

6 Addressing Kurdish Separatism in Turkey

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EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

One of the ongoing themes in descriptions of ethnic conflicts and their settlement is that there is a role for a wide range of interveners. The reason for this may be simple: that there is a great deal which needs to occur before hostile groups can find ways to live together in relative peace. A well-developed theory of ethnic conflict resolution would not only take into account the roles that different actors can play in the process, but would also offer insights into the particular roles each might play at different stages of a conflict.

These questions are especially relevant in this chapter on the Kurdish minority in Turkey. Although the conflict between the majority and this large minority is hardly a new one, it is not an issue which has been openly discussed nor is the conflict one which has been the focus of many constructive efforts to find a peaceful settlement. While the issue of Kurdish political aspirations in the region has received more attention since the 1991 Gulf War, it is a long-term simmering issue in Turkey. For decades the government simply denied that it was an issue at all and Kurds were simply described as 'Mountain Turks'.

The Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce undertook the intervention which Müftüler-Bac describes here and it is particularly interesting in a number of ways. Its main goal was to collect a range of data on the Kurdish population and their attitudes as a first step towards encouraging a discussion in Turkey of the underlying issues and possible solutions to the conflict. The working hypothesis was that there was less support for the radical Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) than most Turks believed and evidence that this was the case could encourage a dialogue and movement towards a solution. As a mainstream organization in Turkey the Chamber of Commerce, whose members for a variety of reasons wanted to see the conflict end, knew that its report would get a public hearing. What it could not be so clear about, however, was that the political climate in Turkey would shift so that a renewed shift toward military responses to the conflict would overtake any efforts to build a climate friendly to dialogue and negotiation.

INTRODUCTION

Turkey has been labelled as the only secular, democratic political system with a market economy in the Muslim Middle East. In the post-Cold War era, Turkey was singled out by the Western alliance as an oasis of stability in the midst of instability that surrounds Turkey in almost all directions. In this bright picture, however, an important missing element is the ongoing intense conflict between the Turkish majority and the country's Kurdish population.

The 12 million Kurds in Turkey comprise about one-fifth of the country's population. The state ideology denies Kurds the status of a distinct minority and the Kurds have long struggled for both cultural rights, such as the use of their language in education and publications, recognition as a distinct ethnic group, and for political autonomy in the regions of the country where they are numerous. Kurds have resisted assimilation but have been unable to engage in collective political action in a state which emphasizes national unity. The Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) has engaged in a violent campaign for Kurdish separatism with the goal of establishing an independent Kurdish state to which the government has responded with military force. Although since 1990 there has been some symbolic recognition of the Kurds existence and some limited acceptance of their language and identity, there has been little effective dialogue, in part because the positions of the Turkish and Kurdish nationalists leave little room for the recognition of the other.

This chapter analyses an initiative intended to redefine the conflict so that the parties might more easily be able to negotiate a settlement. The organizer and sponsor of the project was the Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce (TOBB), the country's largest non-governmental organization. The effort involved almost 2,000 interviews and was intended to understand better the ongoing social conflict with Turkey's Kurdish population; to emphasize the role that cultural and identity concerns play; and to distinguish between the goals of the militant Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and those of the majority of Kurds in southeastern Anatolia. TOBB's project sought to place the Kurdish question in a broader historical and social perspective and to understand the impact of the Turkish state's policies on its Kurdish population. It hoped that such information could help frame the 'Eastern Question' as not only about terrorism, as it is often portrayed, but about the recognition of a Kurdish cultural identity and interests.

In this chapter I first describe the background of this conflict and then discuss the initiative's organization, goals, and underlying strategy. The intervention's major objectives were:

1. to highlight the distinction between the PKK, the separatist Kurdish terrorist organization, and the Kurdish community as a whole;
2. to assess the extent, and ways in which, the Kurdish community desires to be a part of the Turkish state, that is, independent Kurdish state, federation, autonomy, legal reforms; and
3. to generate a greater public awareness of the Kurdish community's needs and interests.

I then consider the question of what constituted success in this initiative and reflect on its implication for the 'Eastern Question'.

TURKEY'S KURDISH PROBLEM

The Kurdish problem is the soft underbelly of Turkey. In addition to Turkey, Kurds live in nearby Iraq, Iran, Syria and some areas of the former Soviet Union so that the issue of Kurdish nationalism and cultural autonomy is not confined to Turkey nor is it entirely a domestic problem for any of these states. The problem's regional character complicates efforts to resolve it in Turkey (as it does elsewhere) since various factions are supported, at times, by different neighbouring states. It is important to see the Kurdish conflict as a protracted social conflict with identity issues at the core. 'The Kurds' identity is based on a number of shared traits: a common homeland and culture, a myth of common origin, a shared faith in Islam, similar languages, and a history of bitter conflict with outsiders' (Gurr and Harff, 1994, p. 30).

The challenge that Turkey faces with regards to the Kurdish identity is to permit Kurdish cultural expression within the limits of a unitary Turkish state. Turkey, this suggests, needs to find ways of integrating elements of Kurdish culture and identity into its state ideology, however, 'the Kurdish question is difficult to resolve simply because no government has yet recognized it for what it is: a movement with nationalist cultural aspirations with a desire for local autonomy' (Ahmad, 1993, p. 218). Various Turkish governments were inclined to treat the problem as strictly one of terrorism and paid little attention to its underlying social and identity dynamics.

A more thorough analysis of the conflict requires a consideration of how Turks understand their own identity, and how present-day Turkish identity developed in the context of the multicultural, multireligious, and a multiethnic Ottoman Empire. At the core of the modern Turkish Republic, a modern, secular state, is its Muslim, Turkish roots. Yet during the Ottoman period the term 'Turk' was used in a derogatory manner to describe the peasants of Anatolia. 'Turk' was not a creation of nationalist hero Kemal Ataturk for it already existed in the Ottoman empire in reference to the masses in Asia Minor who were thought to be uncivilized whereas the upper classes in the capital Istanbul were the Ottomans. It was not until the nineteenth century that a nationalist movement developed with a Turkish identity at its core, and an important challenge facing the reformers of the Republican era was formulating a Turkish identity which would provide the basis for national unity. In the famous declaration of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk – 'Happy is the man who calls himself a Turk' with its emphasis was on the self-acclaimed status of Turkishness meaning that a person would be considered a Turk as long as he calls himself a Turk. Thus, Turkishness was accepted as a self-claimed status, rather than an ascribed status determined by race, religion or ethnicity, and this set Turkish nationalism apart.

The status of religious minorities (Jews, Armenians and orthodox Greeks) in Turkey was clarified by the 1923 Lausanne Treaty. However, other cultural groups, such as the Kurds, who were Moslems were considered Turks, and any view that challenged this definition of Turkishness was perceived as a threat to the indivisible unity of the Turkish state. In the 1990s Kurdish nationalism is clearly a major challenge to this official definition of Turkish identity. From one point of view, the Kurdish problem can be understood as one of clashing definitions in which acceptance of a separate Kurdish identity threatens official Turkish identity. In fact, there are some Turkish officials claiming that a separate Kurdish group does not exist in Turkey but the people who are living in the southeast region of Turkey are 'Mountain Turks'. While the Turkish government does not recognize the Kurds as a minority, the Kurds have pressed for recognition of their distinctive cultural identity and their demands include the right to publish, broadcast and/or receive education in the Kurdish language, as well as political demands ranging from regional autonomy to a separate Kurdish state. To accept these

the majority would need to accept the multiethnic character of the Turkish state.

Until recently, there have been practically no attempts to bring the two communities together in Turkey. At the centre of the conflict lies the question of whether there exists a Kurdish population in Turkey. Thus, a conflict resolution effort has to first address threats to identity since the existence of a separate Kurdish identity in Turkey is widely seen as a direct threat to 'the indivisible unity of the Turkish Republic'. The Turkish legal system addresses these concerns directly, and the 1982 Constitution includes a number of articles designed to control the expression of cultural pluralism. They bar the use of any language and publications in any language prohibited by law for the expression and dissemination of thought, while requiring that 'all political activity must promote the indivisibility of the national homeland', and specify that 'no political party can concern itself with the defense, development and diffusion of any non-Turkish language or culture; nor may they seek to create minorities within our frontiers or to destroy our national unity' (Gunter, 1995, p. 45). In addition, the 1992 Anti-Terror Law has a number of provisions that prohibit activity. All of these legal strictures have served to prevent Kurdish political participation and collective action and the expression of Kurdish identity within the state's political institutions.

At the same time, ethnic Kurds face no individual discrimination when they do not participate in politics as a distinct ethnic group. Schools, jobs and housing are not closed to individual Kurds. However, problems arise when the Kurdish people claim recognition of their distinctiveness. There are many prominent businessmen, politicians, lawyers and professional people in Turkey who are of Kurdish origin and Kurds reach the highest positions in the society. One prominent example is Yalim Erez, the former chairman of the Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce, now a member of the Turkish parliament and a Minister in the Motherland Party, who sponsored the initiative discussed below. Certainly his identity partly explains the TOBB's interest in the Kurdish problem. Another is Hikmet Cetin, a former foreign minister and also the former leader of the Republican People's Party (RPP), which in itself is ironic since the RPP was the first political party in Turkey to articulate the official view of Turkish identity.

An important feature of the current conflict is its intransigence,

meaning that the key parties involved, the Turkish government and the separatist Kurdish movement, are locked into their respective positions and are unable to address each other's core concerns and negotiate an end to the conflict. As a protracted social conflict it is characterized by long-standing, seemingly insoluble tensions that fluctuate in intensity over extended periods of time (Rothman, 1992, p. 39). In such conflicts, battles over resources and competing interests are intense and generally for effective negotiation to occur, the parties mutual recognition must be acknowledged. Yet because issues of community and identity are so salient interest based interactions are highly adversarial.

For a long-term, effective solution to the conflict, the core needs of the parties such as mutual recognition and the identity needs of the Kurdish people must be addressed. The Kurdish aspirations are expressed in terms of specific, and increasingly strong, cultural and other demands including:

- the right to use their language;
- the right to publish in their language;
- the right to broadcast and receive education in their language;
- economic development;
- the right of political participation as a distinct group;
- cultural autonomy;
- federation;
- sovereignty at the most extreme.

As Rothman (1992, p. 46) (drawing on Burton, 1986), notes intense conflict occurs when such core needs as dignity, the expression and development of a distinctive identity, control over destiny, and justice are denied, a situation in which many Kurds in Turkey see themselves. Many Kurds believe that only with significant structural change in Turkish society can their basic needs be met. Clearly this view of the conflict emphasizes its psychocultural components, an approach which requires what Ross and Rothman in Chapter 1 describe as getting each side to lower the perceived threat to its identity by modifying or reorganizing critical elements in its interpretation of the conflict.

Cohen proposes a four stage theory of conflict resolution '(1) the begrudging acceptance of the adversary as an unavoidable fact; (2) mutual recognition of each other in a legal context; (3) interaction with the other as fully equal in status; and (4) partnership in a common post-conflict environment in which defined roles are

shared' (Cohen, 1991 as cited by Adam and Moodley, 1993, p. 230). In Cohen's terms, the conflict in Turkey is still at the stage of begrudging acceptance of the adversary as an unavoidable fact. Perhaps this mutual acceptance in Turkey began in 1991 when the Social Democratic Party under the leadership of Erdal İnönü took a position on the Kurdish issue prior to the 1991 election campaign. During the elections, İnönü allied with the Kurdish People's Labour Party (HEP) in order to attract votes in southeastern Turkey, the region with a large Kurdish population. In the election, a number of Kurdish nationalists won seats in the Turkish National Assembly, establishing a possible mechanism for a dialogue on Kurdish needs and interests. There had been, of course, parliamentarians of Kurdish origin in the parliament before 1991 yet they all were treated and perceived as Turks, whereas after 1991 the Kurdish parliamentarians spoke of themselves as representing the Kurdish community.

Even though there was some shift in public perceptions after 1991, the major obstacle to developing higher levels of sustained communications remained, and the PKK's ongoing separatist terrorism in the Southeast blurred the distinction between the demands of the terrorists and those of the Kurdish community in many minds. Following the 1991 elections, the Kurdish parliamentarians severed their links with the Social Democrats, and HEP was transformed into another political party, the Democracy Party (DEP). In 1994, the Turkish Parliament and the Office of the District Attorney accused the DEP parliamentarians of engaging in separatist propaganda and supporting PKK terrorism in violation of the 1992 Anti-Terror Law and the parliament lifted the immunities of the DEP parliamentarians who were then imprisoned, and later tried on charges of treason. The DEP was declared unconstitutional, but soon another new political party, the People's Democracy Party (HADEP) was founded and participated in the 1995 elections receiving 4 per cent of the national vote and close to 70 per cent in some cities in the south-east region. However, because Turkey's electoral law requires a party to receive 10 per cent of the national vote to win any seats in the parliament, HADEP remained an extra-parliamentary party.

Clearly there were major changes in Turkey on the Kurdish issue between 1991 and 1995. The publicity that the Kurdish parliamentarians received in and outside Turkey and PKK terrorism increased the public's sense of urgency concerning the need to develop a solution to the conflict. For the first time in Turkey, the

use of Kurdish language began to be openly debated and in 1991, public use of the Kurdish language was legalized under some circumstances (but not for publications). In this period, it became clearer to many that the positions of the PKK were not held by many members of Kurdish community although the Turkish state continued to emphasize the Kurdish problem as one of separatist terrorism and focused on the PKK as the cause of the conflict. The state and the military continued to define the conflict as an internal uprising which needed to be crushed. As a result, the government has emphasized the military dimensions to the problem and the militarization of the conflict increased the polarization of society while failing to address the pressing needs of the Kurdish population who oppose the PKK's violence. As a result there is a paradox that the movements of the early 1990s towards a solution have both increased the sense of urgency surrounding conflict and have increased the polarization of Turkish society on the issue.

Finally, it is important to understand that the Kurdish issue dominates Turkey's external relations with Syria and Russia. Since the demise of the Cold War and the rise of ethnic nationalism generally, the plight of the Kurds' in particular has been much more visible in a world where most conflicts involve ethnic groups within countries and not overt conflicts between states (Dittgen, 1994, p. 135). The Gulf War had important consequences for the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. First there has been an increase in international awareness concerning the suppression of Kurds particularly because of the situation in neighbouring Iraq. Second, shifts in power in Northern Iraq had direct consequences on the Kurdish opposition in Turkey leading to Turkey's 1995 military intervention in Northern Iraq in pursuit of PKK forces using it as a base for attacks on Turkey. Turkey argued the PKK benefited from the political vacuum in Northern Iraq that followed the defeat of Saddam Hussein in the Gulf War, and that it was necessary for the Turkish military to secure the area.

At present the conflict is best characterized as adversarial, one in which each side defines the conflict as 'us versus them' blaming the other for the conflict and the absence of any political process which encourages introspection to identify underlying common interests. The parties perceive the conflict as one of struggle over resources and attribute dispositional aggression to the other side (Rothman, 1992, pp. 78–82). In this context, there is a mutual questioning of the other's legitimacy and the absence of a will to negotiate.

THE UNION OF TURKISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE (TOBB) INTERVENTION

In 1995 the Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce (TOBB) initiated a research project in Eastern Anatolia involving field research and interviews with the members of the Kurdish community in various cities in that region. The findings were reported shortly thereafter in *The Eastern Question; Diagnosis and Observations*.¹ TOBB was well positioned to undertake this project with its more than 7,000 members and offices in every town in Turkey.

Interestingly this project, to date the only initiative in Turkey with the ultimate aim of generating a conflict resolution proposal for the Kurdish issue, was launched by a non-governmental organization of prominent businessmen and industrialists. It is worthwhile briefly noting the factors that led to the private sector's involvement in the conflict and its motives for seeking an end to it since generally groups like the Chamber of Commerce are perceived as conservative, dedicated to the preservation of the status quo, and unlikely to challenge the state's authority. However there are a number of factors explaining why Turkey's largest non-governmental organization sponsored a research project on the Kurdish issue and why they would be interested in generating possible proposals for some kind of a solution.

First, there is the personal connection. TOBB Chairman, Yalim Erez, is of Kurdish origin and has a personal interest in developing a solution to the conflict. A second personal link is that between Erez and Tansu Ciller, the prime minister from 1993 until early 1996 whose True Path Party (TPP), is highly dependent on the votes from the Anatolian landlords, merchants and businessmen. As a result, in the past Ciller worked closely with Erez and his organization on projects of joint concern. These personal connections partly explain the TOBB's interest in the issue and the relative support which the government gave the intervention.

A second source of explanation is economic. Ongoing terrorism and instability has produced severe setbacks to the Turkish economy and a substantial portion of the Turkish budget is spent on defence. For example, in 1994 5 per cent of the budget was allocated to the conflict in the region. Fighting the PKK has diverted scarce resources from investment to defence expenditure and TOBB's leaders believe that finding a solution to the conflict would permit greater investment in economic growth.

Because a major source of income for the Turkish economy is from tourism, it should not be a surprise that the PKK has sought to disrupt this sector of the economy since 1994 with a campaign to disturb the peace in tourist areas along the Mediterranean coast. The aim is to harm businesses and deter investments in the area as opposition groups have done in Egypt. In addition, Turkish businessmen are interested in such projects as the Caspian pipeline project which would transfer natural gas and oil from Turkmenistan and other Central Asian republics through Turkey. A number of agreements were signed between the USA, Turkey, Iran, Russia and several newly independent Republics for the construction of these pipelines through Turkish territory. However, the project's feasibility depends on political stability in the southeast. Another regional economic development is the Southeast Anatolian Project which includes one of the largest dams which began operating in 1995 to provide efficient irrigation and electricity. It is part of an ambitious economic development effort which requires a relatively tranquil political environment.

Finally, a motive that is never discussed openly is that of the growing economic links between Turkey and the European Union. Turkey applied for full membership of the European Community in April 1987 and was rejected. One of reasons underlying the rejection is Turkey's human rights' record, a central part of which is the continuing mistreatment of the Kurds, a matter regularly raised in the European Parliament. Turkey has been negotiating with the EU for a customs union since 1990 and an agreement was finally signed and ratified by the European Parliament in 1995. TOBB clearly is concerned that any further integration with the EU which it desires is tied to deescalation of the Kurdish conflict.

The TOBB intervention represents a ground breaking event within Turkey, and even those who did not accept its findings have acknowledged openly that it was the first attempt to analyse the details of the Kurdish situation in the region. The project's initiator and coordinator is Ankara University professor, Dogu Ergil who was working as an advisor to TOBB Chairman, Yalim Erez at the time. The planning of the intervention took about nine months and the field survey which involved 1,500 formal interviews was completed in January 1995. It focused on the Kurdish population living in the predominantly Kurdish populated areas in southeastern Turkey and consisted of interviews with a sample of the region's population and interviews with influential persons in the area who were also

chosen at random.² The sample of community leaders included interviews the project initiator conducted with 200 to 250 trade union leaders, administrators such as the local governors, mayors, police chiefs, religious leaders and sect leaders, teachers and instructors, and artisans and craftsmen in the area. Only because of TOBB's extensive network was the identification and interviewing possible. In addition, TOBB's sponsorship legitimized the survey for many people who might otherwise have been unwilling to be interviewed.

A central objective of the project was to produce detailed information about the attitudes and social conditions of the Kurdish community which TOBB believed would be useful for the Turkish population more generally in a peace-making process. The findings were to be presented to the Turkish state officials, including the Office of the Prime Minister to encourage the state to reformulate its approach to the conflict to begin to develop a solution. In its report TOBB included a number of comparative insights drawing on Spain and its intransigent conflict with the Basque ETA insurgents, and the Northern Ireland situation. Most generally, it deliberately sought to alter the widely held perception among Turks that there is no such thing as a culturally distinctive Kurdish community living in the Turkish Republic.

The goals of the intervention

The starting point for the intervention was the belief that the underlying cause of Turkey's Kurdish problem is the denial or the non-recognition of the Kurdish people's distinctive identity. Their analysis argues that the Kurds view the conflict as a search for cultural expression and that the struggle of the Kurdish community is for the recognition of their distinct identity. (Ergil, 1995, pp. 20–2). The intervention hoped to reframe the public discussion of the conflict away from its military dimensions and to generate an acceptance of the distinct Kurdish identity in the public domain and the belief that an acceptance of a distinct Kurdish identity is not a threat to Turkish identity or the state. Ergil describes the project's approach as 'a scientific exploration and diagnosis of the ongoing problem in East Anatolia', and his report states that the research focused on the East Anatolian region because its problems disrupt the social, economic and political structure of the whole of Turkey.

As explained above, since 1923, the state refused to recognize a distinct Kurdish identity because it feared that such a recognition would lead to disintegration in Turkey. If a separate Kurdish identity is recognized, the proponents of the official Turkish identity position feared that the Kurds would demand autonomy or independence. Thus, the official ideology left no room for ethnic or cultural differences since it was based on the premise that acceptance of diversity would jeopardize the unity and the territorial integrity of the Turkish state. The intervention aimed at eliminating or challenging this perception as a first step towards ending the conflict. The researchers asked the Kurdish community questions about whether they would like to live in a separate Kurdish state or still be a part of the Turkish state while being recognized as a distinct community with legitimate interests and ethnic differences. The answers clearly showed the limited support for political separatism and the overwhelming Kurdish acceptance of the Turkish state. Only 13 per cent of those answering the question favoured an independent Kurdish state, and even among those who proposed an independent Kurdish state, only 9.4 per cent supported talks between the Turkish state and the PKK. Thus, the intervention differentiated between the Kurdish community and the PKK a needed step if Turkish official perceptions that acceptance of a Kurdish identity can be consistent with the unity of the state are to develop. The report concluded that the state should reduce its repressive efforts and seek political, but not cultural, unity.

The survey's other important objectives were to describe the social and economic conditions in Southeastern Turkey; to analyse ethnic relations in the Republican era; to assess the political views of the Kurds in the Southeast; and to examine demographic and living conditions in the region. Given the intervention's attention to the Kurdish community's needs, it is perhaps best seen as a relationship-building process with the stated goal of developing a framework within which the parties can come to understand each other. It aims to bring the parties to the point where they would see each other as having legitimate interests, and a crucial step in a relationship-building process is to alter their current adversarial stances. Table 6.1 below presents the project's central objectives and the strategies employed to meet them.

To a great extent Turkey's political climate influenced the formulation of the project's goals. For example, when the Turkish National Assembly decided to lift the immunities of the six Kurdish

Table 6.1 The intervention's main objectives and strategies

<i>Objectives</i>	<i>How they would be realized</i>
To assess whether the Kurdish community wants to continue as part of the Turkish state or desire autonomy.	The survey addresses the Kurdish community about their political preferences; only 13 per cent reported the desire for independence.
To enhance public awareness in Turkey to the sensitivities in the southeast Anatolian region (the initiative was so controversial that it immediately ignited the public).	Professor Ergil appeared on national TV and gave interviews to the journalists about the initiative and the results attained; a national debate began after August 1995.
To develop interpersonal connections.	Through the personal connections of the TOBB network – the opinion leaders became an important tool.
To change the parties' established, negative perceptions of each other. (This is the most important cause of the ongoing deadlock, only if this is overcome can the other goals be pursued.)	TOBB represents the Turkish society's will to find a solution which built up confidence among the Kurdish community.
To create an understanding of the Kurdish side.	By publicizing the results of the survey which shows that not all Kurds are terrorists.
To build up trust and confidence – if an understanding is born then trust can be built.	By creating a channel of communications through the TOBB.
To develop empathy for each other.	Through communications and the publication of the Report.
To create a new picture of the Kurdish reality (this seems to be the last step).	By demonstrating that the Kurdish community has legitimate interests.
To provide the people who are faced with violence in their everyday lives with new tools of conflict resolution.	Generate proposals for the solution by directly addressing the problem at the core: identity.

DEP parliamentarians in 1994 and put them on trial for separatism and treason, the urgent need for conflict resolution efforts became more profoundly felt. The intervention was an attempt to legitimate the interests and needs of the Kurdish community at a time when their needs were perceived as a threat to the unity of the Turkish state. The respondents certainly favoured some kind of federation as part of a restructured state.³

In addition to the survey, the opinion leaders were asked about the reasons for the conflict in the region and what they felt would be effective solutions. In their answers the opinion leaders clearly placed blame for the conflict's escalation not only on the PKK but on the Turkish state as well (Ergil, 1995, pp. 58–63). They accused the Turkish state of using double standards, of employing the same tactics as the PKK, and of failing to adhere to the rule of law.

There was strong evidence for the existence of a separate Kurdish culture and identity in the region, and the report focused on the strongly felt beliefs that the Kurdish language is central to the recognition of Kurds as a cultural entity (Ergil, 1995, p. 55). Of the respondents 91 per cent described themselves as Kurdish and, in response to the question about language, 65 per cent said they use only Kurdish, 15 per cent said Turkish and 14 per cent reported they use both languages. When asked how they identify themselves, 40 per cent reported that they would use their ethnic identity in defining themselves but 22 per cent reported national identity, and only 11 per cent reported that they would use religious identity.

The most controversial part of the survey were the questions concerning the respondents' views about the 'Organization', a euphemism used for the PKK and the report's conclusion that the Eastern problem is not one of terrorism but about internal social and culture issues (Ergil, 1995, p. 62). Interestingly, 35 per cent of the respondents claimed to have relatives in the PKK, and when they were asked about its goals 40 per cent said the PKK worked for the attainment of cultural and political rights whereas only 16.8 per cent felt the PKK's aim is to establish an independent Kurdish state. When asked which objectives the PKK can achieve, 16 per cent said cultural and political rights and 14 per cent said the destabilization of the political and social structure in Turkey, and a mere 4 per cent thought that PKK could achieve an independent Kurdish state.

The survey documented the low socioeconomic standard of living in the region and argued that the fact that 82 per cent claimed

they did not own any land, the widespread low income, low levels of education and high rates of unemployment were feeding radicalism. Therefore, a major conclusion the study reached was that 'as a primary objective, the region should be developed and living standards of the people should be raised. Social, cultural and educational reforms should be carried out so the individuals are free of traditional control mechanisms' and that the 'Eastern Question can only be solved by economic development, good administration and granting cultural rights to the Kurds and through the recognition of the Kurdish identity' (Ergil, 1995, p. 39).

CONCLUSION

Ross and Rothman point out in Chapter 1 that 'Non-governmental organizations focus more on creating the preconditions which might move the parties to the table of negotiations'. TOBB's intervention should be seen in that light, as an attempt to bring or create conditions for opening channels of communication and to specify the needs of the Kurdish community in southeastern Turkey. TOBB was not interested in proposing a specific solution to the conflict or in negotiating directly with the parties or their representatives. Rather, it saw its role as gathering and analysing information to reframe how key government officials and the public understand the conflict.

The project's goals can be examined in terms of Ross and Rothman's distinction between internal and external criteria of success discussed in Chapter 1. The internal goals emphasized the collection and analysis of data concerning the Kurdish population's perceptions and needs in Turkey's southeastern region. It was hoped that the report would generate significant discussion of the conflict and encourage the development of possible solutions to the long-standing conflict. The external goals involved the stimulation of discussion and influencing change in the majority's perceptions of the attitudes and needs of the Kurds, and especially, changes in the belief that the acceptance of a distinct Kurdish identity and legitimation of Kurdish language and other cultural practices is a threat to the Turkish state, and to begin to develop proposals for the peaceful settlement of the conflict.

Although the focus in this book is on the criteria of success in different projects, rather than the evaluation of the degree to which

they are achieved, it is worth noting here that in many ways most of the project's internal criteria of success were achieved. One of the leading dailies, *Milliyet*, described the intervention as a breakthrough attempt and soon thereafter, the project director appeared on a popular national political TV programme, *The Red Seat*, where he was interviewed about the implications of his research for the Turkish state's policy towards the Kurds. When the report was published, the Turkish media gave it a great deal of attention. Its controversial conclusions which explicitly stated that there is a Kurdish community with its own distinct and legitimate needs and interests produced strong positive and negative reactions.

The project sought to redefine the conflict away from its military dimensions and give a greater role to economic and cultural issues. The respondents clearly provided support for this position as they said the Turkish state should invest more in the area, foster economic growth, and also democratize the region and provide legal reforms. The results suggest that the Kurdish community does not provide widespread support for the PKK's position on many issues, its use of violence and intimidation, and also that the PKK was not considered to be the cause of the problem, but a product of the conflict.

Understanding the project's external criteria of success and their achievement is perhaps more complicated. There were strong negative and positive reactions to the publication of its report and its methodological and substantive grounds were strongly attacked. Interestingly, Professor Ergil's previous publications were attacked and he was even accused of being a CIA spy and it was claimed that there was CIA involvement in the report (Turkish Daily, *Cumhuriyet*, 10.8.1995). However, the fact that the publication of the report caused such turmoil is an indicator of its success, that the intervention generated a debate on the Eastern Question, and that the report's central premises were now being widely discussed.

The Kurdish issue, some claim, is a device to weaken Turkey that traditional enemies such as Greece, Russia and Syria are exploiting. This definition of the conflict leads to the continuation of the military approach to the conflict. By reframing the conflict as primarily domestic involving the ongoing alienation of a distinct ethnic group in Turkey struggling for the recognition of its needs and interests rather than international matter, the TOBB intervention encourages the formulation of very different proposals for the resolution of the conflict.

NOTES

1. The title of the report is reminiscent of the last days of the Ottoman Empire, when *La Question d'Orient—The Eastern Question* led to World War I and eventually to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire in 1918.
2. The field work was carried out in cities among people defined as Kurdish. Permanent residents in the southeast provinces of Diyarbakir, Batman and Mardin, the established Kurdish population areas, were selected and three cities in the Mediterranean region, Antalya, Adana and Mersin, cities that attract many immigrants from the South East were also chosen for interviews.
3. To the question about what kind of a restructuring they favoured, 43 per cent said 'Federation', 13 per cent said an independent Kurdish state, 13 per cent demanded autonomy, 19 per cent favoured local administration reform. Egril's report, described Federation as 'the right to live freely within the existing political structure', and that it reflected the people's desire to be autonomous in their cultural and daily lives (Ergil, 1995, p. 39).

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