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THE APPLICATIONS OF CONFLICT RESOLUTION THEORIES ON TURKEY’S KURDISH CONFLICT AND ITS PEACEBUILDING WORK

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ABSTRACT

Approaches to resolve Turkey's Kurdish conflict have been overpowered by military operations because the state has framed the conflict as an internal security issue rather than a socio-political issue, and there has been very little effort to apply practical theory to the peacebuilding work of non-state actors. This thesis provides an analysis of how four non-governmental organizations have framed the causes of the conflict and how it should be transformed, particularly focusing on the organizations' own devised resolution documents. The organizations’ important concepts and suggestions are examined and evaluated in this paper through the use of key theories from the field of conflict resolution. Exploring the implications of their work using various theories, this research paper fills the gap of demonstrating the limits and strengths of organizations' approaches to resolving the Kurdish conflict in Turkey.
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to the people of Turkey with the hope that they may together build a true peace for all. I also express my deep gratitude to everyone who helped me along the way. This thesis would not be possible without the support and guidance of Professor David Cuthell, Professor Fathali M. Moghaddam, Consuelo Amat Matus, and my family.

Many thanks,
Ayça K. Güralp
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INTRODUCTION

The Field of Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution (CR) is a comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach to analyzing conflicts in order to increase our understanding of them, and also find ways to engage with conflicts so that they serve as valuable opportunities to improve relationships amongst people as well as improve the social structures in which the conflicts occur. If one common definition of conflict is the presence of incompatible goals, then conflict resolution is the pursuit of harmonizing interests so that peoples’ goals are made compatible with each other. Johan Galtung, one of the most influential thinkers in the field, uses the term ‘peacebuilding’ to refer to the process of going beyond ‘negative peace,’ or the halt of physical violence, to achieve a ‘positive peace,’ or the absence of structural violence caused by unjust social institutions.¹

Importance

Although we know of countless groups involved in peacebuilding work, research is scarce on what is being done, and most of it relates to work in official channels and very little relates to NGO work.² What I wish to bring to the global discussion of conflict resolution is the extent to which CR theories are manifested in NGO peacebuilding work throughout Turkey’s Kurdish conflict.

² Wilson, email, March 3, 2011.
The purpose of this thesis is to give a theoretical analysis of efforts by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), domestic and foreign, in bringing a non-violent resolution to the conflict commonly referred to as the Kurdish ‘problem,’ ‘issue,’ or ‘question,’ amongst the ethnic Kurdish citizens living in Southeastern and Eastern Turkey. Through the lens of the conflict resolution field, this paper examines what theoretical approaches various NGO actors have taken to address the conflict. Although I give recommendations based on my theoretical expertise, I make no attempt to declare the absolutely correct solution to the conflict as this can only be decided by the people in Turkey themselves.

The idea behind the following paper came from my desire to apply specific CR and other, related theories discussed in my graduate courses to an actual conflict which, relative to most conflicts world-wide, does not receive much attention from the American media, and which also holds some importance to my family’s homeland. My inquiry was based upon two main questions: What have non-governmental organizations done to address the Kurdish conflict or how do they view the conflict, and what can the theories of conflict resolution say about this? These questions reflect the nature of an existing gap in the collection of knowledge regarding the Kurdish conflict.

This thesis-writing process was also an endeavor to fully explore how the theories of CR work. In short, this thesis is an accumulation of CR and other theories, used as an attempt to explain and evaluate how peacebuilding organizations have addressed the Kurdish conflict. Firstly, this is important because those wishing to support the current conflict resolution process in Turkey must analyze how others who are already involved
in the conflict perceive and address the issues. Secondly, this paper is important because it is an addition to the developing analysis of how CR concepts are used by practicing CR organizations.

**Thesis Composition**

The first section of my thesis is the ‘Background’ and provides a basic foundation of information on the Kurdish conflict in Turkey for those who are not familiar with the issue. I chose to only relay as much history as far back as the republic’s founding date because my paper is examining the conflict as it has been framed since the existence of the Turkish state. The non-governmental organizations I have chosen to look at have only been concerned with the actions of the government. However, in order to provide context of the country’s founding, I begin by discussing the final years of the Ottoman Empire, which immediately preceded the republic, since the empire’s final breaths are inextricably linked to the starting point at which the new nation-state was found. I explain Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s task of establishing Turkey as a new country because I believe it provides critical knowledge as to how Turkey’s Kurdish minority was initially treated and perceived as a part of the nation. Next, I move through the observable rise of the Kurdish nationalist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. This period saw a great amount of activism from Kurds in the East and also led to the founding of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, which has been the most visible face and voice of the Kurdish movement. Lastly, I give a brief overview of the current conflict situation, which
includes the unprecedented progress begun by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling party, the Justice and Development Party (AKP).

The second part of my thesis is the aggregate collection of my findings on what NGOs have done, but even more, it looks at how the NGOs have framed the conflict. My first examined NGO is the Center for the Research of Societal Problems (TOSAV), and I begin by explaining how it was founded. Then, I spend most of my focus on the organization’s manifesto in order to show how the NGO members perceive the conflict as well as its potential resolution. My second examined NGO is the European Union Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC), and I dissect this organization’s own crafted resolution, which suggests all the actions it believes the Turkish state must take to reach a working peace. The third examined NGO is the Democratization Program of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV), and my paper inspects what specific steps to peace this group lays out in its ‘Roadmap’ to a resolution. Finally, I describe the personal views of the founder of the American Kurdish Information Network, a NGO based in Washington, DC, and I discuss his activities to achieve a resolution.

In my paper’s third section, I give my own analysis of the NGOs’ approaches by showing how CR and other related theories apply to or can be used to interpret their work and the entire conflict. For each NGO’s central ideas regarding the nature of the conflict and its proposed resolution, I refer to a main CR theory in order to illustrate what practical value each idea has when examined through the CR school of thought. Furthermore, my paper points out the ideas which the NGOs have in common and, again, shows how CR theory explains these ideas. This paper also includes what other scholars
have discovered about the status of Turkish civil society in general, and I show how these findings relate to my own surveyed NGOs.

And finally in my last section, I conclude by giving my final comments, thoughts, recommendations, and future projections for the CR field as a whole. Once again, I use CR theories as a base for my ideas.
METHODOLOGY

Much of my decision-making throughout this paper was guided by the recommendations kindly given to me by scholars already involved in studying the Kurdish conflict. My criteria for choosing the non-governmental organizations were that it exhibited clear efforts to address Turkey’s Kurdish conflict and that it came endorsed by a knowledgeable person. Dr. David Phillips recommended I get in touch with Dr. Doğu Ergil and examine his work, so this is how I arrived at choosing his founded group TOSAV/TOSAM as one of my non-governmental organizations. I focused most of my attention on examining the organization’s manifesto called the “Document of Mutual Understanding” to see how the members framed the conflict and its resolution. Ergil instructed I look at his interview with the European Journal of Turkish Studies, and this gave me great insight and information into the NGO’s work and Ergil’s conflict approach.

It was through the same process in which I became introduced to the European Union Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC). Knowing Dr. Michael Gunter to be a scholar of Turkish studies, I contacted him for a recommendation, and he kindly referred me to the EUTCC, of which, I later discovered, he is also the Secretary General. I believed it would be beneficial to choose a foreign NGO as an organization to study because it would give me an international, outsider’s perspective. With the EUTCC, I, again, focused most of my attention on looking at the conference documents it drew up so that I may see how they compared with the papers of my other chosen NGOs.
Relying on my method of finding NGOs, I contacted American ambassador to Turkey Ross Wilson (2005-8), who continued my streak of good fortune to kindly recommend TESEV, which became another of my examined NGOs. To be consistent, I chose to analyze TESEV’s ‘Roadmap,’ its own documented paper on the Kurdish conflict.

Finally, on my own accord, I chose to search for NGOs in the District of Columbia that may also be working to address the Kurdish conflict from across international boundaries. I chose the American Kurdish Information Network (AKIN) since it was the only NGO I found in DC. Data on AKIN was taken from its website as well as an interview and email exchanges with its founder and only member Kani Xulam.
BACKGROUND

As with any attempt to approach a topic, there must be a general foundation of knowledge about the target topic. However, a logical consequence of efforts by the Turkish government to actively mitigate the Kurdish ethnic identity has resulted in an absence of concrete official numbers measuring the Kurdish population. Although the precise numbers are uncertain since Turkish state officials put a halt to publishing information on the Kurds following the 1965 census, estimates, albeit varying, exist to form an idea of Kurds living in Turkey. Several records concur that Kurds make up the second largest ethnic group in Turkey with most recent numbers estimating that Kurds make up between 15 to 20 percent of Turkey’s population, so with an official total population of about 72 million people, the Kurds account for 11 to 14 million – not a negligible number by any means. Since the late 1990s, about half of Turkey’s Kurds have lived in the Southeast region, yet much of the region’s people have migrated west to large urban centers in search of better economic conditions. In 13 provinces, Kurds hold the majority with 55 to 90 percent, while in another 8 provinces, they make up a significant minority with 15 to 50 percent. It is also worthy to note that half of the Middle East’s entire Kurdish ethnicity resides in Turkey.³

Parties to the Conflict

³Watts, Activists in Office, xi.
As it stands now, the primary parties of the conflict are the Turkish state, including the ruling party and the state’s security forces (military, police, etc.), the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), and finally, Turkey’s general population. Secondary parties of the conflict include the European Union, the United States, Iraq, Syria, and Iran. As is the case in countless conflicts, each party holds to a different definition of the conflict.

*The Turkish State*

Until very recently under the leadership of the AKP’s Erdoğan, the government has continually dismissed the conflict as a problem with terrorism with no deeper social or political issues to examine, so the state’s resolution approach has been a firm military response. Yet in 2005, Erdoğan delivered a hopeful speech in Diyarbakir whereby he recognized the existence of a Kurdish conflict and offered a different definition to the national identity which stressed citizenship rather than “Turkishness.” The AKP views the conflict as a result of a pervading forced nationalist and secularist Kemalist ideology, so it believes the resolution will come from strengthening relations through the common ground of Islam.4

*Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK)*

Although the Kurdish conflict began long before the PKK, the rise of this organized, armed group created a concrete, regular problem for the state to reckon with. The PKK was formed by Abdullah Öcalan in 1978 and under him, its aim was to use the mobilized Kurdish nationalist movement to establish a democratic Kurdistan in the

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Southeast. It is labeled as an illegal terrorist group by Turkey, the US, and Europe because it has used armed violence, yet it is also comprised of nonviolent subgroups which are involved in political, social, and community activities. High-ranking PKK officers say peace will come when the Kurdish language and education are allowed, the Kurdish identity is recognized by the constitution and granted autonomy, and Öcalan is released from imprisonment. By using armed violence as a central strategy, it has propelled the conflict to involve countless deaths and has given even further justification for the state to treat the Kurds as a security issue rather than a political one. Although the PKK continues to use violence, it has become less of a priority, and the PKK also say they believe the conflict can be resolved by mediation. However, many who oppose the PKK find the organization's talk of relying more on dialogue rather than guns quite hard to believe.

General Population

Civil society in Turkey has grown over the years, and the Kurdish conflict is one of the principle social matters which they are addressing. However, a majority of the general population are disconnected from the conflict.

Secondary Parties

The European Union, ever since accession talks resumed with Turkey, has been a very involved actor in the conflict by pressuring the Turkish government to complete its necessary democratic reforms. Syria and Iran have in the past used the Kurdish issue as a

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5 Çelik, “Turkey: The Kurdish Question and the Coercive State,” 155.
7 Çelik, “Turkey: The Kurdish Question and the Coercive State,” 161.
tool for each of their own political interests. Syria allowed safe haven to Öcalan as a "bargaining chip" during negotiations over water access from the Tigris-Euphrates River. Similarly, Iran allowed refuge to about 1,200 PKK members in its borders as a way weakening weapon against Turkey since it felt threatened by its secularist state model.

**Atatürk’s Legacy**

Much of the Turkish state’s overall policy toward the country’s Kurdish population has been handed down over the generations and can be traced back to the frame of mind which pervaded Turkey during the transition period between the Ottoman Empire’s final years and Turkish republic’s nascent years under its founder Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Similar to how Atatürk’s founding principles of a robust secular modernization has continued to inspire the mindset of many Turkish policy authorities, the Turkish government and military have dealt with the Kurdish people in a likewise habitual manner which has not veered too far from Turkey’s political history. Looking back, Mustafa Kemal originally laid the foundation for the Kurds to retain their local customs and have a degree of autonomy, yet despite early intentions, proclamations never become realized and the current conflict is the result of promises still unfulfilled.

In the years directly following the First World War, Mustafa Kemal (not yet Atatürk) and his supporters occupied themselves with the critical task of gathering and organizing numbers of people in Anatolia to stand unified in opposing the Allies, who were resolute in their aim to carve up what was remaining of the hitherto fading Ottoman Empire. The Kurdish tribes in Eastern Anatolia comprised a sizable constituency which
Mustafa Kemal and his fellow military officers hoped to co-opt into their resistance force, yet one barrier to this plan was that some Kurdish leaders sought to ally with the British in order to realize their dream of independence. After Allied troops began to arrive at various locations throughout Anatolia in 1918, Kurdish leaders in several spots sought their aid in breaking off and claiming their own Kurdistan, and as Mustafa Kemal became aware of these divisive sentiments which the British also encouraged, he worked to counter them. In 1919, he sent very amicable telegrams to several Kurdish tribal leaders whereby he argued for them to remain loyal to the state and not allow the Allies to take advantage of a split and, thus, weakened Anatolia. Mustafa Kemal made countless exhaustive appeals for the Kurds to remain united with the Turks by emphatically emphasizing that Kurds and Turks were ethnic brothers and sisters, so they were tied to an inseparable family and race of people. He declared that they and all other Muslims must fight together to protect their ‘fatherland.’ At this crucially risky point in history when powerful Allied forces waited expectantly both outside and within Ottoman borders to stake control over Turkish and Kurdish homelands, Mustafa Kemal astutely recognized the need for Kurdish cooperation in order to protect the integrity of the land. He also conveyed to the Kurds that he was cognizant of Kurdish aspirations by assuring them that he supported guaranteed the Kurds having all the rights they desired, as long as the Allied conquest did not succeed in partitioning the lands. When proclamations which were to form the basis of the National Pact, the charter declaring Turkey’s independence from

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8 Mango, “Atatürk and the Kurds,” 5.
9 In a telegram to Diyarbekir, Mustafa Kemal wrote, “Kurds and Turks are true brothers and may not be separated. Our existence requires that Kurds, Turks and all Muslim elements should work together to defend our independence and prevent the partition of the fatherland.”
Allied occupation, were issued, they, too, declared the eastern provinces as definite pieces of the Ottoman community and that provincial Kurdish customs would be honored. In a 1920 speech by Mustafa Kemal, he stated that:

“This is…the national frontier of brotherly nations living together and genuinely sharing the same aims. But in addition, every one of the Muslim elements living within the borders of this fatherland has its own specific environment, customs and race, and privileges relating to them have been accepted and confirmed, mutually and in all sincerity….The gentlemen making up your august assembly are not only Turks, or Circassians or Kurds.”

At another speech two years later, he stated “The people of Turkey is a social entity united in race, religion and culture, imbued with mutual respect and a sense of sacrifice and sharing the same destiny and interests.” Historian Andrew Mango is good point out the phrasing ‘people of Turkey’ (Türkiye halkı) and its distinct character from ‘Turkish people’ (Türk halkı). Yet, despite Mustafa Kemal’s pre-independence idea of granting autonomy, when the republic was crafting its 1924 constitution, there was no discussion of how the various provinces would be administered; the promise of autonomy was forgotten. Mango’s explanation for this was that Atatürk and his fellow leaders’ priorities had changed as the nation-building began. Kurdish autonomy slipped off the agenda as Atatürk and the powerful Turkish elite believed this would become a hindrance to their plan of constructing a unified, modern, and secular Turkey, especially since they perceived the East to be backward.10

**The Kurdish National Movement**

Kurdish rebellions began as early as 1920s and 1930s, and these were responded to with severe military suppression. The earliest notable rebellion was the 1937 – 1938

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uprising in Dersim, and this met with the heavy hand of military forces. Yet, despite ongoing structural violence in the form of underdevelopment in the East relative to the West, very little armed violence or unrest erupted for about thirty years, until the 1960s and 1970s, a period known as the “reawakening” of the Kurdish nationalism.

Scholar Nicole F. Watts notes a grand distinction between the "rebirth" of Kurdish nationalism which began in the 1960s and the previous wave of nationalism in the 1930s. The new rise of nationalism was led by a younger generation of Kurdish intellectuals, politicians, and activists who published in the Kurdish language and openly discussed the fate of Turkey's Kurdish identity. This new, less violent wave was a change from the past when Kurdish nationalism was mostly expressed through violence and led by traditional Kurdish tribal and religious leaders. The most innovative aspect of the new nationalist movement was that it combined forces with the rising leftist student movement that was spreading across Turkey at that historical period. Kurdish leaders who also aimed to establish a socialist state reached out across ethnic lines to ally with all other socialists. In 1967, tens of thousands of Kurdish activists organized public demonstrations which became known as the Eastern Meetings. Watt argues that while the 1960s Kurdish movement was very successful in bridging "linguistic, religious, and tribal divisions that obstructed the spread of Kurdish nationalism in past decades," it also prevented a broad mobilization of southeastern Kurds since it challenged the traditional Kurdish leadership. In 1962, the National Security Council was founded; which comprised of military officers, right-wing political leaders, and the intelligence agency;

and it was instrumental in suppressing Kurdish and leftist activism, which were tightly linked as Kurds sought to overturn the socio-economic structure of the elite. This state effort to repress the Kurdish identity had the opposite effect and emboldened the Kurdish community even more. A main leftist party Worker Party of Turkey (TIP) joined with Kurdish intellectuals and combined their protest messages to gain a large mobilization for the struggle for economic rights as well as more rights for all Turkish minorities. In 1969, Kurdish university students formed the first legal Kurdish organization known as the Revolutionary Eastern Cultural Hearths (DDKO), but in 1971, the military coup forced both TIP and DDKO to close on the grounds that they posed an internal security threat and were treasonous.

In 1978, former DDKO member Abdullah Öcalan severed from Turkish leftists and formed the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) with the goal of establishing an independent Kurdish Marxist-Leninist state in the East, with the intention of uniting with all other Kurds in the region. The PKK conducted guerilla operations, which until the capture of Öcalan in 1999, caused about 31,000 deaths, 3,000 destroyed villages, three million internally displaced people, and cost the Turkish government about eight billion dollars annually. After Öcalan's capture in 1999, there lasted a five-year ceasefire until violence renewed in 2004 due to complaints from the PKK that the Turkish military was still continuing to kill Kurdish fighters. Since 2004, the PKK has tried to redefine itself by seeking to become a legal political group and also by renouncing violence unless necessary.

12 Bisku, “The Resurgence of Kurdish Nationalism in Northern Kurdistan-Turkey from the 1970s to the Present,” 87-88.
The "Kurdish Opening"

In a 2009 speech, Prime Minister Recip Tayyip Erdoğan spoke of the need to make the Kurds feel more included within Turkish society. As its own response to the Kurdish conflict, the ruling Justice and Development Party (Turkish: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi - AKP) initiated the “Kurdish Opening”/ “Kurdish Initiative” campaign to begin the effort to resolve the Kurdish conflict. Professor Kemal Kirisci of Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, Turkey defines the initiative as constituting three major components: “confidence building measures,” amnesty for the PKK, and constitutional changes. The measures meant to build confidence between the East’s Kurdish population and the government predominantly include the allowance of Kurdish speeches in Kurdish mosques as well as the changing of city names from Turkish back to Kurdish. A second component of the “opening” campaign which is very controversial is the move to grant amnesty to PKK militants as an incentive for them to disarm and reintegrate into society. Söner Çağaptay, senior fellow and director of the Turkish Research Program at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, informs how this component backfired when several members of the PKK who the government permitted in Turkey from their haven in Iraq did not abstain from giving a provocative speech in Diyarbakir which condoned the PKK’s violent terrorism. The AKP-led campaign’s final major

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14 Kurdish cities in eastern Turkey were given Turkish names as part of a nation-building procedure.
component is substantive constitutional reform which would broaden the definition of a ‘Turk’ and also remove educational restrictions in schools. Kirisci states that the troubling ambiguity with the term ‘Turk’ stems from whether the constitution uses it with a civic or ethnic meaning. The other issue of education comes from Article 42, Item 9 which states that “no language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education.” The main debate with educational reform is whether school curriculum should be allowed in Kurdish or whether Kurdish should be allowed as a foreign language.

The “Kurdish Opening”/ “Kurdish Initiative” began with promising momentum as Erdoğan lifted the state of emergency in the East and also established TRT6, a separate state-run television channel broadcast in the Kurdish language. However, the unfortunate general consensus is that it has lost its drive and stalled. One of the most recent sources of contention has been the resistance of the government to allow pro-Kurdish political parties from running in elections, and this has Kurds fearing that they will continue to be pushed out of the country’s political system.16

FINDINGS

TOSAV/TOSAM

Turkish professor Dr. Doğu Ergil had recognized how the Turkish state had been narrowly viewing the Kurdish issue as simply a security threat that can only be resolved with military might, yet contrary to this long-established view, he sought to approach the conflict with Turkish Kurds as a social issue that demanded in-depth attention. Ergil felt it was an impossibility for the government and military to ever resolve the conflict in the East because their underlying manner of thinking was flawed and because they lacked sight of the conflict’s full image. He believed the government’s engrained understanding of the country’s proper make-up was incomplete in that it left out any space for a recognized Kurdish identity. Ergil also became aware that there was an absence of any comprehensive academic studies on the conflict, so he used the state’s deficient and forced vision of a Turkish nation along with the lack of substantial data to inform the state as just causes and justifications to conduct research which could extend the world’s base of knowledge on Turkey’s Kurdish population. On account of few efforts to gather reliable information, up until Ergil’s research, Kurds have been largely dehumanized and stereotypically portrayed to the public as separatist terrorists. After Ergil’s research in the mid-1990s, which was mostly based on interviews of Eastern Kurds, the topic of the Kurds’ national standing pushed forth into the public arena and the view that all Kurds sought secession from the country was openly challenged. Ergil’s academic work had introduced an opening for a national conversation about a denied reality of Turkey.
Ergil says that after his research discovered that democratic values were actually quite internalized in the eastern provinces when many thought the contrary was true, only the business leaders contacted him to express appreciation for his work. He found business leaders were more supportive of engaging with the East than the politicians because they knew peace and stability with the Kurds increased the opportunities for new markets and investment, and an end to hostilities also meant money used by the military could be diverted to support business expansion as well. Ergil understood that what is good for peace is good for business. Yet, while business leaders were supportive of Ergil’s research on the Eastern Kurds, he was quite disappointed to find that Turkey’s politicians had no interest in learning his results. “They do not want to change the system that provides them status, privilege and unaccountability. In fact they see new knowledge as subversive,” he says.17 He believes that the fact that no political figure tried to use his research is demonstrative of the state leadership wanting to remain ignorant about the country and keep the status quo.

In response to his realization that the conflict was one-sided with the Turkish state heavily controlling how the conflict was being defined and, therefore, how its resolution was being carried out (Ergil calls this the “ignorance factor”), he sought the assistance of international organizations to lend their expertise in negotiations and conflict resolution, and together they recruited seven Turks and seven Kurds from a range of backgrounds to begin to form a more balanced approach to the conflict and its resolution. Throughout 1995 and 1996, this medley of Turkish and Kurdish citizens met at several various

neutral spots. What initially was a group of strangers, some of which hated each other at first, later become a close and amicable working group, and in 1997 they created the Center for the Research of Societal Problems (Turkish: TOSAV - Toplum Sorunaları Arastirma Vakfi). TOSAV’s mandate was to bring ethnic Turkish and Kurdish Turkish citizens together in order to present to the world an alternative view of the conflict which could challenge the long-dominant view. TOSAV was meant to represent the ignored voices which did not seek violence and separation, and Ergil hoped to create a dialogue which would lead to finding a common interest and shared goal amongst the people and the state.

The “Document of Mutual Understanding”

In 1999, the members of TOSAV wrote the “Document of Mutual Understanding,” which was the group’s own manifesto for declaring its intentions and the principles to abide by for resolving the conflict, addressed to Turkey’s public. As stated in its opening paragraph, the document “would work to lay a new constitutional foundation for Turkish democracy based on multiculturalism, political pluralism and the rule of law.” TOSAV’s Document goes deep and wide into the many faults of the Turkish government prior to diving into the Kurdish conflict. Its starting premise and stated need for the document is that the Turkish political system is outdated, inflexible to adapt to changing circumstances, excessively state-central, and detached from the demands of its people. Among the state’s numerous defects are that it does not allow enough space for criticism or questioning from its people, and it suppresses any

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objections because it deems them to be dangerous. The Document states that state suppression is the cause behind society’s resort to violence, which further leads to the state responding with more violence, and ultimately the top-down and bottom-up violence within Turkey “reinforce and legitimize one another.”

The writers of the Document also give what they believe to be an unfortunate yet truthful interpretation of the state; not intending to criticize the state, they simply convey that the disappointing government is a victim of historical circumstances. Their explanation goes as follows: after the fall of the Ottoman Empire, there existed a strong state bureaucracy, yet there lacked a sense of nationhood, so the state took on the role of creating a unified nation, but the state has not shifted from this role of nation-creator to a more appropriate role of nation-“coordinator.” According to TOSAV, the state has failed to recognize Turkey’s culturally rich society and has falsely pursued its unsustainable policy of “uniformity over unity.” The strategy which may had been temporarily essential during the 1920s is no longer essential in the 21st century and has not been for many decades. TOSAV argues that the original definition of “Turkishness” used to create a nation also created a “fictive reality” and nationalist “standardization” which does not reflect the real nature of Turkish society, and it has combined with the underdevelopment of the Kurdish eastern region to produce a sometimes violent, separatist segment of society. TOSAV members state that the parties to the conflict must meet separate from those who created the Kurdish conflict, so TOSAV does not advocate for engaging in a dialogue with the government. What is more, they do not consider the conflict creators, here being the state institutions as it says, as even a party to the conflict.
Rather, the Document calls for the real parties to the conflict to meet and devise their own independent solutions. Then, these solutions should be presented to the public, who is the “real bearer of the problem(s).” TOSAV splits the nation-state along ethnic lines and argues that there are only two parties to the conflict -- the Kurdish and Turkish communities – and that they are not at fault for the conflict; only the state is at fault because it has not fully transferred power to the people and allowed true democratization to occur.

The organization speaks on behalf of all Kurds as one monolithic group to say that the Kurds do not wish to form a separate state from Turkey; they only wish to feel as if they belong to the current state. They feel that this must happen with concrete reforms on education and culture such as an official recognition of their identity. Kurds should have the freedom to preserve their cultural identity, which is not identical to citizenship, so the state should not intervene in the private lives of personal and group identities. The only role the state has is preventing one group from encroaching on another.

One of the resolution steps called for by the Document is a restructuring of the country’s educational system so that it teaches universal human values instead of instructing youth to associate a true Turkey with a single ethnicity and religion. The Document calls for a brand new constitution and laws which are founded upon new principles of multiculturalism, political pluralism, and participatory democracy. Moreover, previously signed international agreements must be enforced. It also says there should be a restructuring of the government so that there is a true separation of powers, especially for the judiciary, and the state should create an Ombudsman to
establish a monitoring and harmonizing mechanism. Violence must be renounced, and again, the conflict’s parties should convene to find common ground, “encourage the silent majority,” and “build a constituency of peace.”

The East and Southeast regions are declared to be “disaster areas” lacking a completed physical infrastructure. To address the issues of underdevelopment in these majority-Kurdish locations, TOSAV’s manifesto suggests the state provide monetary assistance to create entrepreneurial incentives and starting short-, medium-, and long-term projects which create jobs and lift people from poverty. Industrialization must increase which also incorporate the local resources, and the livestock sector, which is the core source of income for the region’s people, should be nurtured by expanding lands and pastures used for grazing.

The Document concludes with a call to all citizens in Turkey, its target audience, to support TOSAV’s efforts because it is the entire country’s responsibility to protect the rights of others just as they demand the same rights for themselves. TOSAV’s manifesto, in quite beautifully moving language, reminds the public that all individuals who wish to live in a democracy must ask themselves how much they are doing to strengthen that democracy, and that it must be everyone’s goal to make Turkey a “civilized” country. In addition, TOSAV will do its part to support anyone who has common aims.

**Peace Projects**

After crafting its manifesto, TOSAV sought to spread its message as it intended to the population in order to start a nation-wide public discourse and mobilize people in a common consensus around the Document. With received EU funding, the organization
started several civic projects, which included civil-society capacity building and
democracy training, and also began a project to organize regional meetings with
community leaders in 1999. One specific project was a seven-year radio program called
‘Democracy Radio’ meant to spark public debate on a range of topics. Another initiative
was a bi-monthly journal called the ‘TOSAV Letter,’ which was distributed in Turkish,
English, and Kurdish. TOSAV also printed the finalized points of the regional meetings
with community leaders in all three languages, yet the state confiscated the Kurdish
version since it was illegal at the time. TOSAV was suspended by the State Security
Court, but Ergil and his fellow members admitted temporary defeat and closed the
organization down to start up anew as TOSAM. The new organization continued with its
focus on strengthening Turkey’s civil society and democracy, but Ergil says that due to a
lack of creativity, TOSAM’s funds ran out, and it, too, had to close.

**European Union Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC)**

In November 2004, several European civil society organizations with a common
political goal convened at the European Parliament in Brussels, Belgium for a conference
on the vital connection between Turkey, its Kurdish population, and Turkey’s bid to join
the European Union. The Rafto Foundation of Norway, the Kurdish Human Rights
Project of the United Kingdom, Medico International of Germany, and later the Bar
Human Rights Committee of England and Wales held the conference to discuss their
shared interest of Turkey becoming a member state of the EU. From this conference, the
organizations formed the EU Turkey Civic Commission with the mandate to monitor and
endorse Turkey’s EU accession whereby it fulfills the Copenhagen Criteria, stated as achieving the “stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.” The EUTCC feels that Turkey’s current handling of the Kurdish conflict illustrates a clear failure to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria and that the conflict must be resolved in order for Turkey to successfully join the EU, so the commission has focused its efforts to tackle the Kurdish conflict as Turkey’s key to opening the EU’s door. The commission reviews and assesses Turkey’s progress in advancing Kurdish rights, raises awareness of the conflict, and also attempts to bring stakeholders together for dialogue. On December 2004, the EU Council of Ministers decided to open accession talks with Turkey, and since then, Turkey has achieved what the EUTCC and others have deemed positive movements forward, yet the EUTCC also concedes that the Kurdish conflict remains in decay, serving as a rusty chain which holds Turkey back not only from the EU but, more importantly, from a truly inclusive and democratic nation-state. While the EUTCC’s target audience and priority is the Turkish government, the international organization also calls upon other EU members to also support negotiations with Turkey.

In November 2010, the EUTCC held its seventh and most recent international conference and brought together academic scholars, human rights activists, politicians, legal experts, and other intellectuals. From this gathering the attendees wrote the seventh “Final Resolution” as a contribution to the peacebuilding effort. In the paper, the EUTCC makes declarations and calls for action which are quite similar though updated
from its six previous conferences. In the latest ‘final’ resolution, the commission recalls its older resolutions and reiterates the needed steps which must be undertaken.

Firstly, the EUTCC explains how it is its duty to monitor and pressure Turkey to follow through in fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria. The resolution paper goes through a list of concrete steps the Turkish government must take, frequently referencing resolutions from older conferences, and also calls for EU states to join in the effort to assist Turkey resolve the Kurdish conflict. Concrete steps the Turkish state must take include ratifying international human rights standards such as the UN protocol against torture (OPCAT), the ICC’s Rome Statute, and the convention on protecting minorities; removing constitutional articles which do not uphold freedom of speech; removing the ten percent electoral threshold; and releasing Abdullah Öcalan while also recognizing the PKK as a legitimate group. Concrete steps the EUTCC urges the EU to take also include pressuring Turkey to achieve its listed reforms, politically and financially helping Turkey create a platform for dialogue, allowing European Kurds to peacefully protest against Turkey without punishment, supporting Turkey’s decentralization of power, and removing the PKK from its terrorist list (a step for the US as well).

One of the repeated pleas which the EUTCC makes is the Turkish government’s need to carry out substantial legal reform to the state’s constitution. The EUTCC advocates Turkey to enforce the legal provisions already in place such as punishing those who torture and commit other abuses and going further to adopt international laws which prohibit torture and abuse. Also, the EUTCC points to the gross lack of the freedom of speech, evident by the state’s continued persecution of journalists and other citizens who
speak out against it. All examples of the state’s human rights abuses are used as proof by the EUTCC that Turkey has not made enough efforts to reform its legal system in order to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria.

A crucial element of the legal reforms which the EUTCC calls for is protection of the Kurds as a recognized minority group. As the constitution stands today, the state only recognizes non-Muslim groups as official minorities, and since the Kurds are a Muslim group, they are left out of the state’s zone of protection. The EUTCC recognizes that the state must remedy this because it denies state recognition of the Kurdish identity. Furthermore, the Commission walks through every UN and EU charter and convention which Turkey has still neglected to sign and ratify, each one dealing with a different aspect of protecting minority rights such as cultural expression and language.

One point of emphasis by the EUTCC is the requirement of consulting representatives of the Kurdish society whenever the state moves forward toward a resolution. One variance between the EUTCC and the other NGOs is that the EUTCC specifically enjoins the state on the need to include Kurdish women in the political sphere and brings up the suffering of women from domestic abuse and illiteracy across all social levels. Overall, the commission states that the AKP government’s 2009 initiative to open dialogues with Kurds has been a “failure” since there have been practically no conversations with Kurdish groups. On the contrary, the conflict has worsened in many Kurdish regions, and instead of consulting with Kurds, the state proceeds to silence them by arresting and trying Kurdish activists.
The EUTCC also stands out in its unique effort to highlight two other entities besides the state which has a role in the Kurdish conflict. One, the EUTCC urges the international community to do more to condemn the state’s military operations, which go on unimpeded with tacit approval, especially from its ally the United States. The EUTCC argues that the EU must be involved and provide the necessary platform for the actors to engage in talks. “Without a common ground for constructive dialogue on all levels of society, Turkey cannot transform into a truly democratic entity.”

Additionally, the November 2010 ‘background paper’ to the international conference, which goes into much greater detail about Turkey’s progress and weaknesses in relation to the conflict, also blames the country’s negative discrimination toward Kurds on the “continued disininformation promoted by public figures and the Turkish media.” The paper explicitly states that ‘ultranationalism’ is at the root of the conflict, and the commission does not wish to neglect the role of mass media in perpetuating what it deems extreme nationalism.

Finally, one interesting resolution tool which the EUTCC and no other organization suggests is establishing a truth and reconciliation commission. With the assistance and support of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who was instrumental in South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the EUTCC is promoting such a body to bring about a peaceful resolution.

TESEV

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19 EUTCC. “Background Paper to the 7th International Conference on EU, Turkey and the Kurds,” 2.
The Democratization Program of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (Turkish: TESEV - Turkiye Ekonomik ve Sosyal Etudler Vakfi) established the Kurdish conflict as one of its working areas in 2004 and has conducted many studies to gather a greater understanding of the Kurdish conflict for the aim of resolving it. In June 2008 in the eastern city of Diyarbakir, TESEV held a workshop which hosted individuals from various sectors including NGOs, professional associations, parliamentarians, and local government officials. Workshop attendees were representatives of varying political thought, possessed expertise on relevant issues, and were also people who had been directly affected by the conflict. All workshop findings and policy proposals brought forth, which TESEV organized into “A Roadmap for the Solution to the Kurdish Question,” are the opinions of Kurds and do not belong to TESEV. TESEV’s stated goal is to act as a microphone for amplifying the “unheard voices” of Turkey’s Kurdish population and to direct the Kurdish voices straight toward the government as well as all of Turkey’s people.

TESEV’s “Roadmap” outlines political, security, economic, legal, industrial, social, and other reforms for the Turkish government to complete in order to address the various dimensions of the conflict which usually become blurred when kept at the periphery of the state’s view while the state directs its focus solely on terrorist threats. Prior to getting into the nuts and bolts of specific transformative reforms, TESEV first lays out a few “general principles” which should not be negotiated regardless of what direction the path to a resolution takes. One principle is that the government must consult with various representatives within society. All stakeholders to the conflict, including
businesses and other NGOs, academics, and human rights experts, should be included to
“make an effort to create a common discourse of solution-seeking.” Another principle is
simply that the language used to formulate government policies should include an explicit
recognition of the Kurdish identity. TESEV states that the overall reasoning behind such
principles is to first increase trust amongst the Kurds toward their government before
other reforms can happen.

The political steps which TESEV finds key to a resolution include the halt of
military operations/ceasefire, negotiations for militants to disarm, allowing some form of
amnesty and way of reintegration into society for PKK members, as well as rehabilitation
services for those fighters who disarm. Secondly, the state must forgo its isolationist
policies and engage in dialogue with Kurdish political parties. Thirdly and finally, the
state must engage in dialogue and communicate with NGOs who represent the Kurds and
who “know the problem by heart.”

The legal steps which TESEV calls for are a new constitution in addition to other
legislative reforms. TESEV representatives declare Turkey’s current constitution a
“barrier” to the conflict’s resolution. First, the constitution must redefine the republic as
having a multi-cultural character, and it must not characterize Turkish citizenship with
any specific ethnic, religious, or other sectarian identity that excludes any groups living
within Turkey’s boundaries. The reformed constitution should give more fundamental
freedoms which comply with international human rights norms. It is also very important
to restructure the military/security institution so that it is subject to government oversight
and inspection. Military decisions and expenses must be under legislative and judicial
review. In short, TESEV believes there should be a check on military power so that there is institutional accountability. TESEV also argues that Kurds are unfairly denied political rights due to a high election threshold, so one concrete suggestion for reform is for the threshold to be decreased to five percent from the current ten percent of the national vote needed. This step is intended to allow Kurds some representation in parliament. The last major legal reform TESEV addresses is the provocative question of the Kurdish language. Reform measures which the government should take include allowing the Kurdish language in schools, in mosques in the form of sermons, in regional courts, in hospitals, in theatres for staged plays, and on maps for the names of regional towns and other locations. TESEV argues that hiring Kurdish-speaking public employees in the eastern region of Turkey would permit many non-Turkish speaking locals access to essential public services and further restore “a trust-based relationship between the State and the local public.”

American Kurdish Information Network (AKIN)

Kani Xulam is a Turkish Kurd from Diyarbakir who is the founder and single member of his advocacy organization in Washington, DC. Xulam lobbies on Capitol Hill, engages with American media, gives talks when invited, and has tried to interact, although unsuccessfully, with academics. His short-term goal is to raise awareness in the United States of the Kurdish conflict, but more importantly, to raise awareness while framing the conflict through a different lens than what has been dominantly used, mostly by the Turkish elite. One of Xulam’s grievances is that the
Kurdish issue in the entire Middle East region has been defined by “adversaries” – the Turks, Syrians, and Persians. He also says that those who have informed Americans about the conflict have ulterior motives and mislead others by falsely labeling all Kurds as terrorists, so one of his goals is to correctly explain who it is the Kurdish people actually are. Xulam’s long-term goal is to bring the debate to the negotiating table and bring a peaceful resolution to the conflict, and he does not discount the option of a Kurdistan nation-state separate from Turkey. He states his belief that many Turkish intellectuals have been influenced by the state ideology, and he stresses that ideas and “dogmas must be broken” to reach a resolution.

The media through which Xulam advocates are mostly hunger strikes, vigils, and protests. Interestingly, he prefers to hold protests in front of churches because he believes church-attendants are pious people with “the fear of God” and assumes they will be more responsive to the Kurds’ plight. He rarely connects with Kurds since there are so few in DC and sometimes reaches out to DC Turks yet states interactions can turn uncivil. He focuses mostly on Americans because he views himself at an advantage with his English fluency and most Kurds do not have the time for advocacy when they are working to make ends meet. Xulam states he has no job or income and that funding for AKIN comes from Kurdish-Americans and their American friends.

The challenges which Xulam faces in his advocacy work is that “there is no right and wrong; there’s only the strong and weak,” and most Kurds in the US are in an extremely weak position in the conflict even in the US where freedom abounds. The Kurdish Diaspora in the US is at a disadvantage because they are first generation Kurds
who do not possess enough disposable income to advocate effectively. Secondly, Turkey is one of the US’ closest allies in the Middle East. Xulam measures AKIN’s impact by monitoring the feedback he receives on the organization’s website, the number who sign up for AKIN’s email list, how often he’s invited to speak, and the emails he receives from Turkey.

Xulam also believes that Americans are more susceptible and responsive to rally behind global causes of justice. He says he wants to make the Kurdish cause catch on with the American public just as freeing Tibet has caught on. Hollywood produces countless documentaries and motion pictures based on Tibet or other causes taking place all over the world, and millions of Americans consume these products of global conflict, after which they become avid supporters of fighting injustice. He says he would one day like to write a screenplay to have produced into a movie about the Kurdish conflict.

Kani Xulam is unsure how the situation will change in Turkey, but he believes his job is to stay in the US in order to explain and shape how the Kurdish conflict is framed by Americans. Through AKIN, Xulam assumes if he can draw attention to the Kurdish conflict, then he can get the American public to care about the Kurds. He has great faith in American power and thinks the United States “should” lift Turkey to a higher standard.
ANALYSIS

TOSAV/TOSAM

TOSAV believes that the absolute root cause of the Kurdish conflict is the ineffective and unresponsive state “institutions, practices, and ideology,” and not the people. Using the USAID’s “Theories of Change” model, TOSAV subscribes to the theory that the conflict’s resolution will follow from a change in “Functioning Institutions.” Specifically, the two institutional pillars which must undergo a transformation are the political and judicial institutions. TOSAV assumes that if the interests of citizens are addressed through activities such as reforming the constitution and decentralizing the nation-state government, the political pillar of Turkey’s institutions can improve, and this will resolve a significant piece of the conflict. The second institutional pillar, the judicial system, can be improved by such activities as enforcing a rule of law and which equally protects the rights of all. However, TOSAV also argues that within the fault of the state institutions is also the false definition of Turkish citizenship, which is based on the single ethnicity of Turks, and this, too, must change to include the value of pluralism and create space for Turks of different ethnicities. There does not exist a theory of change which advocates for a change to a nation’s defining characteristics, yet it is assumed that the national conception of citizenship can only be rewritten by the top leadership since it is an institutional change. TOSAV finds that the source is and always has been with a sole actor – the state structure.
TOSAV’s Document states there is no ethnic hatred between the Turkish and Kurdish communities, and this is probably why there is no mention of any need for community-based reconciliation or building bridges between social groups so as to develop “Healthy Relationships,” a theory of change based on altering the public attitudes. Even though TOSAV does not consider there to be a pervasive culture of hostility between the ethnic Turkish and Kurdish communities, the organization still believes schools in Turkey have a part to play in reforming alongside the legal structure. TOSAV is the only examined NGO which, as part of transforming the state structure, enjoins the educational system to be restructured as well so that it can act as sources of new national values, namely diversity and multiculturalism rather than homogeneity.

One can argue this goes beyond the reforming of the top leadership and implies that the population live by the wrong set of values. This, then, suggests a form of peace education which touts greater tolerance. Professor of psychology Fathali M. Moghaddam believes 'omniculturalism' is a more optimal type of educational framework to manage diversity in a society.²⁰ Omniculturalism is a combination of multiculturalism and universality where instead of focusing on one framework, Moghaddam argues that schools should introduce his new two-stage policy. In the first stage, schools discuss the universal commonalities between human beings and teach that everyone is the same in basic ways, thereby first establishing the notion of likeness and unity amongst people. Only after this, in the second stage of omniculturalism, schools introduce the idea of distinctiveness and educate students on how everyone also has differences which give us

²⁰ Moghaddam, Georgetown University lecture, November 30, 2009.
our unique identities. Moghaddam argues that is the Western way of overemphasizing group differences which has unfortunately led to stark separations between groups and to intergroup conflict. Turkey's Kurdish conflict adds to Moghaddam's theory to illustrate the opposite -- that an overemphasis on false sameness can also lead to intergroup conflict as minority groups struggle to exert their distinct identities.

During his endeavors, Dr. Doğu Ergil recognized that the Turkish government did not wish to heed the results of his research regarding the country’s Kurds. “Selective exposure” theory explains this behavior from Turkish politicians by arguing that we select what kind of information to which we expose ourselves in order to avoid cognitive dissonance, which is the confrontation of two or more discordant or contradictory thoughts. In other words, we decide what messages we wish to listen so that we do not have to cope with ideas which may challenge our accepted understandings. The Turkish state has refused to give recognition to opinions which may argue against it long-help understanding of state structure. This may be a significant reasoning behind why successive Turkish governments have silenced many who challenge their opinions and why they do not make attempts to start a dialogue.

The European Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC)

“Disputants often have to consider how to change the dynamic so that it is no longer in a perpetrator’s interest to behave negatively.” In other words, if behaving in a certain way is not as beneficial as it previously was, then a group will be inclined to

21 Manjoo, True Enough, 24.
22 Mayer, Staying with Conflict, 151.
change its behavior. Therefore, the possibility of EU membership becomes a new factor which can influence the conflict dynamic. The EUTCC sees its role as attempting to strengthen the ability of the EU factor to change the dynamic so that Turkey views membership as a greater interest than the status quo. What makes the EUTCC a potentially effective actor is that by using the incentive of joining the European Union, it can serve as an external source of pressure for Turkey to make a more serious effort in resolving the Kurdish conflict. In their papers outlining the steps toward a resolution, the EUTCC makes continuous references to the Copenhagen Criteria as the golden standard for Turkey’s reforms. The ever-present understanding is that if Turkey wants to become a member of the EU club, Turkey must comply with the Copenhagen Criteria. So, EU membership acts as leverage for the Turkish state to reform the government in the way needed to tackle the causes of the Kurdish conflict. However, ever since the European Commission suspended accession talks with Turkey for a year in 2006, the Turkish population has been less supportive of EU membership. With current public support at lower levels than previously, one cannot be certain the EUTCC will be so effective at using the path to EU accession as the same path to peace with the Kurds. Furthermore, while EU membership may certainly play an incentivizing role for Turkey to reform, one can argue that reform attributed to this method is only a superficial conflict transformation and a false generosity by the state. For an enduring conflict such as this, a durable resolution should display a sincere attempt by the state to engage with its Kurdish citizens over a long period of time, not for the sake of the EU. Peace cannot be

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sustainable by only reforming the constitution; with a conflict that has gone on so long, there must be efforts by the state to build peaceful relationships amongst the state leadership and its marginalized population.

One of the EUTCC’s recommendations is establishing a truth and reconciliation commission. Creating such a commission is a measure which is meant to heal and restore relationships between different groups which have suffered long and painful social divisions. The recommendation for this implies there is a need to transform relationships, social structures, and attitudes, which is a need that goes far beyond a simple end to violence. One may doubt there is such a thing as a ‘simple’ end when dealing with conflict, but there is absolutely a difference between resolving conflicts which are enduring and those that are not. Since the very birth of the country, the conflict between Kurds and the Turkish state has endured and at the core has been the issue of national and ethnic identity, which proves difficult to compromise over, especially if all remains the same; therefore, some aspect of the conflict must be transformed. After a substantial effort by the state apparatus to engage with the Kurds toward a conflict transformation, a truth and reconciliation commission could certainly start the process of healing a relationship which has been broken for about 88 years.

“Critical to the dynamic that drives contemporary conflicts are social-psychological perceptions, emotions, and subjective experiences, which can be wholly independent of the substantive or originating issues.”24 Once a conflict which was originally rooted in “issues of substance,” such as land or governance, persists and

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24 Lederach, Building Peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies, 14. 

becomes mired in violence, then psychological elements enter the conflict foray and become secondary sources of conflict. So, a resolution cannot look only at the original roots, and NGOs cannot craft a solution which does not attempt to rebuild the sullied trust between the opposing sides and larger community. This explains why those who call for more Kurdish rights will at times call for concrete wishes such as more legal rights but at the same time also argue for dignity and respect, which are abstract, difficult to define claims. Nonetheless, issues of trust and respect have also become legitimate concerns amongst the people, and they call for resolutions which address building bridges between the citizens and their state.

The function which foreign entities and international institutions, such as the EUTCC, can fill in conflicts has its own utility, uniqueness, and drawbacks. Unlike local CSOs, international CSOs do not have the advantages of possessing the cultural, linguistic, and socio-political conflict context which comes from being a native entity and having a long-term commitment to the conflict, and also, this contributes to LCSOs being more trusted by the people on the ground.25 On the other hand, international CSOs have the advantages of technical expertise, more expansive resources, a rich bank of diverse past experiences to which they may refer, and access to international decision-makers all over the world.26 ICSOs are also seen to have more legitimacy because they are better known by people all over the world. However, the EUTCC will remain limited in its approach because it cannot directly intervene in the conflict. John Paul Lederach states that “we persist in relying on traditional statist diplomacy, despite its inadequacies in

25 Marks, “Preface,” 2.
responding to the nature of conflict today.”^27 So, the international laws and norms which prohibit intervening in internal conflicts are inapt to the contemporary realities of the world where a majority of violent conflicts today are no longer between states but within states. I interpret this to mean that foreign efforts at CR will continue to face a large obstacle in addressing internal conflict and must develop innovative ways to engage if this traditional system remains in place. Therefore, its and other outside actors’ key role as external intermediaries is to look for ‘ripe moments’ when it can move through formal channels to apply pressure on the state to move toward a resolution. In his ‘Ripeness Theory,’ Dr. I. William Zartman argues that at moments marked by mutually hurting stalemates between two parties when unilateral and bilateral resolutions are inconceivable, these are good opportunities for peace interventions.^28 Throughout the conflict timeframe, EUTCC can also continue to lend its resources to local efforts, just as the EUTCC gave funds to TOSAV/TOSAM so that it could build ground-up mobilization of local peace efforts. If the EUTCC can establish trust with the party actors, then it can serve as a reliable facilitator of peace.

**TESEV**

One can reason that TESEV chooses to act as a voice for Turkey’s Kurdish population is in order to correct the power asymmetry within the conflict. The government has vastly more power and influence with its military might and its ability to punish those individuals who speak out on behalf of the Kurds and who challenge the

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27 Lederach, *Building Peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, 16.
state’s policies. The state’s repressive measures to silence counter-voices further weaken the Kurdish cause as the state’s narrative becomes the dominant narrative in the public, inevitably causing the country’s majority to mobilize behind the government and treat the Kurds as the pariah ‘other.’ Also, this public display of marginalization from key figures and which is sustained by the press essentially informs the population and feeds into the extant nationalist sentiment throughout the country.

Another benefit which comes from TESEV serving to tell the narrative of the Kurds as opposed to the members of TESEV providing their own internally-formed suggestions is that the Kurds claim a large stake in the solution. CR scholars Craig Zelizer and Robert Rubinstein argue that “effective practice needs to be rooted in partnership, not patronage.”29 By TESEV choosing to support Kurdish efforts and to not usurp the process of outlining a solution, the organization defines itself as a partner rather than an arbiter in the conflict. TESEV’s partnership strategy differs from the EUTCC’s method of assistance which gives an outsider’s perspective and an external international body’s list of solutions.

Among TESEV’s guiding general principles to arriving at a sustainable solution is that opinions should be solicited from several Kurdish representatives. This vision of seeking a holistic approach to the conflict reflects what the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy (IMTD) co-founders Dr. Louise Diamond and Ambassador John McDonald call a “systems-based approach” to conflict resolution. McDonald and Diamond’s theory of a multi-track diplomacy argues that no one track can sustainably resolve deep-rooted

conflicts and that all tracks in society; including the business sector, private citizens, religious institutions, etc.; add up to form a functioning system, so they all must communicate and collaborate for a comprehensive resolution. Essentially, TESEV and IMTD assume that the power for conflict resolution should not solely belong in the hands of the government, “Track 1,” but be shared by everyone.

One interesting and important point which the Roadmap authors argue is that the failure to resolve the conflict will with time allow the conflict to negatively transform and expand so that an issue mostly between the Kurds and the state later becomes a larger conflict between the Kurds and the Turks as hostilities may intensify divisions. CR theorist John Paul Lederach argues that identities to which we cling to (clan, ethnicity, religion, or geographic area) become narrower in contemporary conflicts; this is caused by distrust and fear, enhanced by violence, and then it reinforces the antagonism of actors in the conflict. It is beneficial for TESEV to highlight how just as society is fluid, so too are conflict processes and if left to fester they can worsen and grow to include a greater number of actors and levels of society. Lederach also argues that group leaders can often play upon people’s fears in order to mobilize support for their actions and create a deeper rift between the groups. When such sharp divisions are created, the conflict can deepen to become one of survival, either of one’s group identity (ie. the Kurdish identity) or of individual life (ie. civilian life lost to PKK terrorism).

American Kurdish Information Network (AKIN)

30 Lederach, Building Peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies, 13.
Kani Xulam’s work follows the assumption that the American people can put upward pressure upon its political representatives, who can then transfer that pressure onto the Turkish government to solve the conflict. AKIN is an NGO that solely focuses on the advocacy function.

What Xulam displays is his understanding that people are driven to action by stories because they motivate and inspire as well as humanize a situation. Being a Kurdish Turk, he holds great credibility and emotive power in his real-life experiences and struggles. He has endured pain as a friend of people killed in Turkey, and he has been banned by the state from returning to the country. It is important to note that there are some in the Turkish community in DC who strongly believe Xulam has ties to the PKK, and they use this as a reason to dismiss his efforts at peace. One person I spoke to who works for the Turkish government seemed sure AKIN is a cover, that he is funded by the PKK, and that his words of peace are false.

Social Identity theory explains this by saying that during conflict, a certain group will oftentimes take great efforts to stereotype and dehumanize another. This is a way of strengthening group cohesion since it unifies in-group members against an outsider.\(^\text{31}\)

Having an external source or out-group as a target to direct in-group aggression is also a way to focus aggression away from the leadership of an in-group and solidify the leadership’s power. By labeling Xulam as a PKK-supporter, Turks associate him with terrorism and violence, so he is dehumanized and his story is stripped of any legitimacy. Also, by the state attaching the ‘terrorist’ nametag to any individual or group who

expresses dissent toward the state, it is also raising the cost of any American or EU member engaging or giving support to the labeled terrorist.

The Case of Romania as an Inspiration

Another conflict which could also provide insight and inspiration for Turkey’s Kurdish issue is Romania’s Hungarian issue from the 1990s and early 2000s. We must recognize that every conflict must be judged within its own local context and although two conflicts are never identical and so we must be cautious when trying to extrapolate elements of one conflict to assist addressing another conflict, one finds certain similarities between the different situations in Romania and Turkey which may instruct Turkey in finding a sustainable solution. In 1990, intergroup violence erupted between the country’s ethnic Romanian and Hungarian populations, and one international mediation organization intervened to resolve the ethnic dispute. The Project on Ethnic Relations (PER), a US-based NGO, conducted more than a decade of mediation between the political leaders of the majority Romanians and the minority Hungarians. Many fears, complaints, and demands expressed by the parties in this conflict are strikingly similar in that the ethnic Romanians had placed pressure on the ethnic Hungarian community to assimilate into the mainstream notion of nationhood, and the Romanian constitution’s text called for a “unitary” state which Hungarians took to convey that their ethnic community was not recognized as a distinct group. Concomitantly, another likeness is that the Hungarians feared that the Romanians were attempting to wipe out Hungarian culture and identity in the process of creating a unified Romanian national
identity. Conversely, the Romanians, in common step with the Turks, claimed that its minority population of Hungarians was pursuing to secede and break the country apart. Moreover, just as Turkey has the potential of EU membership as an incentive, Romania at the time had both NATO and EU admission prospects as alluring carrots to motivate Romania toward domestic stability.

The situation amongst the Romanian and Hungarian political leaders of Romania was tense and uncooperative, so in 1992 PER hosted a private dinner for all its leaders. Then PER organized another meeting in a few months later at a Black Sea resort which was held between senior level government advisors, who reported back to their party leaders. As the mediator, PER frequently kept in contact and met with both sides separately to understand each of their positions, and the organization acted as a liaison or messenger to exchange information to each side. This allowed a deep trust to develop between PER and the conflicting parties and also ensured that lines of communication remained open. From the meetings, the Hungarian representatives were able to move past grievances and in their place, devised a list of practical concerns which could lead to feasible changes. Issues which the minority Hungarians brought forth, which were again similar to Kurdish concerns, included bilingual city signs and language instruction in schools. During meetings with the Romanian party leadership, PER suggested that the Romanians devise their own ideas for improving relations. The next step was for both sides to meet together again in Switzerland, due to its neutrality, where they were finally able to reach a turning point. Both sides presented their lists of issues, and all peace talk participants agreed upon and signed a joint memorandum. In contrast to the resolution of
the EUTCC, the Document of TOSAV/TOSAM, and the roadmap of TESEV, which all advocate from a single side of the Kurdish conflict, the devised memorandum was a joint agreement between the two conflicted parties. This agreement was a huge first step that, most importantly, set the tone and laid the foundation for the rest of the peace process.

The ethnic conflict in Romania is surely a different situation from Turkey’s, yet Allen Kassof believes that the talks between the two parties in Romania revealed a key fundamental nugget of truth within the heart of all ethnic conflicts: “however much they involve irrational passions and emotions, such disputes are also always about substance.” Kassof argues that a CSO which is attempting to resolve an interethnic dispute absolutely must desegregate the conflict into “manageable steps.”

For instance, one of PER’s key suggestions to the Hungarians when they had their separate meetings was to avoid ideological requests such as cultural or territorial autonomy. Productive groups should first define clear goals to which they can later develop the right path; this will also allow groups to have concrete benchmarks to measure their progress. This rule of thumb for peacebuilders could also be helpful for dialogues between the Turkish state and Kurdish representatives, for the state may respond better to concrete issues of substance rather than abstract appeals. Overall, the lengthy peace process in Romania between the ethnic Romanians and Hungarians could provide help and hope as a general model for the peace process in Turkey.

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32 Kassof, “Taming the Beast: Interethnic Conflict and Accord in Postcommunist Europe,” 23.
Civil Society and Peacebuilding in Turkey

Thania Paffenholz, Senior Researcher for the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Switzerland, and her team of researchers categorize civil society organizations into serving one or more of seven different functions: protection, monitoring, advocacy, socialization, social cohesion, facilitation/intermediation, and service delivery. Ayse Betul Çelik, a researcher from Paffenholz’s team, analyzed the role of civil society on Turkey’s Kurdish conflict, and she concluded that civil society made the largest impacts in advocacy and service delivery but remain very deficient in providing protection, intermediation, and social cohesion.

Regarding protection, Çelik argues that protecting the people from state violence is one of the most vital functions a CSO can provide, yet CSOs in Turkey have failed to afford this function to citizens due to the state’s overbearing power – the exact reason why protection would be necessary. In Turkey, protection would mean protecting all citizens from the state’s forces as well as the PKK. Reasons behind civil society’s weakness in offering protection is that there is little tradition of CSOs performing this function, the state military and other security forces has assumed protection as its internal duty alone, and tight control by the state in conflict areas has left little space for CSOs to get involved in protection. “Due to the increasing role of the military and the reemphasis on the state security and territorial integrity, CSOs cannot perform the protection function.” There was an attempt by the pro-Kurdish movement in the Southeast to use human shields as protection, but strong military control kept terminated this kind of protection fairly quickly. One of the few forms of successful protection in Turkey has
been Kurdish NGOs working to protect Kurdish culture in the 1990s through the publishing in and teaching of the Kurdish language.

Local NGOs in Turkey have increased their roles in performing a second important function – monitoring. Given that the monitoring function is mostly directed at recording the state’s actions and that it is unlikely that the state will hold itself accountable, civil society organizations carry the burden of performing this task. The same obstacle of state repression has certainly weakened the CSO capacity to monitor just as it has for CSO capacity to protect citizens, especially the period after the 1980 coup d’état during which the state abolished several organizations if they monitored the state too closely and thus posed a threat. Most monitoring was performed by international NGOs, yet since the 1990s more local human rights organizations have taken more responsibility in releasing annual reports with the assistance of international partnerships. Also, the secondary role which the EU has increasingly played in pushing for greater democratization since EU accession talks began has allowed CSOs to perform more monitoring.

The function of advocacy and public communication provided by CSOs is the most thriving and successful in Turkey. According to a CIVICUS report, there is an increasing number of CSOs which are actively engaging in affecting policy-making. Through the tactics of public demonstrations, press releases, public campaigns, and awareness workshops, CSOs have advocated for increased rights for the Kurdish population. Unfortunately, most demands for Kurdish rights has been automatically labeled as pro-PKK and pro-terrorist by the state and, therefore, responded to with state
violence. Intellectuals have begun resorting to printed word because it has proved more successful in the face of state dislike for more public demands. Advocacy has still continued to challenge the state narrative and discourse in defining and framing the conflict, but this has also led the state to view pro-human rights advocates as enemies. Fortunately, more international attention upon the Kurds, mainly as a result of the granted autonomy of Northern Iraq since the most recent war, has increased the potency of advocacy and public communication as the whole world, including the EU is watching. The EU monitoring of Turkey’s progress in democratization has also led to an increase in advocacy-related activities by Turkish civil society. While this function is the strongest with Turkish civil society, it remains deficient due to the fact that organizations have not established direct communication to receive any feedback from the state, and there is also a lack of coordination amongst the CSOs.

Socialization, or the strengthening of Kurdish identity, has had mixed results in Turkey. NGOs have assisted Kurds, especially IDPs, adjust to urban settings in Western Turkey and have also taught “legal mobilization.” However, NGOs remain too attached to political parties and do not teach “civic attitudes.” In addition, there is a much more needed effort from Turkish CSOs to address the function of social cohesion since there is a low level of tolerance for diversity in Turkey. CIVICUS reports that geographical, ethnic, and ideological divides have maintained and even furthered an intolerant society, and while some CSOs have acknowledged this problem, organizations have no clear methods to conduct social cohesion work and find it difficult to bring diverse people

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together to discuss the conflict. Çelik argues that many view the Kurdish conflict as between the Kurds and the state, so there is a view that social cohesion means improving relations between these two groups. However, she says, this type of effort will fail since it does not address the gap between Kurdish nationalist and Turkish nationalist citizens. “Thus, building trust between the state and Kurds, and creating empathy and collaboration between different groups in Turkey, are the most important elements for social cohesion.”

Intermediation is one of the most crucial functions for civil society to take on, yet it is also one of the most difficult in Turkey because the state refuses to engage in dialogue with the PKK or pro-Kurdish groups, including the DTP, which it views as terrorist. A majority of the Kurdish population believe that the PKK should have a seat at any mediating table, but many in the state still view the PKK as an illegitimate actor. The AKP has been the sole government to participate in dialogue with Kurdish intellectuals and civil society, yet every spike in violence has thwarted much progress. Çelik’s team of researchers found that most intermediation efforts are lead by politicians rather than CSOs, so there is more potential for NGOs to engage in mediation.

The final function which Paffenholz’s project categories as a civil society function, service delivery, is the only function which the state allows for the Kurds, and not coincidently, it is also the function which Turkish CSOs perform the most. Çelik notes that service delivery has the extra benefit of providing an opportunity for CSOs to mobilize and gather unavailable data on the Kurdish population, and more importantly, it also allows entry points for CSOs to perform the other mentioned peacebuilding
functions. For instance, some NGOs deliver services while using the Kurdish language, especially since many do not speak Turkish, and the using the Kurdish language recognizes the Kurdish identity while it preserves the Kurdish culture, although contrary to state wishes. Notions of service delivery sometimes differ between the state and CSOs since the former has a narrow concept of the function which restricts it to fulfilling humanitarian needs, yet some CSOs believe they can push against the state’s limitations and interpret their role as also addressing the deeper causes behind the Kurds’ lack of basic services.

Çelik believes that the hardest challenge for CSOs trying to resolve the conflict is helping the Kurds while also avoiding stepping on the state’s toes. She argues that “weak state-CS relations and problems in democracy prevent nourishment of CS in Turkey,” and this keeps NGOs from being a large provider of intermediation and social cohesion to the Kurds. These two functions, in which Turkish CSOs are weak, are two of the most important tools which civil society has for peacebuilding. Çelik assumes that the state is the key inhibitor of peace since it blocks NGOs from using peacebuilding functions, and she argues that a third party, namely the European Union must be an external driver, or the “enabling factor,” to pressure the state to democratize and allow NGOs to build peace from the Kurdish conflict. However, EU funding for projects can either have a positive or negative effect on the conflict, depending up on the conflict phase. Yet again, EU support in the form of skills and training will always have a positive impact. The greatest area of concern for Turkish civil society is not so much advocacy but forming better ties between the conflict parties.
Civil Society in Turkey

Civil society (CS) has developed to serve as a connecting tissue between the citizens and the political agenda. As one of the first people to recognize that CS should be independent from the government, John Locke believed that the first task of CS is “to protect the individual…against the state and its arbitrary interventions.” Since the 1980s, the Kurdish conflict has been a principle issue for Turkish CSOs to take on and where they stand has great correlation with how they interpret the state’s role.

Alper Kaliber and Nathalie Tocci argue that all civil society organizations (CSOs) in Turkey; which here includes professional associations, research centers and universities, trade unions, foundations, NGOs, social movements, youth groups, charities, lobby groups, religious movements, and media sources; fit somewhere between the two extreme categories of ‘establishment,’ meaning they support the state and adopt its positioning, and ‘anti-establishment,’ meaning they challenge the state. Kaliber and Tocci further categorize CSOs which address the Kurdish conflict as ‘securitizing,’ ‘desecuritizing,’ and ‘non-securitizing,’ depending on the type of impact they have on the conflict. They define a CSO to be securitizing if it “constructs the ‘other’ as an existential threat…calling for extraordinary measures to combat this threat.” In other words, securitizing CSOs define the opposing party in the conflict, whether it is the state or an anti-establishment organization, as an existential attacking force and, therefore, a

36 Kaliber and Tocci, “Civil Society and the Transformation of Turkey’s Kurdish Question.” 192.
violent response is justified and legitimate if it wants to survive. Conversely, a
desecuritizing organization is one which has the impact of deconstructing the ‘other’ as
an existential threat and succeeds in opening a space for dialogue and to renounce
violence, thereby acting as a conflict transformer to lessen the distance between parties.
Finally, a non-securitizing CSO is one which tries to desecuritize the conflict but is
unsuccessful; they are usually organizations that address smaller, less controversial issues
within the conflict and so are more likely to win short-term victories.

According to Kaliber and Tocci, Turkish anti-establishment CSOs, and NGOs
specifically, have much less potential to make a significant desecuritizing impact on the
Kurdish conflict since the state has repressed any such efforts to challenge its agenda.
The government has curtailed the freedoms of speech, assembly, and association when it
feels threatened by CSO behavior. It is commonly argued that one cause of the state’s
ongoing fear is the resilient legacy from the First World War also known as the ‘Sevres
syndrome.’ Ever since the Western Powers and Russia attempted to break up the
Ottoman Empire following its defeat in the war, the Turkish government has perceived
that any domestic cause of alarm or contention against the state may very well have the
hidden backing of the Western Powers who have not given up its ambitions of conquest.
If not bolstered or provoked by the West, some in the Turkish state may fear that the
West may take advantage of any domestic elements of fracture.

Turning back to the NGOs in question, one can argue that the closest
categorization would be non-securitizing. No organization has been successful in
opening a dialogue between the government and the PKK, let alone engages with either
party. A 2006 CIVICUS report found that due to a number of limitations on and in civil society in Turkey, the impact of LCSOs is low.\textsuperscript{37} Measuring the impact of any NGO on the Kurdish conflict, or any conflict for that matter, is a difficult task, and it is not the focus of this thesis. Yet, it is clear from the extent of their actions that, with the exception of TOSAV/TOSAM, the NGOs in question -- to say nothing of other NGOs -- do not have any direct impact on the conflict (ie. Providing protection or services); rather, they have a contextual influence of contributing to the conflict discourse by providing their understandings of the conflict’s roots and its remedies. TOSAV/TOSAM exemplifies a direct influence by having provided capacity-building and democracy training for Kurds. However, all the examined NGOs, also including TOSAV/TOSAM, have mostly influenced the conflict by impacting the context in which the conflict exists. The NGOs’ main task has been the attempt to guide the conflict toward peace and set an agenda of its resolution. One major reason for the limited direct impact on the conflict is the closed sphere constructed by the state and other spoiling forces. "Caught between the Scylla of an omnipresent PKK and the Charybdis of a repressive Turkish state, a genuinely independent Kurdish civil society struggled to emerge."\textsuperscript{38}

**Group Identity and Multiculturalism**

Theories on group and individual identity also serve to explain and help analyze issues within the Kurdish conflict. Professor of psychology Donald M. Taylor argues

\textsuperscript{37} Çelik, “Turkey: The Kurdish Question and the Coercive State,” 172.

\textsuperscript{38} Kaliber and Tocci, “Civil Society and the Transformation of Turkey’s Kurdish Question,”198.
that one must absolutely have a strong group identity if s/he is to have feelings of self-worth. He says that “without a collective identity, the individual has no clearly established template upon which to articulate a personal identity or personal self-esteem.”\(^ {39}\) A collective identity is the “reference point” from which an individual can orient oneself. So, if we apply this theory to the Turkish Kurds, then we understand how the state’s denial of a strong Kurdish ethnic identity leaves the Kurds without a personal identity and also without any personal esteem, for one cannot have much high regard for one’s self if one cannot perceive who one even is. In short, according to Taylor, by removing the foundation upon which the Kurds can build their personal identities, the Turkish government has denied Kurds the ability to regard themselves as possessing any human value.

On the other hand, Taylor proposes another argument which relates to the Kurdish issue. He states that in today’s society, it has been politically incorrect to regard any cultural group as “better” than another and that cultural relativism, or respecting all cultures as equal, is the social norm. Under this norm we can fit all the pleas by the NGOs which call for the preservation of the Kurdish culture and language. However, Taylor argues that “any form of superficial respect for cultural differences is ethnocentric,” for if all cultures were in fact of equal status and power, then they would survive on their own and there would be no need for the dominant culture to try to preserve another.\(^ {40}\) In addition, Taylor argues that placing too much focus on protecting minority cultures can put them at a disadvantage in society for they cannot function on an

\(^{39}\) Taylor, *The Quest for Identity*, 40.  
equal footing with the majority. In regards to the Kurdish conflict where NGOs push for Kurds to retain their culture and language, Taylor would probably argue that allowing the Kurds to preserve and express their culture at home and in public would be good because it would foster a strong group identity for about 15-20% of Turkey’s population. Yet, Taylor might also argue that allowing the Kurdish language to occupy a large role in the daily livelihoods of the Kurds instead of the Turkish language might prevent the Kurds from integrating into Turkish society and leave 15-20% of the population at a grave disadvantage. Not to mislead, I am not saying Taylor would say speaking Kurdish is bad; rather, he would argue that speaking Kurdish at the expense of speaking might keep Kurds isolated from the rest of society and lead to hardships such as finding employment in the country. For instance, Çelik discovered that NGOs in Turkey complained that they could not deliver essential services to Kurdish women because they did not speak Turkish. Likewise, the EUTCC indicated that the government’s forbidding of Kurdish negatively impacts illiterate women.

A high level of illiteracy amongst women in the East may actually point to a deeper problem of inadequate and inaccessible schools as well as families not sending their girls to school. By placing too much emphasis on the primacy of the Kurdish language, Kurds may fail to learn the Turkish language, the national language, and not be able to receive basic services. What is important is that this in turn will lead many Kurds to remain marginalized people who are uneducated, underdeveloped, and poor.

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41 EUTCC. “Background Paper to the 7th International Conference on EU, Turkey and the Kurds.”
Turkish studies professor Söner Çağaptay believes that any resolution which approves extending rights exclusively to members of the Kurdish ethnic community will cause more conflicts because it will create resentment amongst the non-Kurdish population. His suggestion to prevent this is to extend rights to all of Turkey’s citizenry regardless of ethnicity, religion, or any other discriminative sorting. He refers to Turkey’s Ottoman history which “treated its entire Muslim population as members of the same political grouping, the Muslim ‘millet,’ imprinting its Muslim population with an indelible collective political identity.” He notes that “Turkey is an amalgam of various Muslim ethnic groups, including Kurds as well as Bosniacs, Crimean Tatars, Albanians, Circassians, Abkhazes, Georgians, Arabs, Macedonian-, Serbian-, Bulgarian-, and Greek-speaking Muslims, and ethnic Turks, among others.” To grant more rights to only one group among many would “challenge the foundations of this Turkish amalgam,” so the best resolution should not single out the Kurds but rather ensure more and equal rights for all.42

Common Themes

The NGOs’ documents of understanding, roadmaps, and final resolutions all appear to be close relatives from a single family of solutions since their proposals share very much in common. So, in my mind this begs the question, is there far too much duplication in Turkey’s peacebuilding process? AKIN’s advocacy work does not seem to be a duplicate because Xulam is targeting a different audience with his work: the

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American public. On the other hand, TOSAM, TESEV, and EUTCC share a large overlap in their work in the peacebuilding process. There are several key recommendations which the NGOs all make in either identical or almost identical terms. Shared themes and suggestions can prove beneficial because the NGOs can produce a unified, more powerful message to the state, and a shared definition of the conflict will also help lead to a shared vision of a resolution and lessen the chance of competing or contradictory strategies. However, “the engagement of many organizations…also produces problems of competition, redundancy, and confusion.”

Paffenholz and her assembly of researchers concluded that civil society has the potential for supporting the peace processes in all her examined functions, yet she says the current situation is disappointing. Several NGOs are stuck in an 'automatism' whereby they perform the same function over and over regardless of the conflict's stage. According to Lederach, peacebuilding strategies must be linked to the appropriate timeframes and sequencing, meaning that different types of peace work are suitable at certain times. NGOs must have an imaginary weather vane to see which direction the conflict winds are blowing, and only after the needs of the conflict are weighed should NGOs plan and act. In addition, not all NGOs are right for the needed activities, but how can we identity who is the right actor to perform what task? I believe one question for the CR field is when there is such a proliferation of CSOs which each try their own hand at peacebuilding, who can coordinate the large CR machinery so that peacebuilding is not

unnecessarily duplicated or negated? Or who is the legitimate interlocutor/mediator? Who counts as the right one to mediate and lead peacebuilding efforts?

*Levels of Engagement*

One example of a common theme throughout the discourses laid out by the organizations is the emphasis on an inclusive consultation with Kurdish representatives from varied levels of society. Lederach states that

“Building peace in today’s conflicts calls for long-term commitment to establishing an infrastructure across the levels of a society, an infrastructure that empowers the resources for reconciliation from within that society and maximizes the contribution from outside. In short, constructing the house of peace relies on a foundation of multiple actors and activities aimed at achieving and sustaining reconciliation.”

John Paul Lederach divides the peacebuilding process into a pyramid of three social levels with which CR work should engage: the top level, or ‘Visible high-level leadership,’ the middle level, or ‘Midrange leadership,’ and the bottom level, or the ‘Community-level leadership.’ It is evident that all four examined NGOs have conducted their work in the bottom two pyramid levels, Mid-range leadership and Community-level leadership, but have accomplished very little in the top level of engagement, Visible high-level leadership, since there has been little dialogue or direct engagement with Turkey’s government leaders. Çelik reached the same conclusion after her research into Turkish NGOs.

It is certainly important to get a sense of all the different vertical and horizontal sectors of society so one can find key actors and points of entry where one could engage.

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44 Lederach, *Building Peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, xvi.
45 Lederach, “Where Do I Fit In?” 41.
If it is the top state structure which is stuck, then there must be some catalyst or source of pressure to push it to change its behavior, and this can come from two directions – a grassroots and mid-range mobilization from below as well an external or international actor. Thus, working simultaneously to engage the Turkish state, all four examined NGOs have the potential to grease the wheels of the state mechanism so that it moves forward to engage in a conflict resolution.

*Armed Violence*

A second common theme is that all NGO declarations are based upon the foundational understanding that the Kurdish conflict is a political conflict. This immediately poses a challenge to the Turkish military’s long-held understanding that the conflict is a security issue which it must respond to with military force. TESEV calls for a ceasefire, and the EUTCC argues that military action cannot be a conflict resolution tool in the conflict and has appointed the use of dialogue between the Kurds and the Turkish government as the only possible method to bring a peaceful end to the Kurdish conflict. In its Document, TOSAV argues that state repression is the cause of Kurdish violence, which further causes more state violence. Lederach calls this phenomenon “reciprocal causation,” which means that the conflict becomes stuck in a cycle of violence where one side’s response becomes the cause for the other side to continue the violence, which becomes the cause for another violent response and so on and so forth. This characterizes generation-long conflicts.\(^46\) He also states that in today’s current statist system, the international community takes seriously the group which has a

monopoly over the use of force, and this fact leads to the rise of armed groups, which gain the understanding that they will be recognized as the representative if they display a military capability. If this is true, then one can argue that the PKK have resorted to armed force to gain recognition as the representative voice of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Bernard Mayer says that “the fact that someone is taking a coercive or unacceptable approach to furthering his or her interests does not mean the interests themselves should be ignored or discounted.” It is the role of those involved in conflict resolution to help disputants to use non-destructive methods of power so it does not ruin their chances of beginning the process addressing disputants’ interests.

Regarding the state’s use of violence, military operations are not always wrong, for they can be of good use if they are well-informed, well-planned, and well-executed. However, when they do not address the root causes to a conflict, as they most often do not, military initiatives are counterproductive and only increase the amount of hostility as well as push more people to join the opposing side. Diana Francis argues that our world is characterized by a culture of domination whereby the ‘power over’ model is favored, and war is considered a culturally sanctioned method of resolving conflicts. Yet, at the same time, the CR field tends to emphasize that approaches to conflict should not rely on armed violence, and the paradigm which dominates the global mainstream is that violence is inherently bad. How can we reconcile these global contradictions?

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47 Mayer, Staying with Conflict, 171.
48 Sen, Civil Paths to Peace, 15.
49 Francis, “Culture, Power Asymmetries and Gender in Conflict Transformation”. 4.
Francis points to how groups who perceive themselves to suffer an injustice and whose voices are also suppressed view armed violence as their only remaining recourse.

*Notes of Caution*

A general observation which leads to a note of caution is that the resolution recommendations given by all of the organizations this paper examines is that the discourse is almost completely one-directional, directed toward the Turkish government, only in opposition to the state’s current structure. Although TOSAV/TOSAM addresses the public as its audience, its own Document still lays out a set of reforms which the state must take. Another difference with TOSAV/TOSAM’s Document is that it concludes with an appeal to all citizens to become active in supporting the democratic efforts; however, no NGO addresses civil elements within the lower levels of society which may spoil the peace process. As a third-party intervening in the conflict, it is commonly argued that the most effective mediator should remain neutral in order to remain trusted by all conflict parties. None of the organizations have declared themselves as intending to be neutral actors; however, the little effort by any organization to direct feedback or recommendations for the Kurds or Turks who are challenging the government displays a clear bias in favor of the Kurdish narrative. While it may seem clear that Turkey’s Kurds are the less powerful victims in this national conflict, one must be careful to note that in many conflicts, even the more ‘powerful’ party views itself as the victim. Moreover, the issue of who has more power can be a matter of great dispute, for even the ‘powerless’ can have power and the ‘powerful’ can be weak. Francis also state that “victimized

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groups can use their victimhood as a source of power, both as moral leverage and building support.”

There is, on the other hand, argument from the CR field that cautions against treating all conflict parties equally if there is an evident asymmetry in power. To treat both parties equally would perpetuate the power imbalance and keep the less powerful party at a constant disadvantage throughout the peace process. A report from the Berghof Research Center for Constructive Conflict Management also points out how even when a conflict pits a state military force against an insurgent group, there is rarely an outright victory. Stalemate is the more often outcome because these forms of conflict are not about armed capabilities; they are centered around a “subjective, identity-based element” such as liberation, freedom of self-expression, or a struggle against separatism, and these sustain conflicts far beyond what military strength can.51

Another cautionary note arises from the observation that in none of the drafted resolutions was there mention to address regional or global networks or dynamics. There are Kurdish populations in neighboring Syria, Iraq, and Iran, yet the resolution documents drawn up by the NGOs do not bring forth this fact nor suggest possible steps which the state should take to address the regional factor. The Kurdish conflict is an example of what Lederach categorizes as an “internal and internationalized” conflict, in that it is fought between actors who come from within the same bounded territory but one or more actors are using resources (land, money, etc.) of countries from the surrounding area. According to Lederach, this nature of conflict leads to an unstable region, not just

an unstable nation-state, and thus quite frequently necessitates taking a regional perspective when thinking of a path toward resolution. Conflicts are systems which cannot be hemmed in by state lines, so a resolution which does not at least acknowledge the regional context of the conflict will probably fail to bring sustainable peace.

As a final point, once the parties to the Kurdish conflict begin to seriously engage in the necessary dialogue, they will have to be cognizant of developing varying goals for the varying time frames. This means that short-term goals will most likely work through existing power relations so that issues such as ceasefires will be settled between the actors who have abused their power, namely the PKK and sectors of the state’s security forces who have relied on violence. Yet, long-term peacebuilding goals will have to involve consulting with larger groups of constituents, including those powerless groups who have been caught up in the conflict without choosing to be involved. Immediate concerns for security will involve negotiations between those who took up arms, but the long-term peace process must create a dialogue platform for all affected citizens, especially the voiceless, otherwise any resolution may not be accepted by all, and lead to those marginalized from the process to disrupt the peace later. Moghaddam states that “the best hope for constructively managing diversity in multicultural contexts is to involve as many groups as possible in the procedures of decision making. Such involvement will itself influence the sense of justice experienced by groups involved.” Finally, it should be understood by the country that this process will take an extremely long time.

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52 Lederach, *Building Peace: sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*, 12.
53 Francis, “Culture, Power Asymmetries and Gender in Conflict Transformation,” 9-12.
54 Moghaddam, *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations*, 164.
CONCLUSION

My examination of NGOs along with Çelik's, Kaliber's, and Tocci's findings all concede that the situation in Turkey right now does not allow for any peacebuilding functions which confront or engage (there is a thin line between the two in Turkey) with the state structure. There is much too little political action on the Kurdish conflict, so peacebuilding is not reaching the top, high-level leadership level of society. As Paffenholz states, civil society alone cannot replace political action, and the peacebuilding work of NGOs depend on a reciprocation from the government, especially in the case of the Kurdish conflict, where there is a unanimous consensus from my examined NGOs that the government is the source of the conflict.

Paulo Freire states that, "sooner or later being less human leads to the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so. In order for this struggle to have meaning, the oppressed must not, in seeking to regain their humanity (which is a way to create it), become in turn oppressors of the oppressors, but rather restorers of the humanity of both."55 I believe this beautiful quote teaches us that people who do not have equal rights will eventually take a stand to gain those rights, but in the process, those people should not resort to violent tactics to further dehumanize their opposing side but instead, they should seek to help transform the situation so that all oppression and dehumanization is abolished. Conflict resolution practice should help guide this process. Feeling oppressed, as all the NGOs have conveyed the Kurds do indeed feel, the Kurds must not

55 Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 160.
take up arms as the PKK have done, and they must work with the state and the general population to save the entire country from conflict and violence, since it affects everyone. By transforming the conflict, the country can be transformed into a more humane, democratic land. In addition, Freire implies that it is only a weak and vulnerable state which will oppress its own population, so the state alone does not have the strength to restore humanity for itself and the people. Indeed, one sees how civil society and academics agree that the long-standing presence of the Kurdish conflict is a revealing sign of weakness within the Turkish state structure.

Furthermore, John Paul Lederach is known to really argue that conflict can be good since it can be a catalyst for change. If transformed into something constructive rather than destructive, Turkey's Kurdish conflict may have the potential to mark a new type of positive change in Turkey's structure. Indeed, the progress has already begun. As professor and TOSAV/TOSAM founder Doğu Ergil explained, the Kurdish issue used to be complete taboo in Turkish society, only discussed by the media as terrorism; yet now it has certainly become more prominent as more are engaging with the issue, and, despite its stall, current Prime Minister Erdoğan has charted new Turkish political waters with his crafted "Kurdish Opening."
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