated by the State. Intangible elements such as cohesion under the undisputed spiritual leadership of Öcalan, historical sense of honour and sacrifice among combatants, and the mystification or glorification that surrounds PKK combatants and Öcalan, adds to this continuation of the armed struggle. This coexists with a desire for peace and normalization.

Another factor that reinforces the continuation of armed struggle seems to be certain perception of the armed struggle as a valid last resort in a perceived absence of other options or in view of the obstaculization of other ways of struggle.<sup>20</sup> This would explain the belligerent rhetoric and the conceptualization of armed struggle as a “historical necessity” and as the medium that has managed to put Kurdish demands on the political agenda, as evidenced in the discourses of members of the Kurdish nationalist movement, including the Kurdish political parties. All this currently seems more related to the lack of a consolidated conflict-resolution process (and the usual fear to abandon what is considered as a survival guarantee in the absence of other guarantees), the increasing defiant self-assertive Kurdish positions and with a relatively unified vision among many Kurds in the region of the need for a decent solution to PKK combatants, rather than with a belief in violence as a

18 Traditionally it is estimated that the Kurdish nationalist movement mobilizes around 5% of the votes in the general elections, which could amount to one out of every three Kurds (Akyol 2011:20), although in the 2011 elections, the bloc led by BDP candidates got 5,9% of votes.

19 These factors do not exclude the possibility of imposed types of support, through coercive mechanisms.

20 As a local journalist highlighted, this has to do with the traditional saying –going back to Ottoman times– of “if they have the imperial edict we have the mountains”, in reference to this perception of conceptualising the armed struggle as a legitimate last resort.

legitimate and effective means in the current context, which is no longer the case. In fact, the Kurdish nationalist movement and the guerilla forces are mainly in favour of a peaceful solution that would open the door to the end of violence.

Besides, the relationship of violence with historical root causes means the use of violence by PKK since 1984 cannot be disconnected from the broad Kurdish question along the history of modern Turkey, while at the same time it would be problematic to leave to the armed actors the resolution of the broad multi-dimensional Kurdish question. In other words, an approach to the conflict that leaves unresolved the security dimension (existence of PKK armed struggle and combatants, their future status, etc.) is deemed to fail, due to the strong survival capacity of the PKK and the determination of the PKK and the broad Kurdish nationalist movement to exit the conflict in ways that provide solutions to the existence of armed combatants and to the root causes of the conflict; and the other way round, an approach to the conflict that disconnects the military and non-military dimensions and demands or imposes the “silence of arms” without addressing the root causes to the conflict, might not solve the conflict but rather alienate and radicalise the PKK and the Kurdish nationalist movement for what they would perceive as a neglecting of the root causes and issues at stake.

All this gains more significance in view of other trends at place. On one hand, there are increasing local analysts, journalists and members of NGOs warning of the structural factors that have led to the existence of a significant amount of young kurds affected by unemployment, poverty, structural and/or direct violence linked to the Kurdish issue, etc., and who are deeply dissatisfied with the system and who can resort to violence (e.g. street violence) to express their anger. Some experts point that this youth even disregards BDP authority and ultimately would only obey Abdullah Öcalan. Moreover, they highlight that this new Kurdish generation has no previous shared experience with Turkish population, in contrast to the first generation of the Kurdish nationalist movement and of the PKK. They consider this a factor of risk for further antagonism and potential radicalisation. Some local analysts point to the risk of a potential future scenario of urban warfare and more radicalised street violence as a result if the Kurdish conflict is not dealt with and if the specific problems of the Kurdish youth are not attended. This potential future scenario of less tractable expressions of violence and of new more radicalised Kurdish generations has been used as a threat by representatives of the older PKK generations to try mobilise the Turkish State and other actors into the search for a solution.

There are different views with regards the real danger of such a transformation into urban warfare, and in that sense some analyses identify a certain level of excessive alarmism in that. Despite so, certain conditions do exist for a risk of further alienation and increase of confrontation by the youth, which could influence the direction of the conflict in the long term. In any case, and regardless of the risk of violence, the problems faced by this Kurdish youth require urgent attention, as part of the Kurdish question.

This combines with a more self-assertive Kurdish nationalist movement, which has lost any fear of confronting the State and of putting forward their demands. In turn, this new self-assertion should be channelled into constructive strategies that seek dialogue and understand the timing and proceedings of conflict-resolution processes, to avoid further antagonism or zero-sum approaches in nonviolent arenas.

On other hand, some analysts put also some emphasis on increasing conflict dynamics between Turkish and Kurdish population in some western areas of Turkey, in which discrimination patterns build on socio-economic dimensions. For some analysts, a new intercommunitarian conflict has arisen, as a kind of divide between sectors of Kurds and Turks at societal level, in part as a result of the non-resolution of the Kurdish issue, and which has resulted at times in anecdotic violent incidents. However, the predominant view is that there is no risk of an extension of the armed conflict into a large intercommunitarian violent conflict. There can be limited expressions of intercommunal violence, as it has already happened with some isolated incidents, but there would be no risk of a major inter-ethnic conflict, according to some observers. Factors such as a major common majoritarian religion (Sunni Islam) act as deterrents to inter-ethnic conflict. Despite so, divisions, prejudices and cleavages do exist, even if not expressed by violent means, which results in discrimination and cultural violence, at least.

## 2.2. Reflecting on ceasefires

The prolonged presence of violence by all sides in Turkey, even if largely lowered at certain ceasefire periods, such as the current period, has questioned the credibility of ceasefires as a mechanism able to broker peace in a clear or decisive way. Over the years, ceasefires have not arose answers or constructive reactions by the State, which has dismissed them, despising them as tactical manoeuvres, as it happens in other conflicts around the world. Despite so, some analysts pointed that for the first time, the ceasefire of 2010

was temporarily 'de facto' addressed by Turkish authorities, and that this marked a difference. That happened amid a climate of hopes and desire of peace among the population of Turkey. Therefore, episodes of violence such as the bomb attack in the centre of Istanbul in November 2010 were a blow for the expectations for peace that had been created among the public and turned the attention again on the extent of ceasefires, the actors to the conflict and the obstacles for peace.

Despite the aim to encourage peace talks, PKK unilateral ceasefires have tended to be somehow

ambiguous, with loose self-defence prerogatives, and no monitoring mechanisms. Violence by PKK, including not only in self-defence attacks, has taken place during ceasefire periods, which has damaged the credibility of ceasefires.

Dynamics of violence are deeply interiorised, coming from decades of open and diluted violence of all types (direct, cultural and structural). Therefore, there is a need to rethink ceasefires and other issues around the use of violence. Can ceasefires continue to be called for in the same terms as up to now, given their limitations, or are

### Reflections from the analysis of ceasefires around the world

Ceasefires, truces, cessation of hostilities and armistices are concepts sometimes used in confusing ways, as there are no unified definitions. They are sometimes used alike, as research carried out by the School for a Culture of Peace shows (Fisas and Herbolzheimer: 2007). In case of unilateral calls, the responsibility of setting their terms lies on the actor calling the truce or ceasefire. At the same time, in case of unilateral ceasefires it is assumed that violation of their terms by the side that has called the ceasefire falls on that side.

From the study of ceasefires around the world, some conclusions can be drawn. Fisas and Herbolzheimer highlight some reflections and make suggestions, which can also be useful for the Kurdish question.

**1. Demythify ceasefires as fundamental measures for brokering peace.** This is related to the confusion that often surrounds them in relation to their terms and concrete meaning, as well as to the difficulties of monitoring and verification. That results in their fragility. Authors of that study suggest that when the aim is to build confidence there are additional alternative measures which may be less visible but equally significant (e.g. firm commitment to International Humanitarian Law, changes in language and attitudes, demining, amongst others). It is not that ceasefires are not important, in fact they can be fundamental, but rather that they can also be not too effective due to their fragility. Thus, additional or alternative confidence-building measures can be contemplated, to avoid excessive expectations (and risk of frustration) on ceasefires. This can be extrapolated to Turkey as well, where acts of violence during periods of formal ceasefires (e.g. attack in Taksim, Istanbul) have been very harmful for peacebuilding efforts; while, at the same time, additional or alternative inclusive measures could have been designed and/or implemented (if already acquired, such as the PKK compromise not to target civilians).

**2. Possibility of negotiations or of dialogue without ceasefire declarations or ceasefire agreements.** Fisas and Herbolzheimer remind that other confidence-building measures can also be enough indicators for a climate allowing rapprochement and contact between the sides. The authors of that report add that frequently peace talks take place amid violence. Too maximalist demands or preconditions can be harmful, while at the same time certain guarantees are necessary in order to engage in dialogue. In the case of Turkey, traditionally there has been insistence at Kurdish public level on the need for a halt in military operations, sometimes as a pre-condition to move forwards. In that sense, further discussion and debate are needed on whether these or other demands, if presented as preconditions, do help peace talks to move forward or not. This does not mean that army operations are not to be questioned.

**3. Identification of interests which are contrary to a conflict-resolution process.** It is convenient to identify and analyse actors that are interested in perpetuation of status quo and armed conflict, including factions, splinter groups, sectors among leadership or external groups, and to design strategies to incorporate them into peacebuilding processes or to reduce their potential for destabilization. In the case of Turkey, this includes identifying potential splinter groups both in relation to the PKK and the State, including debate on TAK or other potential autonomous groups, as well as the so-called "deep state", paramilitary forces, etc. The weight of the economy of war in mobilising against peace needs also further analysis in the case of the armed conflict in Turkey, specially taking into account the economic weight of the military establishment in Turkey as well as the geostrategic significance of the areas affected by the Kurdish conflict, and the internationalised dimension of the conflict.

**4. The principal aim of a ceasefire should be the decrease of suffering of civil population.** Beyond this humanitarian dimension (lack of violence), the population needs to feel in a concrete way the effects of advances towards peace. In Turkey, periods of lack of violence clearly contribute to a decrease of social and political tension and anxiety and reduce the scope for more irrational and violent reflexes. In that sense, they are clearly beneficial for peacebuilding. At the same time, advances towards peace require attention to the other types of violence beyond direct violence.

**5. Detailed specifications on the scope of the ceasefire are helpful.** Ambiguity is harmful for ceasefires and can result in impacts that are contrary to those expected. In Turkey, declarations of ceasefires have often been ambiguous in relation to their terms (e.g. their definition of ceasefire, definition of "self-defence"). The lack of external monitoring mechanisms has also made them more fragile.

there ways to reinforce them? How? Are there other alternative or additional measures to build peace? What does society expect in relation to violence? These are some of the questions being posed and that require further attention.

The rethinking of ceasefires in Turkey also relates to the whole process of conflict-resolution and how to advance towards dialogue with the State on security issues. If the State pursues military ways, what will the PKK do to try to broker steps towards dialogue, as allegedly is its aim? Are threats of "all-out war" helpful? How serious are about their peace strategies? Does the State realise the impact of certain military campaigns? It should be taken into account that the existence of clashes and ceasefire violations are a common obstacle and element of crisis in many peace processes around the world, and therefore continuation of army operations can in practice block peace efforts.

### **3. The challenge of peacebuilding: inclusive solutions**

Different voices in Turkey highlight that the opportunity for peace created and the transformations that have taken place in the last decade, specially in the last years are just the beginning of a conflict-resolution process. The quick rise and fall of expectations of conflict-resolution in 2009-2010 give evidence of the enormous difficulties ahead and the fragility of peace opportunities. In Turkey peace attempts in the past, such as those in the 90s, did not manage to build up enough political and social support for peace, and failed to secure the processes, while others were designed not as a ways to solve the root causes of the conflict but rather as means to keep the conflict and its violence levels under control, according to some local analysts. Consequently, they did not arrive to consolidate themselves as conflict-resolution processes. Despite so, they have contributed to the present new period of

opportunities in the form of certain accumulated knowledge and learned lessons, including the need for guarantees amid mutual fears and distrust; the need to avoid violent incidents that could spoil peace attempts; or the need to build up enough military, social and political support for peace. To sum up, a minimum of understanding and common umbrellas are needed.

Given this characteristic of preliminary stage of the current new peace opportunity period, challenges and dilemmas have to do, as mentioned before, with issues of participation and actors to engage with, and with how to move from a framework of confrontation to one of conflict-resolution, regardless of the concrete format.

A fundamental dilemma that arises in terms of processes is that of inclusion and participation. For a process to be successful, any specific format should include or be seen as acceptable to the main sides to the conflict and be inclusive enough. However, this requires previous readiness of the sides to the conflict to engage with each other, regardless of the format, and it also requires legitimacy in front of public light.

That links to the issue of actors and parties to the conflict. With regards to the armed conflict, the two main fundamental parties to the armed conflict are the State and the armed guerrillas. And the latter can be said to be linked to the broad Kurdish nationalist movement. In terms of the broader Kurdish question, even if there are be other additional actors, the State and the broad Kurdish nationalist movement, represented at formal political level by pro-Kurdish BDP, are necessary parties of the Kurdish question and of its solution. So far, obstacles linked to communication and acknowledgement of each other, have been significant and have hindered the building of conflict-resolution processes, as in other conflicts around the world. At the same time, one should take into account that political representatives or political branches are the usual counterparts

of States in conflict-resolution processes rather than armed guerrillas. That is, States do not usually negotiate with military wings to achieve comprehensive political solutions to conflicts, due to factors of legitimacy, amongst others. This is a significant point for the Kurdish movement to take into account, and it requires also further debate on how the figure of Abdullah Öcalan is perceived (e.g. ¿military or political leader?) and on his suitability or not as main counterpart.<sup>21</sup>

In that sense, the characteristics of the Kurdish nationalist movement pose significant challenges, according to some local analysts, due to the extensive and loose nature of the movement and the discredit that has been projected by mainstream actors upon the political pro-Kurdish parties. This external attributed discredit is related to issues of alleged not enough effectiveness in its work at the Parliament, the non-explicit condemnation of the use of violence by PKK, the ambivalence and changing position with regards to its potential role in conflict-resolution of the Kurdish issue (e.g. from leadership position of political leaders to delegation on PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan for leading conflict-resolution), alleged lack of clarity in terms of demands and position (e.g. reinforcement of local administrations or regional decentralisation?), attributed ambiguity in relation to roles and power relations between the various actors within the Kurdish nationalist movement (e.g. role of co-chairs of the DTK versus role of co-chairs of BDP, political and social actors vs armed actors), etc. These factors also affect how the Kurdish nationalist movement, including Kurdish political parties, is perceived in the international arena, including by potential peace facilitators such as the EU or US government, who are suspicious of their links to armed actors and instead cooperate with Turkey in its so-called fight against terrorism. Even if these disadvantages might be dismissed or rejected by the Kurdish nationalist movement as false accusations, they are still existent perceptions in Turkey and therefore there would be a need to deal with them.

The Government, and more in general the State, are also being seen with suspicion by the Kurdish nationalist movement, especially with regards the ambivalence of its approach to the conflict, which has combined both alleged conflict-resolution initiatives together with harsh discourses, military operations and massive police operations. The criminalization of the political struggle generates

deep distrust and alienation of Kurds towards the State and the AKP government, and reinforces them in their view that armed struggle is a valid last resort if their non-violent ways of defending demands are blocked.

There seems to be a multiple responsibility challenge in terms of how actors present themselves and address each other, in order to contribute to building and anchoring processes of conflict-resolution. While a certain degree of double discourses is assumed in any given conflict, efforts are also needed in order to clarify and acknowledge counterparts of any conflict-resolution process and in order to gain the legitimacy for being acknowledged.

An important shortcoming in relation to the transformation of the Kurdish conflict is, as said before, the lack of a broad consensus or broad enough consensus on how to proceed. As many local commentators highlight, the issues at stake are well known, and with more or less taboos they have been under discussion for long time. These include issues such as citizenship and identity, linguistic rights, decentralization or administrative model, future of current combatants, etc. This means that there is apparently no metaconflict (conflict over what is in conflict), even if public discourses sometimes seem to deny the existence of a conflict, specially at times of social and political tension, such as electoral campaigns.

It is understood here that issues at stake should be a subject matter for discussion under the axis of a process of conflict-resolution, regardless of the format of that process. In fact, as some local analysts highlight, there is more flexibility than what public discourses might suggest. And, in any case, previous profound disagreement over all those issues at stake is understandable, as a result of the existing conflict. Pre-discussion and circulation of ideas and proposals over those issues at stake can help to bring down taboos if adequately introduced into the public debate and if there is a previous minimum shared view on dialogue and agreeable reforms as the optimum way to deal with the conflict. However, in practice, pre-discussion of issues at stake in Turkey has often been object of harsh reactions and tension, which can be linked to the lack of consensus on how to proceed as well as to power struggles that are prior to entering into a more substantive conflict-resolution process.

This social, political and military tension has traditionally made it hard to prepare the ground for a more consolidated process. Nonetheless, taboos are gradually being overcome and public debates over the Kurdish question are more and more common, which contributes to a potential public acceptance of an agreeable resolution of

<sup>21</sup> The Kurdish nationalist movement has delegated to Abdullah Öcalan the leadership in conflict-resolution efforts, as local observers highlight. This collective decision implies many challenges and risks, as there is ambivalence regarding his figure, as mentioned above (e.g. Is he still a military leader?), and as he is regarded with open hostility and hatred by mainstream Turkish population. At the same time, many observers agree on his capacity to unify the broad Kurdish nationalist movement, which can be beneficial to avoid spoiler factions.

the Kurdish question, regardless of the format. However, as some human rights defenders argue, there is a risk of identifying intangible and loose elements, such as certain decrease in taboos or more open debates, as if they were tangible results or indicators of clear advances. In their view, social changes (changes in minds, attitudes and perceptions) cannot be a substitute of State tangible measures addressing on one hand conflict-resolution and on the other –and interrelated– human rights deficits, including commitments that have already been acquired.

A key issue then is the question of whether the sides are ready and willing for an inclusive process of conflict-resolution, that is, one that does not dismiss any of the main sides; or whether they are still exhausting other options. There are different opinions on that among local observers. For some, the Government and the State might still be prioritising the weakening, isolation and marginalization of the PKK and the Kurdish nationalist movement (whether to bypass them or to finally deal with them in better terms), while for others the new road is one that includes somehow inevitably dealing with them.

Moreover, there seems to be disagreements on what type of conflict-resolution processes to follow: Should it be a process of parliamentary discussion on further democratic reforms, including reforms on issues at stake for the Kurdish question? Should a process of democratization include the security dimension? Should there be additional talks on security issues relating specifically to the PKK? In case of specific talks on security, would they be between the State and political representatives of the Kurdish nationalist movement? Interestingly, some local analysts highlight that solutions to the Kurdish issue might not be symbolised in a peace table, but could come through less iconic formulas, such as agreeable reforms at political level. These are just some of the multiple questions related to how to proceed and that are being increasingly debated at local level.

Any specific format or process to be adopted for the resolution of the conflict would need to take into account gender considerations, in terms of participation, agenda and future implementation and monitoring in order to be inclusive, comprehensive and sustainable. The gender dimension has been present throughout the conflict in many ways. Both the armed conflict and the broad Kurdish question have affected women and men in specific ways, crossing gender and ethnic dimensions. As a result of that, there have been specific gender impacts on Kurdish women, as well as on Turkish women, and their male homologues. Thus the design of any format to solve

the conflict requires an understanding of how those specific impacts have materialised and also an understanding of which are the issues at stake from a gender perspective. The aim is to build processes and formats that are inclusive. In that sense, gender equity could be a horizon and a common umbrella under which bring together Turkish and Kurdish population, both women and men.

Regarding formats for conflict-resolution, the possibility of a new Constitution, of civil nature, has raised hopes as a potential formula to address key issues of the Kurdish question. However, there are also many voices warning about the risks of excessively mythicizing a new Constitution as a definite solution to all problems linked to the Kurdish issue. Local analysts highlight that not all problems might be solved through it and that there are many challenges linked to a constitutional process, including in terms of participation and processes. Consequently, they advise against depositing all hopes in the new Constitution, but rather to promote and anchor complementary ways to arrive to a solution, one of them surely being a new civilian Constitution.

There seems to be a certain vacuum in terms of effective trust-building measures that could help to overcome prejudices and facilitate communication and engagement between the sides. For many this is understood as an area to be dealt with now in order to prepare the ground for more substantive dialogue in a sustainable way. For others, it is necessary to convince the sides to engage with each other even if there is not enough trust, by using arguments of strategy and rational calculus, in a way that could ensure rapprochement between the sides and which, in turn and gradually, would help gradually to build trust between the sides. From this latter point of view, investment in trust-building measures is helpful but not necessarily fundamental, that is, the existence of significant trust is not considered as a required previous condition, as trust would arrive progressively as a result of rational and strategic engagement. Ongoing reported dialogue between the State and Öcalan (as well as between the State and Kandil and between the State and European representatives of the PKK)<sup>22</sup> would prove that a high level of trust is not necessarily needed for those contacts to start. However, trust would be needed to consolidate a more substantive and sustained framework of dialogue or negotiations. And if encouraged, trust could also help the current stage to advance.

Given the level of volatility of both moods and of degrees of support for dialogue among the general

<sup>22</sup> Local media, as Taraf newspaper, have reported on alleged talks and contacts between the State and PKK representatives at Kandil, as well as with PKK representatives in Europe.

public, trust-building measures between the State and the Kurdish nationalist movement (and also the guerrillas) and towards the public opinion can be helpful for seizing and anchoring peace opportunities.

Trust-building measures should be designed and presented truly as inclusive mechanisms in the sense of taking into account the other's fears and sensitive issues. That is, whether they are unilateral or agreed, it is important to foresee potential results and to announce or explain them in ways that do not follow bellicose discourses. Moreover, one should take into account that what is considered as a trust-building measure by one side might not be seen as such by the other if the latter has not been acknowledged or made part of the process.

For instance, ceasefire announcements that keep depicting the other as "genocidal or assimilationist" will not probably help in a constructive way nor will it lead the other side to reduce its feelings of distrust and ambivalence. Or as a way of another example, the establishment of TRT-6 TV channel could be seen in itself as an advancement as it was a step forward in lifting the barriers to the use of Kurdish, but as it was unilaterally designed –including without involvement of the Kurdish nationalist movement– amid a context of multiple barriers yet to the use of Kurdish and amid simultaneous "trust-eroding measures", then the creation of TRT 6 was perceived by the Kurdish nationalist movement not as a trust-building measure but was depicted as a propaganda instrument and as a proof of double-standards. Another recent example was the return to Turkey of a so-called Peace Group in August 2009. The return of this group of PKK combatants and Kurdish refugees, which was allegedly jointly prepared by the State and the Kurdish nationalist movement, finally created much political and social tension after tens of thousands of Kurdish people welcomed the group in the streets of Diyarbakir, which was perceived by mainstream Turkish political parties and media as an offense to Turkish victims in the conflict and as an act of victory by PKK over the Turkish State. Thus, what was supposed to be a trust-building measure resulted in a "trust-eroding measure". This concrete result has been interpreted by some observers as a mistake by the then still legal DTP, which did not avoid nor pre-empted that jubilant welcoming and instead promoted it. For others, the Government is also to be blamed for its naivety in not having foreseen that welcoming and result. There are others who consider inevitable that demonstration of Kurdish joy and consider that it was largely Turkish media coverage that resulted in the subsequent Turkish distrust and anger reactions.

Both sides to the conflict (the State and the Kurdish nationalist movement) seem to have

fears over potential hidden agendas of the other side: fear of the State with regards a potential eventual separatist agenda by PKK and the Kurdish nationalist movement; and fear of the latter with regards potential assimilation practices by the State towards the Kurds and empty reforms. Trust-building measures that address and eliminate the fears and suspicions of the other side over one's own position and that promote clear communication of real agendas can be strategic at current stage. There are also fears of the Kurdish side of exclusion from the legal political and social arena, as expressed in the massive police operations against politicians and activists; and fears of the State and other Turkish actors (political parties, media, etc.) of glorification of PKK combatants and their armed struggle and of any initiative or measure that could be interpreted as a surrender of the State towards the PKK. Trust-building measures emphasizing inclusive and common narratives and symbols and positive sum approaches would help to diminish those fears. Thus, communication and emphasis on inclusion and on common "umbrellas" seem fundamental for peacebuilding in Turkey in the current stage.

On the other hand, regarding trust-building measures, there is a great deal of potential to build bridges at civil society level and to promote inclusive dialogue and peacebuilding. There have been some initiatives in that sense, although some local observers consider there is a need for more cross-ethnic and dialogue measures that address peacebuilding. In that sense, this report identifies a potential to build bridges between women from different sides, positions and perspectives. There are important divisions within the women's movement in Turkey, including divisions that relate to the understanding of the gender impacts of the armed conflict. That is, specific gender impacts of the conflict on Kurdish women (e.g. sexual violence by security forces and village guards against Kurdish women, impacts of militarization of the region on women, etc.) are not fully understood or accepted by Turkish women within the women's movement in Turkey. There are also some divisions among Kurdish women with regards the PKK, their strategies and the degree of leeway left for independent action. Despite all that, there is a great deal of potential for peacebuilding, in terms of trust-building measures to reduce prejudices and to build common gender equity agendas to be mainstreamed in the general conflict-resolution agendas. Peace efforts that address the gender dimension of the conflict and that build on the gender potential for peace synergies seem strategic at this phase. That is, taking into account the need for common symbols, languages and umbrellas for the resolution of the broad Kurdish question and the armed conflict, women's rights –as part

of a broad democratic and human rights agenda—can be an area in which many sectors of Turkey could converge, including Kemalist sectors, pro-EU AKP's sectors and the nationalist Kurdish movement. For that to happen, women from different fields would need to work on common agendas, in order to overcome the obstacles related to patriarchal structures in Turkey, including in the Kurdish region, with are common to other parts of the world but that have also specific dimensions.

Besides, even if the gender dimension of potential future disarmament and demobilisation has not been receiving much attention, it is a fundamental area to be foreseen and addressed, given the high percentage of women involved in the PKK as combatants or other roles within the group, in order to avoid further problems such as stigmatization and exclusion of women combatants, that have been identified in post-war phases in other countries.

Not much has come to the public light with regards alleged contacts between the State and Öcalan, and at the same time the new legislative period has just started, with renewed hopes even if not without crises and convulsion. Somehow a new cycle has just started. Given the ongoing long-term democratisation process of Turkey and given the belief of the Kurdish movement on the lack of exits to the conflict through violence, much effort is needed for channelling those and other factors into sustainable and substantive processes of addressing the conflict in ways that do not alienate any significant sector of the society of Turkey. Defiant confrontational strategies by any of the sides will not help in this new period, as maximalist and non-inclusive approaches have proven not helpful.

## 4. Conclusions

The Kurdish question in Turkey has reached a period of significant window of opportunity for its resolution. Strategies, agendas, attitudes and positions are moving towards an understanding that the conflict, both at security level and in relation to the broad social, cultural, political and economic dimensions, cannot be solved through more violence. At a time when there are complex risks ahead (e.g. the challenges regarding the Kurdish youth in the southeast; the continuation of military operations, etc.), there are also increasing consensus on the need to address the conflict and seize current opportunity factors. However, previous failure to approach it through inclusive and comprehensive means raises uncertainties on the extent of learned lessons and the willingness to assume the risks and difficulties that will accompany any comprehensive approach, including deals for an end of violence and solution to root causes.

The lack of violence, when maintained, is a mobilising force for peace in Turkey, as it eases tensions and diminishes distrust. Any party to the conflict must assume its own responsibility in pursuing a climate that is favourable for peace. Military means to confront the conflict do only escalate tension and do not benefit the sides neither in the short, medium or long term, especially if there are victims of any side. At the same time, the continuation of violence is a common trend in many conflicts around the world, and its continuation should not block peace efforts, which are more than needed.

A definitive end to violence is unlikely to come unless as a result of some kind of deal and/or as part of a comprehensive inclusive and agreeable solution that addresses issues at security level as well as at social, political, cultural and gender level, amongst others. The decades of armed conflict and the history of discrimination against the Kurds are interconnected, which implies solutions will require comprehensive frames. Common narratives and positive sum approaches, which replace zero-sum perspectives, seem fundamental for that, which in turn implies readiness to compromise.

Status quo feeds the logics of war and protracts violent conflict and antagonism at social and political level. Peace efforts at this time can be strategic to keep preparing the ground and anchoring future conflict-resolution processes, which can take various forms, including the drafting of a new Constitution in tune with the plural nature of Turkey and the democratic aspirations of its heterogeneous population.

As this report has highlighted, the road to peace in Turkey is a long and complex one, but it also seems closer than in the past. Inclusive positive sum horizons are to be concreted through agreed conflict-resolution formats that allow for the searching of solutions to the core issues of the Kurdish question, hand in hand with the ongoing long-term process of democratisation in Turkey.

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## School for a Culture of Peace

The *Escola de Cultura de Pau* (School of Peace Culture) was established in 1999 with the aim of organizing academic activities, research and intervention related to peace culture, analysis, prevention and transformation of conflicts, education for peace, disarmament and the promotion of human rights.

The school is mainly financed by the Catalan government, via the Catalan Agency for Cooperation and Development. It also receives support from the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation and Development (AECID), the Catalan International Peace Institute (ICIP), the Norwegian Foreign Ministry, local authorities, foundations and other bodies. Its director is Vicenç Fisas, who is also UNESCO Professor of Peace and Human Rights at the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona.

In accordance with this mission and these objectives, the school focuses its work on the following areas:

- **Intervention in conflicts**, to facilitate dialogue between the protagonists.
- Academic activities such as a **postgraduate diploma on peace culture** (which entails 230 hours of study with an average of 60 students per course in 10 courses) and the elective topics "peace culture and conflict management", and "educating for peace in conflicts".
- **Awareness** initiatives related to peace culture in Catalan and Spanish society through various educational activities.
- **Analysis and** daily monitoring of international events, regarding **armed conflicts, situations of tension, humanitarian crisis and gender** (Conflicts and Peace-building Program).
  - Monitoring and analysis of different countries undergoing peace processes or formal negotiations, or countries which are in an exploratory phase of negotiations (Peace Process Program).
  - Analysis of different themes linked to **disarmament**, with special attention given to the processes of Disarmament Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of ex-combatants (Disarmament Program).
  - Monitoring and analysis of peace-building in postwar contexts (Postwar Rehabilitation Program).
  - Monitoring of the international situation regarding human rights and, in particular, the mechanisms of transitional justice, the social responsibility of business and the impact of multinationals in conflict contexts (Human Rights Program).
- The promotion and development of the understanding, the values and the capacity for **peace education** (Peace Education Program).
- Analysis of the **contribution made by music and the arts** to peace-building (Art and Peace Program).

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