

TURKEY: REGIONAL ELECTIONS AND THE KURDISH QUESTION

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Abstract

The results of Turkey's regional elections of 29 March 2009 were ambiguous, with no definite winner in the southeast. The ruling AKP got 38.34% and the Kurdish DTP, 37.4%. Both are major players in shaping Kurdish policies, and this result can be interpreted as a call for cooperation in the region, and between Ankara and the southeastern provinces. Though vital for improving the economic situation, attracting public and international investments, and finding common political solutions for the Kurdish question, the AKP has ignored the DTP, and Ankara continues to neglect the DTP-run municipalities. During the AKP's reign, since 2002, important steps toward granting more rights to Kurds have been undertaken, for example, the 24-hour state channel TRT 6 in Kurdish, launched on 1 January 2009. However, these policies remain incomplete since there are no constitutional changes fully guaranteeing the use of languages other than Turkish in broadcasting and education. Kurdish politicians are still accused of speaking Kurdish, and private TV stations are banned from broadcasting in other languages more than 45 minutes a day. These questions could be settled in a new civil constitution, which has been on the agenda since August 2007. Whether these election results will be able to revitalize discussions on the new constitution remains to be seen.

Keywords: Turkey, Regional Elections, Kurds, AKP, DTP, PKK, TRT 6, Diyarbakır

Introduction

In the campaign for the regional elections, Diyarbakır, the symbolic Kurdish capital, was of special importance for Prime Minister Erdoğan and the AKP (Justice and Development Party). The mayor's office in Diyarbakır plays a significant role in defining and nationally dominating Kurdish policies. Mayor Osman Baydemir's (Democratic Society Party (DTP)) metaphor for Diyarbakır – a fortress that would not fall¹ – was challenged by the AKP, which set out to besiege and conquer it. It was a tough election campaign between the DTP and the AKP; both of them were present and active on the ground. However, neither the promise of improving the economic situation nor the initiatives concerning cultural rights, such as the

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¹ Ferit Aslan, "Baydemir kimlik siyaseti yaptığını kabul etti" [Baydemir admitted that he pursued identity policy], *Radikal*, September 21, 2008, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&ArticleID=899756&Date=18.11.2008&CategoryID=77> (accessed March 5, 2009).

introduction of Kurdish television, nor the distribution of refrigerators, rice, and noodles, paid off for the AKP. In Diyarbakır the result was clear: 65.4% for the DTP versus 31.6% for the AKP in the mayoral election, and 59.4% (DTP) to 32% (AKP) for the city council.² Diyarbakır province has seventeen constituencies, of which the DTP won fourteen and the AKP only one, with the other two going to the CHP (Republican People's Party) and the DSP (Democratic Left Party).³ In the entire southeastern region, the AKP is still the strongest party, but compared to the outstanding results there in the parliamentary elections in 2007, with 52%, the new 38.34% total marks a significant drop. The DTP won in eight provinces in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia, and regained the provinces of Van and Siirt, but did not manage to win in Mardin or Bitlis. The overall result for the DTP was 37.4% in the nine southeastern provinces.

What does this mean for the region and for Kurdish policies? Will the confrontations between Ankara and Diyarbakır, and the AKP and the DTP, continue, or will a dialogue begin which could bear fruit both for the economy and the political solution to the Kurdish question. To answer this, the past two years will be shortly reviewed.

2007 and 2008 have been turbulent years even by Turkish standards: Mass demonstrations against presidential candidate Abdullah Gül; a huge election victory for the AKP in July 2007; the election of Gül to the presidency in August 2007, followed by a closure case filed against the AKP; investigation against the alleged terrorist network Ergenekon; and increased anti-PKK military actions inside and outside Turkey throughout 2008. The result was a paralyzed political system, a near standstill for reforms.

In Turkey, regional elections are held nationwide at the same time and, therefore, usually reflect trends in national politics. In total, more than forty-eight million voters were registered for the last regional elections, meaning an increase of roughly six million voters since the July 2007 parliamentary elections. The Supreme Election Committee (YSK) explained that this was a result of the new registration system in operation.⁴

Regional elections held after parliamentary elections usually function as a vote of confidence for the incumbents. The AKP already passed such a test with great success: After its first electoral victory in November 2002 the results of the March 2004 regional elections, in which the AKP increased its strength, served as a reaffirmation of popular support for the AKP's policies. In the July 2007 parliamentary elections, the AKP was again reaffirmed and strengthened, winning almost 47%. The base of this success was the broad support from conservative-religious Turks in Central Anatolia, their relatives in large cities, and the Kurds in Southeastern Turkey, where the AKP was by far the strongest party. This was due to a policy that successfully represented an alternative to the Kurdish-nationalistic DTP, that of accepting cultural rights of Kurds while pushing for economic improvements.

However, since autumn 2008 the AKP changed its rhetoric, becoming increasingly Turkish nationalist and in compliance with the ideas of the armed forces. This gave the DTP another chance to present itself as the sole "Kurdish" representation in the region, but it might also

² *Hürriyet Secim*, (Special election 2009 page of the daily *Hürriyet*), <http://yerelsecim2009.hurriyet.com.tr/ildetay.aspx?cid=21&bs=1> (accessed March 30, 2009).

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Today's Zaman*, "YSK excludes top PKK members from voter database," December 25, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=162247> (accessed December 28, 2008). The homepage of the Supreme Election Committee YSK is: <http://www.ysk.gov.tr/ysk/index.html> (only available in Turkish).

have contributed to the altered tone of the CHP toward the Kurds after many years. How did the major parties position themselves, and what does the election result say about the future of the Kurdish question?

The Kurdish Question in Turkey

Turkey as the successor state of the Ottoman Empire also inherited its multiethnic Muslim population. In terms of population, the second largest ethnic group, after the Turks, is the Kurds. One of the most respected studies on the Kurds is van Bruinessen's "Agha, Sheikh and State,"⁵ which estimated the percentage of Kurds to be 19% of Turkey's population in 1975. Taking into account that population growth in Eastern Turkey is higher than in the western provinces, this percentage can be assumed to be at least 20% today. In a population of 70.6 million,⁶ this would mean that there are around fifteen million Kurds in Turkey.⁷

During the Ottoman Empire, the Sunni Kurds enjoyed in present-day Southeastern Turkey a certain degree of autonomy and, in the rest of the empire, were allowed to have their associations and foundations and use their languages.⁸ The situation of the Kurds *vis-à-vis* the state changed completely with the foundation of the republic in 1923. After the Turkish War of Independence, the Lausanne Treaty was signed on 24 July 1923,⁹ and only non-Muslims were recognized as minorities with guaranteed rights. The Kurds were not mentioned. The goal of the state elite was to transform a multiethnic and multireligious empire into a homogenous nation-state in which every ethnic group could be "Turkish". However, no solution was foreseen for those who were not ready to give up their ethnic identity and did not want to become Turks: "This, in a nutshell, was the problem of a significant portion of the Kurdish population."¹⁰

The Kurds' refusal to "become" Turks led to numerous rebellions between 1925 and 1938, which were all defeated. It then took another generation to start a cautious debate in the Southeast; student associations got involved and the Left made it a topic in form of solidarity with poorer regions of the country. This phase ended abruptly with the military coup of 12 September 1980, which led to further restrictions, neglect, and policies of repression. After 1980, the military leadership, under General Kenan Evren, banned the use of Kurdish completely, as well as in private, and persecuted Kurdish intellectuals and activists.¹¹ The worst conditions of all were those in the military prison in Diyarbakir, where thirty-four

⁵ Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1992). On the population figures, see pp. 14 & fol.

⁶ TÜRKSTAT: "The population of Turkey is 70,586,256 as of December 31, 2007."
http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?tb_id=39&ust_id=11 (accessed May 25, 2009)

⁷ However, this population group called "Kurds" is anything but homogeneous. There are Sunni Muslims and Alevis, Kirmanci and Zaza speakers, Ezidis (with a distinct syncretistic religion), and there are solely Turkish-speakers, which is true for many Kurds in Western Turkey who have a Kurdish identity but do not speak the Kurdish language anymore.

⁸ For the situation of the Kurds during the Ottoman Empire, see: Altan Tan, *Kürt Sorunu* [Kurdish Problem] (Istanbul: Timaş Yayınları, 2009), pp. 73-166.

⁹ For a critical evaluation, see: Ismet Cheriff Vanly, "Der Lausanner Vertrag und das Schicksal des kurdischen Volkes" [The Lausanne Treaty and the fate of the Kurdish people],
http://www.navend.de/html/kurdistan_heute/artikel/07_Lausanner_Vertrag.htm (accessed April 17, 2009).

¹⁰ Svante E. Cornell, "The Kurdish Question in Turkish Politics," *Orbis*, vol. 45:1 (Winter 2009),
http://www.cacianalyst.org/Publications/Cornell_Orbis.htm (accessed March 22, 2009).

¹¹ Evren called these procedures a big mistake in his interview in the book *Komutanlar Cehpesi* [The Front of the Generals] by Fikret Bila, (Istanbul: Detay Yayıncılık, November 2007), 9-33.

inmates died under torture, many more left crippled.¹² This had a far-reaching consequence, according to Kurdish intellectual Altan Tan: “PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) was born in the period after 12 September.”¹³ In 1984, the PKK added its paramilitary dimension, and the war between the PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces caused an estimated 37,000 deaths, most of them Kurds, and at least one million displaced people,¹⁴ close to 3000 destroyed villages, a long lasting state of emergency in the Kurdish provinces, massive human rights violations, terrorist attacks in Western Turkey, and a massive increase in the military budget and cross-border operations.

Official policy started changing its rhetoric toward the Kurds for the first time in 1991. The then Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel spoke of a “Kurdish Reality,” the restrictions concerning the private use of Kurdish were lifted. The state of emergency in the southeastern provinces was gradually lifted, and, with the capture of PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, a cease-fire was announced, which lasted until 2004 and improved the security situation.

The Kurdish Question and the Ruling AKP

The AKP has managed to become Turkey’s only nationwide successful party with a broad spectrum of different voter groups. The largest and most oft-mentioned contingent are conservative Turks in Central Anatolia or in the outskirts of the big cities that practice Islam and support a secular order yet, for example, want the right for women to study at universities with a headscarf. The smallest supporter groups are liberals, intellectuals, and students, mainly in western big cities, who voted for the AKP because its program was the least nationalistic and the most pro-EU and pro-democratization among the parties with a chance of obtaining more than 10% of the vote needed to be represented in parliament. The Kurds, especially in South East Anatolia, where they represent a majority in thirteen provinces, joined this odd couple. The Kurds were mostly attracted for the same reasons as were the other two groups.

Kaya pointed to the fact that many influential Kurds have been active in the religious Milli Görüş (National Outlook) movement, where many of the AKP founders began their political careers: “The election of the AKP in 2002 also had a significant impact on the region and on the Kurdish movement. In the Milli Görüş movement, from which the AKP stems, Kurds have occupied important positions.”¹⁵

With this personnel and program, the AKP became the only noteworthy rival to the Kurdish DTP in the Southeast. In 2002, the AKP won 26% of the vote in the southeastern provinces. In August 2005, Prime Minister Erdoğan made a historic statement in Diyarbakır, being the first Turkish Prime Minister to admit that the state had made mistakes in the past in its

¹² Emine Kart, “Coup anniversary revives painful memories of Diyarbakır prison,” *Sunday’s Zaman*, September 30, 2007, <http://www.sundayszaman.com/sunday/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=2068> (accessed February 20, 2009).

¹³ *Taraf*, 10 Maddelik Çözüm Planı [A 10 article solution plan], Interview by Neşe Düzel with Altan Tan, March 13, 2008, http://www.haberpanorama.com/news_detail.php?id=592 (accessed March 14, 2009).

¹⁴ Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, “Turkey Migration and Internally Displaced Population Survey,” Press release, December 6, 2006, Ankara, http://www.hips.hacettepe.edu.tr/english/press_release.pdf (accessed February 15, 2009).

¹⁵ M.K. Kaya, “Kurdish Problem forces Erdoğan to shift to the right,” *Silkroad Studies*, November 21, 2008, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2008/081121B.html> (accessed December 27, 2008).

relations with the Kurds: “The Kurdish problem is everyone’s problem and mine in particular.”¹⁶

Erdoğan’s strategy paid off during the July 2007 national elections. The AKP won 52% of the vote, 5% more than their national average, whereas the DTP, which decided to run with independent candidates, ended up with 25%. In Diyarbakır, the AKP raised their share of the vote from 16% to 41%. Together the AKP and DTP reached almost 90%, and other parties have hardly any representation. Commenting on this result, Prime Minister Erdoğan said that the Kurds are best represented by the AKP, not by the DTP. Erdoğan was referring to the seventy-five Kurdish AKP MPs,¹⁷ whereas the DTP won 20 parliamentary seats.

Such results after five years in power might be interpreted as demonstrating that the Kurds know, or at least hope, that the AKP will improve their economic and political situation and be more receptive to their demands for increased rights in terms of the use of Kurdish language and in the area of culture. In addition, the first month after the July 2007 elections seemed to prove them right. Shortly after the elections, a draft for a new “civil” constitution was presented, where some important changes for the Kurds were also foreseen, whereby Kurdish in education and broadcasting would comply with the constitution, and the reference to ethnic Turks in the current constitution would be changed to “citizens of Turkey.” Then in March 2008, a debate was begun on a “new Kurdish plan” when Erdoğan gave an interview to *The New York Times*.¹⁸ However, neither the new constitution nor the so-called new plan became concrete policies, what became concrete, instead, was the AKP turning more nationalist in the election campaign.

The 2008–09 Election Campaign

Already in February 2008, more than a year ahead of the elections, there were debates on the importance of the elections in Diyarbakır: “Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has frequently mentioned to members of his party that he ‘wants Diyarbakır.’ The DTP and its Diyarbakır mayor, Osman Baydemir, also underline quite often that ‘the city is the fortress and cannot be allowed to fall.’”¹⁹

This tone did not change during the election campaign. On 4 December 2008, AKP Deputy Prime Minister Yazıcı told *Akşam* Newspaper: “For us to win the elections in Diyarbakır is as important as Istanbul and Ankara. Every province is important but Diyarbakır is still different.”²⁰ On 18 December 2008, a DTP parliamentarian from Diyarbakır, Selahattin

¹⁶ Qantara, “Two Steps Forward, One Step Back,” November 19, 2007, http://www.qantara.de/webcom/show_article.php/c-476/_nr-881/p-1/i.html?PHPSESSID=5 (accessed December 29, 2008).

¹⁷ Nazif Ilfazoğlu and Mesut Hasan Benli, “Kürtlerin temsilcisi AKP mi DTP mi?” [Is the representative of the Kurds the AKP or the DTP?], *Radikal*, November 8, 2007, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=238214> (accessed December 27, 2008).

¹⁸ Ekrem Eddy Güzeldere, “Was there, is there, will there be a Kurdish plan?” *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Spring 2008, <http://www.turkishpolicy.com/images/stories/2008-01-turkey/EkremGuzeldere.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2009).

¹⁹ Ayşe Karabat, “Tension high in Diyarbakır one year ahead of local elections,” *Today’s Zaman*, February 20, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=134461> (accessed December 16, 2008).

²⁰ Deniz Gücer, “AKP: Diyarbakır’ı alacağız” [AKP: We will take Diyarbakır], *Akşam*, December 4, 2008, <http://www.nethaber.com/Politika/47484/AKP-Diyarbakiri-alacagiz> (accessed December 6, 2008).

Demirtaş, noted that the DTP was way ahead of the AKP: “1000 people want a beauty, but only one can get her. We are working to get into power with at least 70% in Diyarbakır.”²¹

The AKP After the Closure Case

For the entire political system, the closure case against the AKP was one of the most important political events in 2008. In Turkey, many parties have been closed in the past decades, but never the ruling party, and never has a political ban been sought for the incumbent prime minister. July 2008 was especially tense, with arrests of former four-star generals within the framework of the “Ergenekon” investigation against an alleged terrorist network. The Constitutional Court made a decision on 31 July, in favor of not banning the AKP with the margin of just one vote. This not only relieved the AKP and its leading politicians, but the whole country took a deep breath after narrowly avoiding a profound political crisis.

The AKP had two alternatives after this decision:

- 1) To continue with the reforms as stated and planned on a new constitution, Article 301 of the Penal Code, and minority rights, which would lead to continuous conflict with the armed forces and the bureaucracy.
- 2) To reach a “cease-fire” with the Armed Forces, meaning that the AKP would not push through sensitive reforms, and the Armed Forces would leave the AKP in peace.

In the final two months of 2008, there were several signs that the AKP opted for the second alternative. On 3 November, Erdoğan visited the eastern province of Hakkari to deliver a speech at a conference of the local AKP branch. In Hakkari, with its DTP mayor who received almost 60% of the vote in the 2004 municipal elections,²² DTP supporters held street protests and closed stores, objecting to Erdoğan’s presence. In his speech, he used a phrase akin to the vocabulary of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP): “We have said, ‘one nation, one flag, one motherland and one state.’ Those who oppose this should leave.”²³ Erdoğan received support from pro-state intellectuals for his stance against the protesters but was harshly criticized by liberal intellectuals. Ahmet Altan commented on Erdoğan’s speech on 5 November 2008: “Now he presents himself perfectly as statist, nationalist, chauvinist, giving credit to violence and almost praising those ‘getting out the gun’ against protesters, saying in a puzzling manner that there is ‘an end to patience.’”²⁴

Erdoğan’s statement was followed by a series of nationalist comments by AKP politicians. On 10 November, Defence Minister Vecdi Gönül asked in Brussels, “if there were still Greeks in the Aegean and Armenians in many places in Turkey today, would it be the same nation-

²¹ Canan Altıntaş and Bayram Bulut, “DTP’li Demirtaş: Diyarbakır’ı alacağız” [DTP’s Demirtaş: We will take Diyarbakır], *Milliyet*, December 18, 2008, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Siyaset/SonDakika.aspx?aType=SonDakika&ArticleID=1029916> (accessed December 19, 2008).

²² “The DTP candidates ran on the list of the SHP then,” <http://www.yerelsecim.com/Detays.asp?ID=30> (accessed March 10, 2009).

²³ Ayşe Karabat, “Erdoğan’s comment rattles Kurds in Diyarbakır”, *Today’s Zaman*, November 4, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=157780&bolum=103> (accessed December 23, 2008).

²⁴ Ahmet Altan, “Erdogan 2008,” *Taraf*, November 5, 2008, <http://www.taraf.com.tr/makale/2535.htm> (accessed December 28, 2008).

state?”²⁵ On 12 November 2008, AKP MP Abdülkadir Akgül said in parliament during the debate on the 2009 budget, referring to a DTP demonstration in Istanbul: “I think that justice in this country is applied too equally. I enjoy shooting those who commit crimes against my state or nation.”²⁶

The AKP’s strategy seemed to have been to win among ethnic Turks in the west and among Kurds opposed to the DTP’s Kurdish-identity discourse. Altan Tan, a Kurdish intellectual, told *Today’s Zaman* that the “calculations of the AK Party go like this: If we defeat the DTP, we will defeat the PKK. If we defeat the PKK, the Kurdish question will be solved. All of these things – the DTP, the local elections, the PKK, driving the PKK down from the mountains – are related to each other, but they are not the same at all.”²⁷

TRT 6

The AKP’s statements in late 2008 were not very appealing to the Kurds, but they still had one trump card in their hands that they played on 1 January 2009: The first state-run Kurdish-language channel, TRT 6, was launched. Erdoğan spoke at the opening of the channel, ending his speech in Kurdish: “TRT şeş bi xêr be” (May TRT 6 be beneficial).²⁸ The channel broadcasts twenty-four hours a day in Kurmanci. The preparations concerning the new channel began more than a year before the launch. TRT 6 contacted Kurdish intellectuals, such as Ümit Firat,²⁹ to get their opinion and to reach to potential contributors. To be able to broadcast in Kurdish, the Act on the Radio Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) had to be changed. The sentence “the institution can broadcast in languages and dialects other than Turkish” was added to the current act in a vote in parliament on 11 June 2008.³⁰

The overwhelming reactions to the channel were positive. On 3 January, *Hürriyet*’s Hadi Uluengin called it “a Kurdish TV Revolution,”³¹ and Cengiz Candar used in *Radikal* a Kurdish title saying “Welcome TRT 6, welcome Kurdish.”³² Hasan Cemal called it in *Milliyet*

²⁵ Ayşe Karabat, “Academics: Gönül is right, Turkey would not be the same without population exchange,” *Sunday’s Zaman*, November 16, 2008,

<http://www.sundayszaman.com/sunday/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=158865> (accessed December 25, 2008).

²⁶ *Nethaber*, “AKP’li Akgül, ‘Devlete karşı suç işleyeni VURMAKTAN hoşlanacak’mış” [AKP’s Akgül seems to enjoy SHOOTING those who commit crimes against the state], November 13, 2008, <http://www.nethaber.com/Politika/80508/AKPlı-Akgül-Devlete-karsi-suc-isleyeni-VURMAKTAN> (accessed December 26, 2008).

²⁷ Ayşe Karabat, “Elections perceived as ‘referendum’ in Kurdish areas,” *Today’s Zaman*, November 22, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=159469&bolum=103> (accessed December 27, 2008).

²⁸ Actually, the correct form is “Li ser xêrê be.” On 2 January, many newspapers opened with that sentence; all used the wrong spelling. *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet* wrote “Bê xerbe,” which means the opposite; *Sabah* wrote “Serx erebe,” *serx* being a word that does not exist; *Radikal* wrote “Bi xwêr be,” and *xwer* does not exist either. However, *xwe* would mean salt, thus “it should be salty.” For the discussion on the correct spelling and grammar, see: *Radikal*, “Kürtçe’nin devlet kanalıyla imtihanı” [Kurdish exam with the Kurdish state channel], January 10, 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=HaberYazdir&ArticleID=916264> (accessed February 26, 2009).

²⁹ Ümit Firat, “Kar Kurttan TRT Sese” [From Kar Kurt to TRT 6], *Birikim*, February 2009, 87-88.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Hadi Uluengin, “Kürtçe TV devrimi” [Kurdish TV revolution], *Hürriyet*, January 3, 2009, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=10690324&tarih=2009-01-03> (accessed March 15, 2009).

³² Cengiz Candar, “TRT-Şeş Tu Bi Xîr Hatî Kurmanci Tu Bi Xîr Hatî” [Welcome TRT 6, Welcome Kurdish], *Radikal*, January 2, 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=YazarYazisi&ArticleID=915189&Yazar=CENG%C4%B0Z%20%C3%87ANDAR&Date=02.01.2009&CategoryID=99> (accessed March 15, 2009).

“a positive development: the Kurdish TRT channel,”³³ and even *Hürriyet’s* editor-in-chief made a “neutral” comment entitled “Kurdish broadcasting.”³⁴

However, statements by the opposition parties concerning the launch of the new channel were rather negative. Deniz Baykal, leader of the biggest opposition party, the CHP, said on 3 January 2009 in a programme on CNN Türk:

*It is not right to spend the money of the state and seventy million people in line with the ethnic demands of a certain group of our citizens. The duty of the state is not to encourage ethnic identities. Turkey is heading in the wrong direction.*³⁵

Oral Calislar criticized Baykal in the daily *Radikal*:

*Aren’t the Kurds citizens of this country? How can it be seen as unnecessary spending to broadcast in the native language of millions of citizens? What was done by the state was to put into place a duty towards its citizens.*³⁶

Many Kurds welcomed TRT 6 and told stories of their families in the Southeast, who for the first time could watch TV in their own language, such as Mehmet Ulas who was quoted in *Hürriyet* on 7 February 2009:

*[Previously], we had to translate the words on television into Kurdish. “I don’t need your translation, son, anymore,” said my mother to me on the phone. “Now I understand.” It was really a nice thing to hear.*³⁷

However, there was also harsh criticism by DTP politicians and the PKK. DTP Batman mayoral candidate Necdet Atalay said:

*For years, Kurdish was recorded in police records as an “unidentified language.” They used to tell us that Kurds do not exist. Now they are going to tell us that there is no such thing as Kurds in Kurdish.*³⁸

Ahmet Türk, chairperson of the DTP, was not that critical, but was skeptical whether this was a genuine move:

³³ Hasan Cemal, “Olumlu bir gelişme: Kürtçe TRT kanalı” [A positive development: A Kurdish TRT channel], *Milliyet*, January 2, 2009, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/Yazar.aspx?aType=YazarDetay&Date=03.01.2009&ArticleID=1042253&AuthorID=63&b=Olumlu%20bir%20gelisime:%20Kurtce%20TRT%20kanali&a=Hasan%20Cemal> (accessed March 15, 2009).

³⁴ Oktay Eksi, “Kürtçe yayın” [Kurdish broadcasting], *Hürriyet*, January 4, 2009, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=10695048&tarikh=2009-01-04> (accessed March 15, 2009).

³⁵ Betül Akkaya Demirbas, “CHP’s displeasure with TRT transformation draws criticism,” *Today’s Zaman*, January 25, 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=165025> (accessed March 17, 2009).

³⁶ Oral Calislar, “Deniz Baykal ve Kürtçe televizyon...” [Deniz Baykal and Kurdish Television...], *Radikal*, January 3, 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalYazarYazisi&Date=3.1.2009&ArticleID=915326> (accessed March 17, 2009).

³⁷ *Hürriyet Daily News*, “From ban on Kurdish to Kurdish TV,” February 7, 2009, http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/opinion/10946650_p.asp (accessed March 18, 2009).

³⁸ Kerim Balci and Ayse Karabat, “Most Kurds welcome Kurdish channel run by state-owned TRT,” *Today’s Zaman*, December 27, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=162452> (accessed March 20, 2009).

*There is a need for a broadcasting policy that understands Kurds and meets their demands. We are carefully observing the process. We will see in time whether this is something that was initiated with the elections in mind.*³⁹

The PKK launched what can easily be called a smear campaign against the new channel. Murat Karayılan, a PKK commander, called for a boycott against the channel, and PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan commented twice on the channel via his lawyers on 2 and 8 January 2009. In both statements, he said it was a US-driven policy: “These are all impositions by America. These are part of their view of the Kurdish solution.”⁴⁰

Mutlu Civiroglu, a Kurdish freelance writer, analyzed the contents and use of language of the new channel. His verdict is generally positive:

*The channel is continuing a sophisticated and orderly broadcast which is composed of nice cultural, musical, literary, social, and documentary programs. [...] TRT 6 also offers several enjoyable cartoon films for children that create opportunities for children to watch cartoons in their mother language and at the same strengthens channel's claim of being a family channel.*⁴¹

One part of the criticism of the channel was that the AKP uses it to promote its policy and its view on the Kurdish question. Two events proved the critics right (but two events in three months of broadcasting have to be put in perspective, too). On 8 February 2009, it became known that singer-poet Ozan Yusuf was not allowed to sing the songs “Amed” and “Berfin”. ‘Amed’ is the old name of Diyarbakır and ‘berfin’ means snow, but for TRT 6 these words were too closely linked to the usage of the PKK.⁴² While it is still forbidden to use Kurdish in political rallies, TRT 6 broadcasted Erdoğan’s visit to Diyarbakır live on 21 February 2009 and interpreted it simultaneously into Kurdish.⁴³ TRT 6 has not broadcasted any other party rally nor simultaneously interpreted one. However, the biggest blow to the new channel came when moderator-singer Rojin stepped down because of pressure and censorship concerning the contents of the channel. Rojin presented the most popular and prominent show, called *Rojname*, of debates and music with a focus on women’s issues. She commented on her decision in an April 2009 press statement: “The pressure on myself and the program became huge; there was an effort to deprive the show of any content and bring it to an end.”⁴⁴

Still, the introduction of TRT 6 is an important conciliatory move toward the Kurds and a sign of how the language policy of the state has changed. However, what is needed to complete this step concerning broadcasting is to allow private radio and TV stations to broadcast in

³⁹ David Romano, “Turkey Addresses PKK Challenge with Kurdish Language Reforms,” The Jamestown Foundation, January 15, 2009, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=34352&tx_ttnews\[backPid\]=413&no_cache=1](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/gta/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=34352&tx_ttnews[backPid]=413&no_cache=1) (accessed April 1, 2009).

⁴⁰ Ümit Firat, “Kar Kurtan TRT Sese” [From Kar Kurt to TRT 6], *Birikim*, February 2009, 87-88.

⁴¹ Mutlu Civiroglu, “First Impressions About TRT 6 and Some Suggestions,” *Turquie Européenne*, January 26, 2009, <http://www.turquieeuropeenne.eu/article3129.html> (accessed March 22, 2009).

⁴² *Haberforum*, “TRT6'den Amed ve Berfin'i sansür” [TRT 6's censorship of Amed and Berfin], February 8, 2009, <http://www.haberforum.net/?p=3220> (accessed March 22, 2009).

⁴³ *soL*, “Erdoğan'ın Diyarbakır mitingi Kürtçe canlı yayında” [Erdogan's Diyarbakir meeting broadcasted live in Kurdish], February 21, 2009, <http://haber.sol.org.tr/kentgundemleri/10400.html> (accessed March 26, 2009).

⁴⁴ *Today's Zaman*, “Kurdish pop star Rojin parts ways with state broadcaster TRT 6,” April 15, 2009, <http://www.todayzaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=172488&bolum=101> (Accessed on 12 May 2009).

Kurdish, not only state television, and to introduce a legal basis for broadcasting in languages other than Turkish. When the trial broadcasts started on 26 December 2008, *Bianet* declared: “Broadcasting in Kurdish was allowed to the State, but banned to the Kurds.” In addition, on 15 January 2009, a commentator on *Radikal* said of the current situation “it is paradoxical that that this language can still not be used in other fundamental areas of societal life and there are still obstacles for that.”⁴⁵

There is still no full-fledged legal basis for TRT 6 to broadcast twenty-four hours a day in Kurdish. So far, according to the regulations of the Supreme Council of the Radio and Television (RTÜK), TV channels can broadcast in local languages only four hours per day, and they need to have subtitles in Turkish, which TRT 6 does not have.⁴⁶ As long as the constitutional and legal guarantee is not established, the channel can easily be removed again by the ruling party. Moreover, as long as it is only possible to speak Kurdish on TRT 6 and not on private channels, Kurds regard the channel as another means of an assimilation policy.⁴⁷

The DTP and the Struggle for the Kurdish Identity

The ingredients for the election struggle in the Southeast were to determine whether the AKP or the DTP would be the representative for Turkey’s Kurds.⁴⁸ The DTP is often seen as the political arm of the PKK, having the same goals but using different means. In 2006, Aliza Marcus, in her book about the PKK, wrote: “The political Kurdish party, which is supported by the PKK, [is] currently the DTP [...]”⁴⁹ A year later, in August 2007, the European Union Institute for Security Studies stated in a report: “It is an obvious secret that DTP is connected to PKK in a way and PKK is a terrorist group.”⁵⁰ However, the DTP refuses to call the PKK a terrorist organization⁵¹ and refers in a friendly and often praising manner to PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan, for instance, as during the party conference in Diyarbakir in October 2007 as “the leader of the Kurdish people, Abdullah Öcalan.”⁵² Another recent sign of the continuous closeness of the DTP to the PKK was the election party outside the DTP headquarters in Diyarbakir on 29 March 2009. No DTP slogan was shouted; only PKK and Öcalan slogans, and when the first election result was shown on a big screen, the crowd

⁴⁵ Sezgin Tanrikulu. “TRT 6 ve Kürtçeyi kullanma hakkı” [TRT 6 and the right to use Kurdish], *Radikal*, January 15, 2009
<http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalHaberDetay&ArticleID=917002&Date=15.01.2009&CategoryID=99> (accessed March 16, 2009).

⁴⁶ See *Bianet*, “Broadcasting in Kurdish Allowed To The State, But Banned To The Kurds,” December 26, 2008, <http://bianet.org/bianet/kategori/english/111621/broadcasting-in-kurdish-allowed-to-the-state-but-banned-to-the-kurds> (accessed March 18, 2009).

⁴⁷ Informal discussions of the author with citizens in Diyarbakir (in the Sur and Yenisehir districts) on 29 and 30 March 2009.

⁴⁸ PKK (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan) has been on the EU’s list of terrorist organizations since May 2002. It is also on the lists of both the US and NATO.

⁴⁹ Aliza Marcus, *Kan ve Inanc* [Blood and Belief, English original in 2006], (Istanbul: İletisim Publisher, January 2009), 406.

⁵⁰ *Worldbulletin*, “EU report: DTP is connected to PKK ‘in a way,’ ” 6 August 2007, http://www.worldbulletin.net/news_detail.php?id=8226 (Accessed on May 12, 2009).

⁵¹ See *Today’s Zaman*, “Ten soldiers killed in PKK terrorist attacks,” 30 April 2009, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=173860>.

⁵² *Milliyet*, “DTP’nin ‘Öcalan Kürt halk önderi’ sözlerine jet soruşturma” [Immediate inquiry of the words “Öcalan is the leader of the Kurdish people” of the DTP], October 31, 2007, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/10/31/son/sonsiy03.asp> (accessed March 20, 2009).

shouted “PKK!” and “Long live leader Öcalan!” while Öcalan posters and PKK flags were held by supporters from the building’s windows.⁵³

In 2008, PKK terrorism seemed to play a more important role again. After the capture of its leader, Öcalan, in 1999, terrorist attacks largely disappeared during a cease-fire, until 2004. Since then, terrorist and military activities are back in the Southeast. “First it was a devastating attack in Dağlıca [September 2007]. Now it is Aktütün [May 2008]. In addition, countless other attacks occurred in between. Outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) terrorism is back.”⁵⁴ So are cross-border military operations. Ihsan Kamal, commander of the border guards’ operation room in Iraq’s largely autonomous Kurdistan region, said on 28 December 2008: “This is becoming routine, Turkish warplanes targeting the border area. We are not worried about civilian casualties because these areas are deserted.”⁵⁵

According to figures released by the General Staff of the Turkish Armed Forces, 1049 PKK members were “neutralized” in 2008, including 670 killed, 214 captured, and 165 surrendered.⁵⁶ However, the PKK is increasingly under pressure not only from the Turkish Armed Forces but also from the Northern Iraqi Kurdish government. For the first time Ankara and Erbil agreed in early November 2008 to cooperate in the fight against the PKK.⁵⁷ This might be the beginning of closer cooperation, as Ankara knows that disarming the PKK is only possible with the help of the Iraqi Kurds, because only Barzani’s own 100,000-strong militia is capable of rendering the PKK militarily harmless in Iraq.

In addition, the EU and the US are increasingly siding with Turkey in the fight against the PKK. Mehmet Ali Birand commented on 4 December 2008: “The European Parliament’s sometimes much bothering attitude toward the DTP and PKK is progressively changing. Maybe there are still some who support the PKK and perceive them as ‘warriors of freedom,’ but the majority takes Ankara’s side.”⁵⁸ In late December 2008, Gilles de Kerchove, the EU’s Counter-terrorism Coordinator, and Turkish intelligence officials discussed PKK activity in Europe. The two sides focused in particular on ways of cutting off financial resources to the PKK, an important part of the PKK’s system. Further, the US has long highlighted the importance of curbing financial resources to the PKK. “Observers say that with de Kerchove’s visit, the EU has become a fourth party, along with Iraq, Turkey and the US, on the front against the PKK.”⁵⁹

With its back to the wall, the PKK’s strategy is to increase its terrorist activities and present itself as the only alternative to state policy. Arguing that the PKK loses when there is peace, and wins when there is war, analyst Ibrahim Kalin comments:

⁵³ Observed by the author during the visit to Diyarbakir from 28 to 30 March 2009.

⁵⁴ Ibrahim Kalin, “Back to square one on the Kurdish issue,” *Today’s Zaman*, October 16, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/yazarDetay.do?haberno=156039> (accessed March 18, 2009).

⁵⁵ *Today’s Zaman*, “Turkish jets hit PKK targets in northern Iraq,” December 28, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=162599> (accessed March 18, 2009).

⁵⁶ *Hürriyet Daily News*, “Turkish army says 1,049 PKK terrorists neutralized in 2008,” <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/english/domestic/10549364.asp> (accessed March 22, 2009).

⁵⁷ Nick Brauns, “PKK soll ausgeschaltet werden” [PKK should be eliminated], *Junge Welt*, November 14, 2008, <http://www.jungewelt.de/2008/11-14/015.php?print=1> (accessed March 20, 2009).

⁵⁸ Mehmet Ali Birand, “Europe loses its sympathy toward AKP,” *Hürriyet*, December 4, 2008, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=10502008&yazarid=298> (accessed March 22, 2009).

⁵⁹ Sedat Güneç, “EU steps up involvement in fight against PKK terrorism,” *Today’s Zaman*, December 27, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=162439> (accessed December 27, 2008).

[T]he PKK will use its most deadly weapon: identity politics. This means provoking the sentiments of ordinary citizens and forcing the government and the military to take tough action in Kurdish-populated areas. This, in turn, will lead to more tension and reactions in Kurdish cities. This means a more fertile ground for recruitment, more of an arsenal for ideological battles, more reason for actual killing.⁶⁰

The PKK also wants to extend this war across the border into Iraq to internationalize the conflict. A real border war would get the United States involved – the US does not want to see the last peaceful area in Iraq turn into a battlefield between the Turks and the Kurds. In addition, in the end this might lead to a US-led peace conference, in which Turkey would have to accept the PKK, at least indirectly, as a negotiating partner.⁶¹ This seems utopian, but it is currently the PKK's strategy.

However, during the first three months of the 2009 election campaign, there were no terrorist attacks anywhere, and even in Diyarbakır there was a calm and relaxed atmosphere with very little gendarmerie and police presence.⁶²

What could the DTP do in such a situation? It seems as if the party also opted for a tougher campaign stance, focusing on a discourse of nationalist identity. In November 2008, several DTP politicians toured the southeastern towns and villages. The DTP's deputy chairwoman, Emine Ayna, said in Muş, on 1 December 2008, that the DTP is the only party in favor of peace, whereas the AKP, the CHP and the MHP are in favor of war. But she also made an ethnic reference: "The AKP candidates should not come out with their Kurdishness, they are not Kurds."⁶³

Besides stressing that only the DTP will be the true representative of the Kurds in the election, there was a clear strategy of confrontation toward the AKP. In DTP-run municipalities, Erdoğan was "greeted" by town centers that were closed for business and had uncollected rubbish overflowing in the streets. The situation was tense because a lot was at stake: Who will attain the power to shape Kurdish politics in the coming years? Professor Mümtazer Türköne, agreeing that the local elections in March would turn out to be a referendum for the DTP and the PKK, adds that if the AKP wins, the Kurdish question will evolve:

For them, the victory of the AK Party, especially in Diyarbakır, will be a nightmare. If the AK Party wins in Southeastern Anatolia, the Kurdish question will enter a new phase. The PKK and the DTP will not remain the sole powers designing pro-Kurdish politics. Pro-Kurdish politics will be "pluralized".⁶⁴

⁶⁰ İbrahim Kalın, "Back to square one on the Kurdish issue," *SETAV*, October 16, 2008, http://www.setav.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=625&Itemid=29 (accessed December 26, 2008).

⁶¹ Jürgen Gottschlich, "What Does the PKK Want?" *Spiegel Online*, October 24, 2007, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,513294,00.html> (accessed December 26, 2008).

⁶² This was observed by the author during two visits to Diyarbakır from 9-13 March and 28-30 March 2009.

⁶³ Onur Sağsöz and Turgay Ipek, "DTP'li Ayna: AKP'den aday olan Kürt değil" [DTP's Ayna: AKP candidates are not Kurds], *Radikal*, December 2, 2008, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=RadikalDetay&Date=&ArticleID=911092> (accessed December 22, 2008).

⁶⁴ Ayşe Karabat, "Elections perceived as 'referendum' in Kurdish areas," *Today's Zaman*, November 22, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=159469&bolu=103> (accessed December 22, 2008).

Concerning Kurdish language, the AKP scored some points with TRT 6. On 24 February 2009, however, Ahmet Türk, DTP chairperson, equaled the score for the DTP when he spoke in Kurdish to his parliamentary group in the Grand National Assembly on the International Day of the Native Language: “Kurds have long been oppressed because they did not know any other language. I promised myself that I would speak in my mother tongue at an official meeting one day.”⁶⁵ Türk’s move was largely welcomed as another way to normalize the situation of Kurdish in Turkey. Cengiz Çandar titled his column: “The Kurd Ahmet Türk did it very well.”⁶⁶

The CHP: In Search of New Voters

The CHP is the biggest opposition party in parliament and gained 19% of the votes in July 2007 and 18% in the latest regional elections in 2004. The CHP voters largely live in Western Anatolian cities or central districts of big cities, belong to the upper middle class, and are strong supporters of the *status quo* concerning secularism.

The party knows that the core voter group is for almost 20% exhausted. Therefore, the CHP is in search of new voters. The surprise initiative toward veiled women started on 21 November 2008, at a party-meeting in Istanbul’s Eyüp district, where party chairman Baykal welcomed as new party members women in black chador.⁶⁷ This was surprising because the CHP is vehemently against veiled women at universities or in public offices. This was not the only move toward new voter groups.

The Diyarbakır branch of the party prepared a report two weeks before the party conference on 21 December 2008, where they suggested that the “Kurdish identity should be recognized,” and “instead of being Turkish, being a citizen of the Turkish Republic should be emphasized. Kurdish language courses should be elective courses in primary and secondary education. Universities should open Kurdish language and literature departments. Formulas should be developed for the integration of outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party [PKK] members.”⁶⁸ The report also referred to an older (1989) CHP report on the issue, in which the party demanded school education in one’s mother tongue.

However, at the conference on 21 December 2008 the party was not as outspoken as this report. The word “Kurdish” was not mentioned, and the reference to different ethnic identities was limited, appearing only in a speech by Baykal. In the approved program it reads: “Different ethnic identities are an asset. Different ethnic groups’ rights to learn, teach and broadcast in their mother tongues will be safeguarded.”

⁶⁵ Nichole Sobecki, “Turkey’s forbidden tongue,” *Global Post*, March 6, 2009, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/turkey/090305/turkeys-forbidden-tongue> (accessed March 7, 2009); The whole text of what he said in Kurdish is available at: <http://bianet.org/bianet/kategori/english/112799/what-kurdish-mp-said-in-mother-tongue-%E2%80%93-whole-text>.

⁶⁶ Cengiz Çandar, “Kürt Ahmet Türk çok iyi yaptı” [The Kurd Ahmet Türk did it very well], *Radikal*, February 25, 2009, <http://www.radikal.com.tr/Default.aspx?aType=RadikalYazarYazisi&Date=&ArticleID=923349> (accessed March 16, 2009).

⁶⁷ *Zaman*, “Baykal: Şov yapmıyoruz, çarşaf laikliği tehlikeye düşürmez” [Baykal: We are not making a show, the chador doesn’t endanger secularism], November 22, 2008, <http://www.zaman.com.tr/haber.do?haberno=762973&title=baykal-sov-yapmiyoruz-carsaf-laikligi-tehlikeye-dusurmez> (accessed December 26, 2008).

⁶⁸ Ayşe Karabat, “Nothing new from CHP regarding ‘Kurdish initiative,’ ” *Today’s Zaman*, December 23, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=162054> (accessed December 27, 2008).

The conciliatory moves toward veiled women and the cautious approach toward the Kurds were accompanied by an approach toward non-Muslims, who traditionally see the CHP in a very critical light. All of these moves were surprising because all three groups seem out of reach for the CHP. Therefore, it was hard to estimate whether these would serve to win the CHP new voters among veiled women and their conservative husbands, Kurds, and non-Muslims. Concerning the Kurdish initiative, Sezgin Tanrıku, from the Diyarbakır Bar Association, wisely stated: “The CHP does not represent anything in the region. This report or any initiative can only be meaningful if the party is able to establish a relationship with Kurds based on trust. For now, the CHP says one thing in Diyarbakır and the exact opposite elsewhere.”⁶⁹ As the election results show, the CHP were clearly unable to increase its share of the vote in the Southeast; in Diyarbakır the party remained at 0.5%, but it could still win an overall percentage of 28.2%, increasing its share by almost 8% and winning most of the provinces in Thrace and the Aegean, traditional strongholds of the party.

Conclusion

The evaluation in the press after the elections concerning the national result was relatively clear. The AKP won 40.1% in the mayoral elections and 38.8% in the city councils, significantly less than in the 2007 national elections (46.6%), and less than in the last regional elections in 2004 (41.7%), but it still finished as the party with the largest percentage of the vote by far. At national level, the CHP won two percent more, as compared with 2007, and received 23.1%, followed by the MHP having 16.1%, compared to 14.3% in 2007. The national results also reflect a kind of referendum on the AKP’s policies, since July 2007, under the effects of the global economic crisis, which brought the record growth of the past five years to an end, and increased unemployment.

However, in the Southeast the elections carried the additional factor of deciding who will be the major actor in the Kurdish cities. In addition, this result is not as clear-cut as the Diyarbakır result suggests. In Diyarbakır, Osman Baydemir (DTP) crushed Kutbettin Arzu (AKP), 65.4% to 31.6%, and became the mayor of the city. In the elections to the Diyarbakır city council, however, the gap was between 59.4% (DTP) to 32% (AKP) (meaning that more people voted for Baydemir than for the DTP), but this is not consistent for the whole region.

The DTP could win back Van and Siirt from the AKP; the latter city involves the added nuance that Erdoğan’s wife was born there, and Erdoğan was elected after the 2002 elections from Siirt to parliament, and Iğdır from the MHP, but it didn’t succeed in Mardin, Bitlis, Muş, Şanlıurfa, or Ağrı in the wider region. The overall result for the nine regions of Southeastern Anatolia⁷⁰ shows that even there the AKP still won 38.34%, slightly stronger than the DTP with 37.4% in the municipal councils.⁷¹ And the share of the vote for the AKP is much more even in the region, ranging from the lowest percentage of 27.2% in Mardin to the highest of 49.2% in Adıyaman, whereas the DTP did not participate in Kilis and received only five percent in Gaziantep, and a high in Şırnak of 60.75%.

Against the backdrop of these results, a confrontation strategy between the two parties, the DTP and the AKP, in the region in conjunction with the exclusion and neglecting policy from Ankara vis-à-vis DTP politicians can only mean the continuation of the problems, be they

⁶⁹ Ayşe Karabat, “Kurds praise CHP initiative amid deep suspicions,” *Today’s Zaman*, December 13, 2008, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/detaylar.do?load=detay&link=161148> (accessed December 27, 2008).

⁷⁰ The provinces are: Adıyaman, Batman, Diyarbakır, Gaziantep, Kilis, Mardin, Şanlıurfa, Siirt, and Şırnak.

⁷¹ Personal calculations taken from the election results in the provinces.

economic or political. The election result is a clear call to cooperate, in the region and in the many local councils where the two parties share power, but it is also a call for Ankara to cooperate with the DTP municipalities. The AKP's strategy in stressing economic benefits and investments while downplaying the Kurdish aspect failed, as did, in the comment by Jenkins, the "attempted appeal to Muslim solidarity over ethnic identity. But whether the AKP will be willing or able to formulate a new policy to address Kurdish aspirations remains unclear."⁷²

For the DTP, the lesson must also be that while it is possible to win in Diyarbakır with a popular candidate and to win high results in strongholds such as Sirnak (60.75%) or Hakkari (in the East Anatolia region, 73.2%), in the region as a whole, even in favorable times for opposition parties during an economic crisis, it did not manage to become the strongest party, and that is not to mention its ongoing inability to attract Kurdish voters in provinces outside the core Kurdish regions, while its national result remains at five percent.

The coming months will determine whether the parties draw lessons from this result. Not only for the Kurdish question but for the whole democratization process, a new civil constitution would be of utmost importance. This could also help in removing the obstacles to the use of Kurdish in broadcasting, education, and for political parties. The new civil constitution has been on the agenda since the national elections of 22 July 2007, but although there has been a finished draft since August 2007, it has never been debated in parliament.

The new constitution, equal rights for Kurds using their native language, and opening the debate on more powers for the municipalities are disliked by the military, the old elites, and the bureaucracy. To pursue democratization, these resistances have to be overcome. For Tan, the biggest obstacle to a solution is "politicians' lacking courage."⁷³ If the government really wants to change something beyond economic development and infrastructural improvement, it has to act independently from the military and proceed despite its opposition.⁷⁴

Another important question will be how the closure case against the DTP will play out. The Constitutional Court announced that a decision is expected after the elections, since as of 19 December 2008 150 court cases against the DTP still required a verdict.⁷⁵ However, to date no decision has been made yet. The result will also certainly influence the ongoing debate about the so-called "roof party," which will include not only Kurds but liberal Turks, Alevis, and other non-Turkish/Sunni groups. The current AKP policy could also open up the debate on a moderate Kurdish party, perhaps issued from the Islamic conservative movement as an alternative to the DTP.

As long as the other parties persist with a policy of Turkish nationalism, they will remain insignificant in the Kurdish-populated region. The CHP's results in the Southeast show that a

⁷² Gareth Jenkins, "Turkey: AKP Pays the Price," *International Relations and Security Network (ISN)*, April 1, 2009, <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/isn/Current-Affairs/Security-Watch/Detail/?lng=en&id=98450> (accessed April 1, 2009).

⁷³ Interview by Neşe Düzel with Altan Tan, "10 Maddelik Çözüm Planı" [A 10 article solution plan], *Taraf*, March 13, 2008, http://www.haberpanorama.com/news_detail.php?id=592 (accessed March 14, 2008).

⁷⁴ Ekrem Eddy Güzeldere, "Was there, is there, will there be a Kurdish Plan?" *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Spring 2008, <http://www.turkishpolicy.com/images/stories/2008-01-turkey/EkremGuzeldere.pdf> (accessed December 26, 2008).

⁷⁵ *Star Gazete*, "Seçim sonu' demedim dosya tamamlanmadı" [I didn't say 'end of the elections,' I said the file is not completed], December 19, 2008, <http://www.stargazete.com/politika/-secim-sonu-demedim-dosya-tamamlanmadi-156100.htm> (accessed December 22, 2008).

cautious, half-hearted approach is unconvincing. Both parties (AKP and DTP) saw that aggressive rhetoric does not pay off, and that their election victories also have their limits. No single party is the only representative of the Kurds, and none is the only one holding the key to the solution. The coming months will show whether the AKP will again be more committed to the reform process that made it strong and saw it achieve overwhelming support from the Kurds in 2004. If not, the DTP can finally hope to be the dominant force in the upcoming elections.