



Ethnic Kurds, Endogenous Identities, and Turkey's Democratization and Integration with Europe

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Introduction

This article argues that, in examining the domestic dynamics of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey, research should focus on finding new ways of conceptualizing different formulations of ethnic and national identities. The dominant understandings of these identities should be treated as variables rather than as predetermined and fixed categories, and their variation should be explained by changing state policies and economic-political developments. The article's goals are, first, to offer a conceptual framework for such an analysis, and, second, to use this framework to analyze the bottlenecks of Turkish democratization vis-à-vis the Kurdish conflict. One such bottleneck is identified as restrictive policies that systematically crowd out social-political actors who could promote inclusive and harmonious understandings of Turkish and Kurdish identities. The article's focus is on improving our theoretical approach to this conflict, although limited policy implications and projections into the future will also be generated.

A brief review of this conflict's main characteristics is in order.¹ Kurds are a transnational ethnic group forming significant minorities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Kurdish is distinct from Turkish, but Turks and Kurds are, in general, indistinguishable physically and religiously. The latter enjoy full citizenship rights in Turkey unless they publicly accentuate their ethnicity. In accordance with a conservatively interpreted official ideology of national unity, stringent laws and state practices ostensibly intended to stem separatism have the effect of discouraging any activity promoting specifically Kurdish interests, even in cultural and educational spheres. Eastern and Southeastern Turkey, which are heavily populated by ethnic Kurds, are the country's least developed regions socio-economically. An armed conflict, which began in 1984 between the Turkish state forces and the Kurdish rebel group the PKK, generated extensive human rights violations and cost more than 30,000 lives by 1999. That year, the PKK's leader was captured and sentenced to death.² Since then, armed clashes have practically ended, although most of Southeastern Turkey remains under emergency rule.

This development has coincided with increased pressures from the European Union (EU) on Turkey to release legal-political restrictions on non-violent Kurdish activities, within a context of democratic opening. Combined with considerably diminished direct threats to state security, the environment of this conflict has significantly changed. It has become possible that considerations other than internal and external security and actors other than the security forces and the PKK may begin to play an influential role in determining the parameters of this conflict.³ Until now, however, progress has been limited.

¹ For comprehensive reviews see Olson (1996); Gunter (1997); Kiriçi and Winrow (1997); Barkey and Fuller (1998); Kramer (2000); Robins (2000).

² The sentence has yet to be approved by Parliament. There are plans to abolish capital punishment by then.

³ Reportedly, the PKK abolished itself in April 2002, apparently in response to expectations of being banned by European governments, and reorganized its activities under the new name 'Freedom and Democracy Congress of Kurdistan' (KADEK).



Turkey faces a series of reforms that are prerequisites for starting negotiations for full membership in the EU. Among these, those related to ethnic Kurds, such as the removal of restrictions on education and broadcasting in Kurdish, have encountered the most political resistance.⁴ Yet, for theories of international political economy, especially the neo-realist perspective, Turkey's reluctance to comply with EU norms presents a puzzle. Turkey's interests appear to lie in full compliance. Since a Customs Union went into effect in 1996 between Turkey and the EU without any insurance for the former's membership, Turkey has yet to participate in the Union's decision-making mechanisms and gain full eligibility for EU funds. Meanwhile, the EU is already reaping most of its expected benefits from the alliance. Hence, the EU may prefer to keep Turkey as a close, 'westernistic' ally short of enjoying full membership.⁵ Turkey does not have a lot of leverage in determining the terms of her relations with the EU and seems to have everything to gain from accelerating the political integration process. Popular support for the EU is also far-reaching.⁶ Thus, it seemingly is a puzzle why progress on reforms regarding Kurds has so far been insignificant.

Perceived interests are a major stumbling block, but the real question is why these perceptions have not changed significantly in light of the changing security environment. For various historical reasons that are outside the scope of this article, Turkey's political elites, especially the military and conservative groups within the judiciary and the bureaucracy, tend to associate public accentuation of ethnic-cultural differences with social-political disintegration.⁷ They also tend to view minority demands in social-cultural domains as a prelude to more radical demands such as political-territorial secession. Such perceptions produce suspicion of ethnic group demands and an urge to curtail the group activities that express these demands. In contrast, Western European policy makers generally regard the accommodation of ethnic-cultural demands as a requirement of democracy and as a way of preempting more radical demands.⁸ The problem is not limited to one of elite interests. Elite suspicion of ethnic-political activities and resentment of Kurdish separatism is widely shared. As an indirect sign of this, in 1999, two parties that ran on a mainly anti-Kurdish-nationalist platform, the ultranationalist MHP and the leftist-nationalist DSP, together won 40.17% of the national votes. This is not to say that all popular preferences support the status quo; as already mentioned, people support the EU, and, it will be argued later that tolerance for ethnic diversity is generally high on a personal level. The point here is that popular support for change in general, and the EU in particular, do not necessarily translate to strong popular support for democratic opening in regard to the Kurdish issue. The reasons may be related to negative expectations regarding the political consequences of liberalization on ethnic-cultural expressions, and to beliefs regarding what serves national interest.⁹

⁴ Among others, see Ümit Sezgin, www.ntvmsnbc.com, February 26, 2002, and 'Cepheleer Artık Net', *Radikal*, June 8, 2002.

⁵ For Turkey as a westernistic state see Buzan and Diez (1999). See also Mango (1998).

⁶ In recent surveys, popular support for EU membership is consistently found to lie around 70-75%. Among others, see 'Türkiye Dış Politikası Araştırması' by Ali Çarkoğlu and Kemal Kirişçi of Boğaziçi University, İstanbul, conducted in November 2001. See summary report in <http://hamlin.cc.boun.edu.tr/~ces/index.htm>. Also see www.hurriyetim.com.tr, March 30, 2002, and www.ntvmsnbc.com, August 18, 2001.

⁷ Kirişçi and Winrow (1997) and Barkey and Fuller (1998) offer reviews.

⁸ Robins (2000: 73-75). Kramer (2000). Also see Kinzer (2001).

⁹ For instance, Jenkins (2001) points to the fact that the military, which is widely seen as the bulwark against Kurdish nationalism, is found to be highly popular and trusted in opinion surveys. A major reason for this may be distrust of political parties. For a perceptive commentary, see Mehmet Ali Birand, 'TSK'nın Gözetleme ve

These perceptions of interest can change through social and political processes whereby social and political actors who are trusted by the public articulate new visions of society. From this perspective, the foremost obstacle to reform appears to be an outcome of past policies and restrictions. These have generated conditions under which pessimistic expectations about how domestic identities would change in response to EU-led reforms become self-fulfilling. Restrictions produce two consequences, short-term and long-term. For reasons to be explained in the following section, restrictions disproportionately affect Kurdish actors integrated with the rest of the Turkish society and drive them out of the public-political sphere. Hence, in the short-term, restrictions increase the visibility of Kurdish nationalists with little interest in integration, and seemingly corroborate the pessimists' claim that Kurds asserting their ethnicity are all potential separatists.

Meanwhile, the long-term effects of the restrictions reproduce the conditions under which the expectations of those who are skeptical of liberalization could be borne out. Skeptics expect that lifting restrictions would strengthen the Kurdish identity, as opposed to the Turkish national identity, and feed Kurdish separatism. By crowding out Kurdish actors integrated with the rest of the Turkish society, heavy-handed approaches erode the organizational capacity of these potentially conciliatory actors relative to that of extreme Kurdish nationalists. It takes time to build a constituency and organizational capacity for any social-political actor. Hence, past restrictions increase the odds that nationalists who oppose any affiliation with Turkishness, and who are likely to be more vocal and better organized than the moderates, could monopolize the representation of ethnic Kurdish interests in a less restricted environment.

For instance, the Constitutional Court has regularly shut down explicitly Kurdish parties for allegedly promoting separatism.¹⁰ Middle-of-the-road parties have disproportionately been affected by these actions, while more radical parties have managed to be reopened. As a result, the main and practically only legitimate political party that explicitly promotes Kurdish interests, HADEP (People's Democracy Party), is a party widely associated with the PKK. This party was founded after two predecessors were shut down between 1990 and 1994.¹¹ For the state, and presumably for a substantial portion of Turks, HADEP is Kurdish nationalism (Robins 2000: 78). A related perception is that Kurdish nationalism is the PKK. It matters little how strong the PKK and HADEP affiliation really is. This is because the perceived overlap of the two is sufficient to make it a highly risky strategy for any mainstream party to cooperate with HADEP. For example, in response to allegations that his party may cooperate with HADEP in elections, a center-right party deputy immediately had to defend his party by maintaining that his party 'would not even exchange greetings with a divisive party.'¹² In a more recent example, premier Ecevit accused a rival party of considering cooperating with 'a divisive party'.¹³

The effects of past restrictions also manifest themselves in the public-political discourse. Indirectly, restrictions drive out social-political actors who could develop non-oppositional understandings of the Turkish and Kurdish identities. Directly, restrictions

Koruma Görevi', (The Military's Task to Supervise and Protect), *Milliyet*, April 30, 2002. See Çarkođlu and Kiriđçi study cited above on popular preferences regarding EU-related reforms.

¹⁰ For instance, the Democratic Mass Party (*Demokratik Kitle Partisi*), led by former minister 9erafettin Elđi, was shut down by the Constitutional Court for threatening national unity. See *Milliyet*, February 27, 1999.

¹¹ HEP (People's Labor Party) and DEP (Democracy Party).

¹² ANAP deputy Erkan Mumcu. See *Radikal*, February 27, 2002.

¹³ The accused party is CHP. See www.ntvmsnbc.com, April 25, 2002.



push expressions of views and beliefs that support ethnic pluralism into the private. Hence, skeptics of pluralism are disproportionately represented in the public-political discourse. This may also be leading many people to endorse restrictions: people rely on the views and information expressed in the public-political discourse to foresee the consequences of a pluralistic opening.

In order to be able to adequately analyze such complexities, research should create new analytical categories and explanations. First, one needs categorizations that are flexible enough to capture the diversity of the ways in which identities are constructed. It is argued here that, simple distinctions such as moderate versus extreme, or ethnic versus civic definitions of nationalism are insufficient. Whatever specific way they are constructed, the most important distinction between different formulations of the Turkish and Kurdish identities is whether they are portrayed as rival or complementary categories. The first type makes the relationship between the two identities, and between the associated group interests, a zero-sum relation. It leads people to choose one or the other. The second type makes the relationship a positive-sum relation and enables people to embrace a combination of the two.

Second, research should formally incorporate into its explanations the diversity of interests among ethnic Kurds. More than 50% of ethnic Kurds in Turkey are thought to live outside of Eastern and Southeastern Turkey, which Kurdish nationalists consider their traditional homeland. Substantial portions of them are highly integrated with the rest of the Turkish society. In short, in contrast to most journalistic assessments of the issue, ethnic Kurds, like many other ethnic groups in the world, hardly constitute a monolithic group with uniform identities and preferences.¹⁴ As a result, as survey findings to be discussed confirm, one cannot expect all ethnic Kurds in Turkey to have the same notion of Kurdishness. Hence, one can anticipate that intra-Kurdish divisions may play an increasing role in political developments and new actors and visions of Kurdishness may emerge in the future.

Third, research should anticipate that official and popular definitions of Turkishness may shift to accommodate (or further exclude) ethnically conscious Kurds. In a less restricted environment, many views and interests that were hitherto kept in private can come out and compete in the public-political space. In order to capture such changes, one should distinguish between expressed and unexpressed identities and interests.

This article is aimed at contributing to such analytical-conceptual developments and to complement existing explanations of the weaknesses of Turkish democratization and the problems of Turkey's integration with Europe.¹⁵ The second section below theorizes how legal-political restrictions affect various social-political actors. It develops a framework to conceptualize the endogenous relation between identities, collective actions, and public policy, and presents new categories to describe different *definitions* of the Turkish and Kurdish identities. The third section discusses the dynamics of the public-political discourse. The section defines and distinguishes between the private and public

¹⁴ For a typical journalistic analysis, see 'The Battle-Lines in Turkey', *Economist*, January 13-19, 2001. Also see Robins (2000) and Kasaba (2001: 172) who highlight intra-Kurdish diversity and argue that the Kurdish identity is still 'in the making.'

¹⁵ The bottlenecks of Turkey's democracy include a fragmented political party system and a relatively weak democratic culture. Among others, see Özbudun (2000).

expressions of different formulations of ethnic and national identities, and discusses how the dominant public-political discourse may change. The fourth section discusses existing evidence on the private understandings of the Turkish and Kurdish identities in order to assess whether they can form a basis for democratic change (Somer 2001b). The last section discusses preliminary policy implications and projections into the future possibilities.

Restrictions on Ethnic Activity and Endogenous Identities

People do not necessarily acquire their identities through their own actions. Especially, ascriptive group identities such as race, ethnicity and religion evolve historically and are usually adopted by individuals at birth. However, the level of solidarity among group members, and the degree to which people value these identities socially and psychologically result, at least partially, from the collective actions on which they depend to obtain group benefits (Hechter 2000). This view is consistent with the major social psychology finding: even in artificially created group divisions, attachment to group grows when people participate in collective actions with other group members, especially in competition with rival groups.¹⁶

In other words, people are not only more likely to attend collective actions organized in the name of their identities given by birth, but their level of involvement in these actions shape the social and affective importance of these identities for them. The more they participate, the more they will self-identify with these categories. For instance, many Kurdish leftist intellectuals became more 'Kurdish' in a social-psychological sense after they left leftist movements with mixed Turkish-Kurdish memberships and joined predominantly Kurdish movements in the 1970s (van Bruinessen 2000).¹⁷ This way of looking at the relationship between identities and collective actions de-essentializes ethnic identity, instead of treating it as historically or biologically rigid.¹⁸ At the same time, by analyzing ethnic categories as variables, it enables one to examine how public policy affects ethnic identities by encouraging or discouraging different types of collective actions. Here I use the term public policy as a short cut for a large array of state-led policies that shape the economic and legal-political environments of potential ethnic collective actions. The opportunities and incentives-disincentives that are created by these environments affect which type of collective actions materialize and become long-lasting and which type of collective actions do not. The goals, organization, and membership composition of these collective actions then influence the identities of the participants in these collective actions.

Take the region (*hem°ehrilik*) and ethnicity-based associations among rural-migrant communities in urban Turkey. A theory based in an essentialist reading of ethnic identities would interpret these associations as products of ethnic-cultural awakening caused by some exogenous force such as migration or political developments. The perspective here has a different focus. Accordingly, the causal relationship flows from action to identity. Such associations are founded to provide certain group benefits such as social insurance. But once they materialize, they are expected to enhance the regional

¹⁶ Robbers Cave experiment (Sherif and Hovland 1961). Only a simplistic account is given here. For a good discussion including an overall evaluation of Social Identity Theory's contributions, see Hechter and Okamoto (2001).

¹⁷ Ethnic Kurds living in Europe also experience shifts in their ethnic-national identification.

¹⁸ For an excellent discussion, see Laitin (1998). 'Identity strategies' are not in flux to the same degree at all times. They are especially variable during cataclysmic periods of political change and conflict.



or ethnic identities of the participants, depending on whichever identity becomes emphasized within the movement. The important point here is that different collective actions compete with each other in providing group benefits such as insurance and solidarity. Hence, prior to collective actions, it is not a forgone conclusion how the identities of a group of people will evolve. For example, collective actions with ethnically mixed membership will nurture a different understanding of ethnic identity than those with homogenous membership. Public policies in turn affect which type of collective action is more likely.

This analytical framework is mapped in Figure 1. The first line restates that identities partially follow from collective actions. The second line depicts how public policy can therefore affect identities. How can one summarize the mechanism through which public policy affects identities via collective actions? In a totalitarian society, the state determines which collective actions people attend. In other societies, however, individuals face a choice between individual pursuits and collective actions. They also face choices among different collective actions. As a matter of simplification, collective action theories express the attractiveness of a collective action to an individual as the inverse of that collective action's price: expected benefit less the cost of attending.¹⁹ The expected benefit of a collective action is largely subjective for each individual. It can include economic as well as psychic benefits such as an enhanced sense of equality. However, given their subjective evaluation of these benefits, people choose the collective action that provides a given benefit with least cost to them. These costs can include the cost of time, expected punitive action by the state, or loss of social status. Thus, public policy affects the likelihood of different collective actions by changing their relative prices. Everything else being the same, those with lower costs are more likely to materialize.

The third and fourth lines in Figure 1 summarize the policy implication. The more a state integrates with a supranational structure such as the EU, the more one can expect policymaking on the supranational level to influence domestic public policies. Indeed, EU institutions and policies increasingly affect Turkish policy-making. Through their influence on domestic policies, supranational institutions and policies thus create endogenous changes in domestic identities. Line four suggests that supranational policymaking should therefore take into account these possible changes in the identities and preferences of the affected populations. Similarly, domestic policymaking should evaluate possible impacts of the policies in question on integration with the supranational entity. In a nutshell, integration makes it imperative that domestic-national and supranational public policies be shaped interactively and requires better understanding and information flow between the two levels.

Defining *ethnic activity* as a short hand for ethnic group-specific goods and activities, the ostensible aim of restrictions on ethnic activity is to reduce the social-psychological importance of ethnicity. While most restrictions are directed at public ethnic activity, they also affect semi-private ethnic activity such as reading or watching TV in one's home. However, these restrictions can also have unintended consequences. In particular, they might end up boosting divisive ethnic activity while crowding out the conciliatory.

¹⁹ Tarrow (1998) and Lichbach (1998) offer comprehensive discussions of the collective action theories. Also see Laitin (1998).

The intended effect of restrictions is to drastically increase ethnic activity's relative price vis-à-vis nonethnic (or individual) activity, and to reduce its occurrence. However, such restrictions also tend to alter the relative prices between different kinds of ethnic activities. In order to capture this effect, let me define different kinds of ethnic activities according to the type of relationship that they promote between ethnic and national identity. According to Table 1, *rival activities* promote the view that ethnic and national identities are rivals, or substitutes, and the associated group interests are in a zero-sum relationship. *Compatible activities* promote the view that they are complements and in a positive-sum relationship. In other words, the former types of collective action promote what I call the *rival definition*, while the latter promote the *compatible definition*.²⁰ The lead organizers of these activities are called *rival* and *compatible entrepreneurs* in respective order.

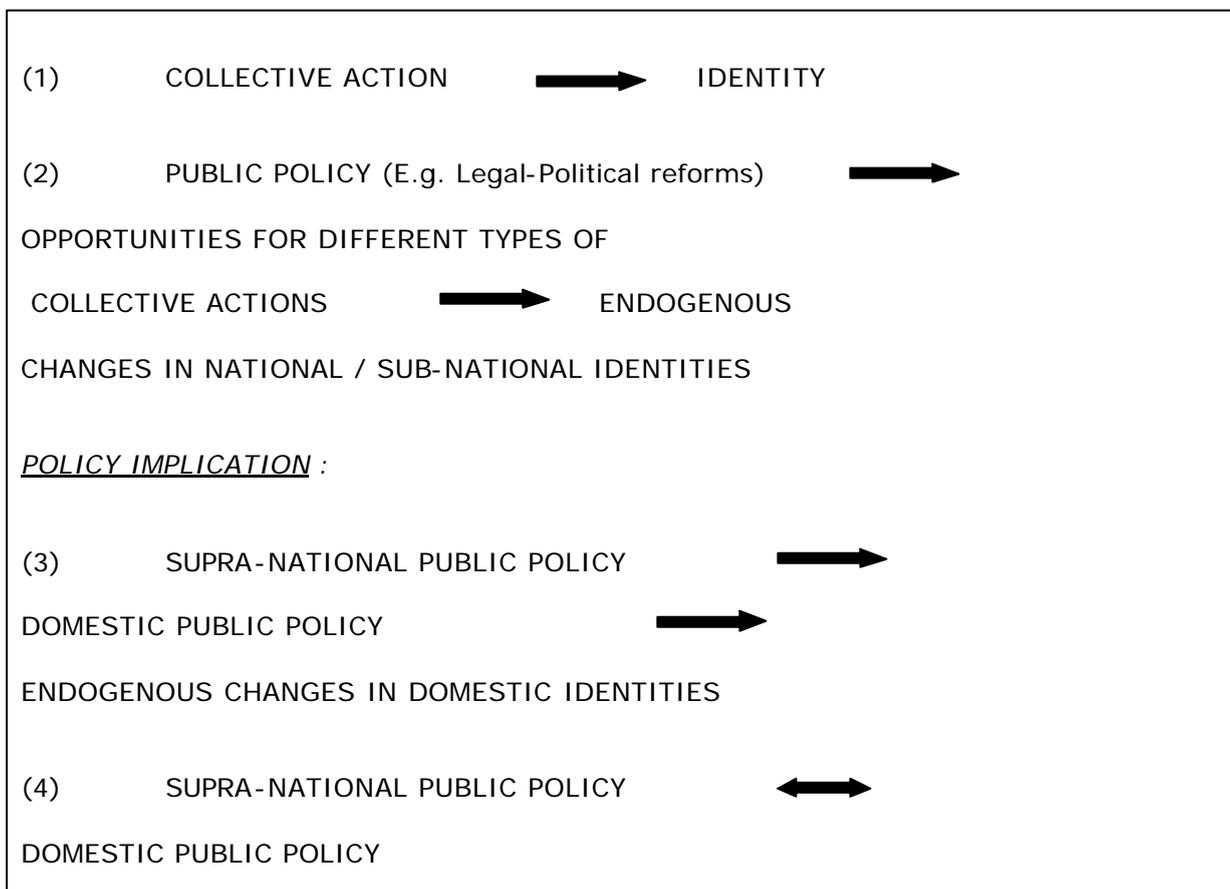


Figure 1: Collective Action—Identity Relationship.

²⁰ For related definitions, see Somer (2001a).



Table 1: Rival vs. Compatible Activities: Organizers and Identities Promoted

<i>Type of activity</i>	<i>Organizers</i>	<i>Ethnic-National Identities Relationship Promoted</i>
Rival	Rival entrepreneurs	Substitutes (or rival); zero-sum relationship: <i>rival definition</i>
Compatible	Compatible entrepreneurs	Complements; positive-sum relationship: <i>compatible definition</i>

An example of compatible activities would be that of associations established by people who trace their origins to immigrants who left the formerly Ottoman territories in the Balkans and the Caucasus for Turkey during the last century. Such associations have become increasingly visible in Turkey since the disintegration of the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia. The members of these associations, Karpas argues, 'do not see any conflict between their current Turkish identity and their ancestral and regional identities shaped during Ottoman rule' (Karpas 2000: xvi). This observation may hold for the majority of ethnic groups in Turkey as well as for ethnic Kurds who integrated with the mainstream society in urban centers of Western Turkey.

How can one categorize collective actions based in Turkish and Kurdish identities according to the rival-compatible definition criteria? Rigid versions of Turkish nationalism, and their counterpart, rigid versions of Kurdish nationalism, are essentially incompatible because they compete for the undivided loyalty of the same people and for the ownership of the same territory. Their relationship is a zero-sum game. In other words, they promote a rival definition of ethnic-national identities. Hence, examples of rival definitions are rigid versions of Turkish nationalism that view any notion of sub-national diversity potentially subversive, and rigid versions of Kurdish nationalism based on the belief that national (Kurdish) and state boundaries should coincide. According to the former, any notion of a separate Kurdish cultural or linguistic identity threatens the security of the Turkish nation and its vital interests; according to the latter, the territory and policies of the Turkish state by definition infringe upon the Kurdish homeland and interests. But both assume that people, territories, and perhaps even animals should be categorized as either Turkish or Kurdish, but not both.

In one example, one spokesperson of a radical group recently accused the Turkish army of trying to eradicate the exotic Van cats by poisoning them because 'the cats are Kurdish, and the Turkish authorities cannot digest this'. Ethnonationalist groups have also called into question the ethnic-national credentials of the indigenous *Kangal* dogs.²¹ The counterpart of this view in Turkish nationalism is the denial of any culture, territory, or people that can be labeled Kurdish as distinct from being Turkish.

²¹ Amberin Zaman, 'German Group Pounces on Kurdish Cat Eradication', *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 2000. Turkish extreme nationalists responded by trying to prove that the cats originated in Central Asia, as did Turks. Also see 'Kangal Komedi'si', *Hürriyet*, February 2, 2002.

In contrast, a compatible definition implies that the Turkish and Kurdish identities are not rivals but can complement each other. In other words, ethnic Kurds holding the compatible definition would believe that they could be hyphenated Turks who, presumably like most Mexican-Americans, may embrace their ethnic-linguistic identity without necessarily opposing their national identity. In turn, ethnic non-Kurds holding the compatible definition would think that a Kurdish ethnic-cultural minority within Turkey is not a threat to social cohesiveness, national security, and territorial integrity. Official definitions and policies significantly affect which of these definitions people hold. However, people's own definitions, especially in private, are not necessarily the same as those of the state. The characteristics of rival and compatible definitions and activities are summarized in Table 2.

The rival-compatible definition distinction is related to, but not the same as, the distinction between ethnic-civic definitions of nations. The usefulness of the latter distinction is limited because the constructions of most national identities entail ethnic as well as civic elements (e.g., Yack 1996; Özdođan 2000). The distinction here is broader than the ethnic-civic distinction. Rather than qualifying the specific way (ethnic, cultural or linguistic) in which two or more identities are constructed, the emphasis is put on the question of whether they are made rivals in people's minds. This enables one to apply the formulation to non-ethnic identities as well, such as a supranational identity (e.g., European) and national identities.

Table 2: Rival vs. Compatible Activities: Defining Characteristics and Descriptive Qualities

<i>Type of Activity</i>	<i>Defining Characteristic</i>	<i>Descriptive (typical but not necessary) Qualities</i>
Rival	Expressing the Rival Definition of National / Sub-national Categories	Oppositional, homogeneous membership valued, essentialist
Compatible	Expressing the Compatible Definition of National / Sub-national Categories	Accommodating, neutral toward heterogeneity, potential fluidity of identities acknowledged, individual choices to enter and to exit respected

We can now return to the effects of restrictions on ethnic activity. Restrictions tend to decrease the relative price of rival ethnic activity vis-à-vis compatible ethnic activity. Hence, in addition to decreasing the level of ethnic activity in general, they tend to increase the share of rival activity within all ethnic activities. Thus, compatible ethnic activity is disproportionately affected by the restrictions. The reason is related to the supply of rival activity. Mainly because of differences of group size, organizing rival activities tends to be less costly than supplying compatible activity. Compatible



entrepreneurs try to appeal to a cross-ethnic audience because they see these groups as mutually inclusive and part of the same nation. In order to reach a large and diverse audience, they have to supply a large range of ethnic and non-ethnic activity, and satisfy a large spectrum of different interests. For example, when they organize a rally, they want a multiethnic attendance; when they start a TV station, they want an audience that crosscuts ethnic groups. In addition to ethnic issues, they have to take an interest in other issues; for instance, they may have to engage labor unions or offer solutions to environmental problems. In a nutshell, compatible ethnic entrepreneurs' efforts are split between many goals, and their target support base tends to be larger, possibly including social groups with conflicting interests. They suffer from all organizational and collective action problems that afflict large groups.

In comparison to compatible entrepreneurs, rival ethnic entrepreneurs need only appeal to a smaller group, their own ethnic group, and a more narrow, ethnically specific agenda. They can concentrate their resources on achieving a small number of goals, putting other issues on the backburner. In addition, thanks to their smaller target group, rival entrepreneurs can more easily monitor their activists, punish defective behavior, and reward those contributing to their cause. Hence, they incur lower organizational and enforcement costs than do compatible ethnic entrepreneurs, given that state restrictions on ethnic activity affect both.

Note that restrictions cannot limit ethnic activity to the extent that nobody dares to undertake it. Consider the banning of books considered to be ethnically inflammatory by the judiciary. As a result of this policy, entrepreneurs-publishers who promote the compatible definition would be driven out of the market, while rival entrepreneurs would likely continue their activities. Rival entrepreneurs tend to have a higher reservation price, the maximum price they are willing to pay in order to continue their activities despite the law. This is mainly because their activities are less costly in the sense argued above. This tendency is reinforced to the extent that many rival ethnic entrepreneurs have already found themselves in conflict with the state. Insofar as rival ethnic entrepreneurs already operate in an illegal or extra-legal environment, the social and political consequences of clashing with the law and the state – otherwise an important deterrent – is a sunk cost.

For instance, despite Turkey's ban on broadcasting in Kurdish, MED-TV, which allegedly is linked to the PKK, has continued broadcasting into Turkey for years, notwithstanding Turkey's pressures on European governments to ban it (e.g., Kirişçi and Winrow 1997: 174, 197; Gunter 1997: 57, 122).²² Reportedly, MED-TV found a large audience in Southeastern Turkey. In other words, the demand for Kurdish broadcasting has largely been met by a supplier that is illegal in Turkey and is targeting an exclusively Kurdish audience. To quote Barkey and Fuller, 'it seems amazing that the Turkish government would prefer that Kurds get their TV news and culture in Kurdish from PKK-TV [MED-TV] rather than provide Turkish state or private TV in Kurdish inside Turkey from non-PKK sources' (Barkey and Fuller 1998: 33). Potential legal suppliers of Kurdish broadcasting, which presumably could have targeted mixed Kurdish-Turkish audiences in order to enlarge their market size, have been driven out.

If it were allowed, would providers of Kurdish broadcasting really promote the rival

²² Local radio stations in Kurdish are tolerated in practice to a limited extent.

definition? Separatist organizations such as the PKK would certainly try to exploit Kurdish broadcasts to advance their own cause. But such organizations already have their propaganda networks despite the laws prohibiting them. As for the potential commercial suppliers of Kurdish broadcasts, they would have to consider what type of programming the average ethnic Kurd demands. Insofar as ethnic Kurds are integrated with the larger Turkish society and embrace the compatible definition, they would have to supply programs reflecting their worldview and interests. However, one should note that the answer to the above question is irrelevant to policy makers if it is impossible to prevent Kurdish broadcasting anyway. In this case, the relevant question becomes whether a small number of illegal, or a larger number of legal providers are more likely to have polarizing effects on society.

Public Discourse and Ethnic Activity

For the purposes of this article, let me define the *public-political discourse* (henceforth public discourse) broadly as the collection of views, beliefs and cultural-political references that people feel comfortable using openly, that is, when they cannot expect to be able to restrict their audience. This definition covers for instance the discourse of representatives of organized groups such as political parties in public settings and the discourse of the mainstream media. It also encompasses ordinary people's discourse when talking or writing to strangers.

In terms of tipping and cascade models of identity formation to be discussed further below, this definition denotes the discourse people use outside their *private* realm, such as their household members and close friends. Accordingly, *public discourse* can be defined as the views, beliefs and cultural-political references people openly use when they cannot control the dissemination of their views.

It was discussed above that restrictions on ethnic activity tend to crowd out compatible ethnic activities. The natural consequence of this on the public discourse in Turkey is that the discourse of the rival definition will be overly represented in the public discourse. With compatible actors discouraged, there are significant social-political pressures to hold back views in favor of mutual inclusiveness. Indeed, Turkish nationalists who view the Turkish and Kurdish identities as mutually exclusive rivals tend to associate any suggestion to open up the public space to Kurdish expressions as being pro-Kurdish or, worse, pro-PKK. Within their discourse, interpretations of the Ottoman Empire's disintegration as the consequence of tolerant attitudes toward ethnic-religious plurality remain intact. Meanwhile, Kurdish nationalists accuse ethnic Kurds who fail to reject Turkishness of betraying the Kurdish cause.

At the same time, as will be elaborated below, tolerance of cultural diversity and interethnic mixing continue to exist on a personal-private level, alongside the dominant public discourse. Despite a substantial degree of cultural and linguistic homogenization that resulted from national education and other nation- and state-building practices, Turkey's ethnic-cultural composition remains quite heterogeneous, with Kurds being the second largest ethnic group among the forty-seven identified by an authoritative 1989 study (Andrews 1989). A growing awareness of this actual diversity also continues to exist alongside the public discourse (Kramer 2000: 44). Can these private beliefs and attitudes give rise to a transformation of the dominant public discourse?

Research recognizes the possibility that private or 'latent' belief structures provide a source of unifying change in different contexts (Karpas 2000). It has been put forward,



for instance, that values stemming from Turkey's multicultural past in the Ottoman period or from Islam, the religion of the vast majority of the population, may breed tolerance and serve to conciliate ethnic Turks and Kurds (Yavuz 2001). I argue that the possibility that any private beliefs may successfully give rise to a conciliatory public discourse hinges on two conditions.

First, new social-cultural actors have to remold historical identities to create new formulations of ethnic-national identities. Historically held belief structures may produce different consequences in a changed social-political context. The history of secularization and of the relations between the Sunni and Alevi Muslims in Turkey restrict the identities that can play a unifying role. The same identities or ideologies that might have been unifying in the past may prove polarizing in the present. In fact, the 1980 military regime tried to place a renewed emphasis on Islam in order to stem ideological polarization and Kurdish nationalism, which not only failed to do so but might have fueled polarization between the secular and religious portions of the population. Thus, the emergence of new social categories and definitions is a complex phenomenon that requires human agency and creativity.²³ Once again, the prior crowding out of compatible actors who could play this role emerges as a major obstacle.

The second condition derives from cascade models. Cascade models describe how the discourse or behavior of people can rapidly change through chain reactions.²⁴ This occurs when a critical mass is reached, which denotes the number, or social-political significance, of those who are already willing to change their behavior or discourse. Thus, cascades explain situations in which the individual incentives for taking an action or using a discourse depend significantly on the behavior of others. For instance, the incentives for learning a specific computer language drastically increase once a critical mass of other people have begun to use it. After that critical point, the language can rapidly become the standard because, among other reasons, people would like to learn the language that will be compatible with that of most others.

The logic of cascade models implies that leading state actors play a key role in signaling future changes in 'appropriate' definitions of ethnic and national identities. Their role is, along with other social-political actors, to signal a critical mass of people to express new definitions in public. Hence, the issue of coordination is important. Even if the majority of Turks felt free to express a more heterogeneous and inclusive national self-image, and expected to be better off with such a new self-image, change may not occur unless a critical mass of people begin to express this new self-image simultaneously. Individuals who use a heterodox discourse on their own put their public image and social-political relations at risk. Therefore, most people would feel that it is not in their self-interest to change their discourse on their own.

Until the 1990s, it was considered taboo to publicly use the word 'Kurd' to denote an ethnic group in Turkey. The word was almost never used in that sense in official

²³ Sakallıođlu (1996) argues appropriately that 'creative ideas' are more important than 'political will' for the resolution of the Kurdish conflict. Yavuz makes a related point when he maintains that a dynamic, tolerant version of Islam peculiar to Turkey can play a unifying role. See *Zaman*, March 7, 2002. However, given the politicized nature of the relations between the secularist and religious groups in Turkey, an enhanced role for an even moderate version of Islam may prove polarizing.

²⁴ For discussions of cascade and tipping models, see, among others, Lohmann (1994), Kuran (1998), Laitin (1998), Somer (2001a).

documents and in the public discourse. Consequently, many assumed that only people with radical political views would choose to use it. With such a stigma attached to it, people with no political intentions shunned the word in order to avoid risking their reputation within their social reference groups, thus making the assumption self-reinforcing. These incentives reflected the dominant public discourse at that time, which associated the use of the word with sectarian personal beliefs and intentions. The same way as Americans who display the confederate flag risk being labeled racists, Turks who employed the word 'Kurd' in their public discourse risked being labeled a *bölücü*, literally 'one who stirs up divisions' or a 'separatist'.

President Özal's public announcement in 1989 that he is partly Kurdish, followed by President Demirel's public recognition of the 'Kurdish reality' in 1992, have 'tipped' a critical mass of people to use the word 'Kurd' publicly. Hence, the incentives shaping the public usage of the word have changed significantly. Generally, it is no longer thought that the expression of terms such as 'Kurd', 'Kurdish', 'Turkish Kurd', or 'Kurdish Turk' signals one's radical personal beliefs, intentions, or group memberships. This is not to say that everybody is using these words readily or that nobody is stigmatizing them. In fact, for some people these categories might have accrued new and more politically sensitive meanings. But in general the intentions people impute to others who express these categories, and the social-political consequences of their expression, appear to be significantly less negative than before. A simple search in a major Turkish newspaper's online edition found more than 400 articles containing the word 'Kurd' during the last one and a half years.²⁵ The relative ease with which this change in dominant public discourse took place may suggest that on a personal level, opposition to the acceptance of the Kurdish identity is insubstantial. However, so far, lack of opposition has only applied to recognizing Kurds as an ethnic-linguistic category. For reasons already discussed, expressing views in favor of recognizing them as a group that may be entitled to cultural or political rights continues to face public opposition.²⁶

A fuller discussion of the dynamics of the public discourse in terms of cascade models is beyond the scope of this article. Instead, a few key implications will be summarized:²⁷

- (1) The dominant public discourse may be a poor predictor of the underlying private beliefs.
- (2) Cascade effects can generate rapid and massive shifts in public discourse, if state actors signal a critical mass of people that they can simultaneously shift their publicly expressed beliefs.
- (3) Political and social-cultural entrepreneurs constantly compete to shift the dominant public discourse. To this end, they endeavor to manipulate information on actual support for their beliefs, and employ social and political pressures to silence opposing views.
- (4) Because of the imperfect observability of private beliefs, social-cultural entrepreneurs who represent a minority of private beliefs can dominate the public discourse by creating the impression that they represent the majority's beliefs, or by silencing the dissenters.

²⁵ The newspaper is *Hürriyet*.

²⁶ Notably, however, these ideas are no longer 'unthinkable.' Increasingly, political party leaders and the media challenge on these issues powerful state actors such as speakers of the military.

²⁷ The reader is referred to the cited references for further clarification.



- (5) Public policy affects the outcome by shaping the opportunities for various social-political actors to participate in public discourse and by protecting – or not protecting – dissenters.

Private Beliefs

The gist of the previous section is that the public discourse in Turkey may downplay private acceptance of ethnic diversity. In private, do people in Turkey view Turkish and Kurdish identities as rivals or complements? Ethnic Turks and Kurds have shared a homeland for most of the last millennium, depending on how one interprets history and the roots of each ethnic category. Leaving loyalty to the Ottoman state aside, religious community remained the primary identity of Ottoman people, and ethnic-linguistic categories carried only secondary importance (Lewis 1995: 321-323; Karpas 2000). Religious divisions, such as those between Sunni Muslims and Alevi Muslims often override both linguistic and ethnic divisions, among ethnic Turks as well as Kurds (Kehl-Bodrogi 1999: 439-454). Thus, generally, 'Kurdish' conflicts have occurred between Kurdish groups and state forces rather than between ethnic Kurds and Turks. The PKK's armed conflict with the Turkish state has not defied this rule, either, and tensions between ordinary Turks and Kurds have been limited, given the seriousness of the conflict.²⁸ Hence, the historical background does not lend itself to the development of a rival definition of Turkish and Kurdish identities.

In accordance with this prediction, ethnic background is not found to be a significant determinant of respondents' choice of spouse between Kurds and Turks (Özdağ 1995; Pope and Pope 1998: 253-254). This is important because marriage decisions are long-term investments and intermarriages produce ethnically mixed children. One would not expect a person to enter an interethnic marriage if that person believed the spouse's ethnic-national identity and group interests to be incompatible with his or her own.

Given the politically sensitive nature of the issue, data on ethnic-national self-identification are scarce and largely static. Studies available to scholars are also criticized on theoretical, methodological, and political grounds (e.g., Sakallıoğlu 1996; Turgut 1996). In addition, again because of the sensitivity of the issue, responses in surveys may be affected by self-censorship even in meticulously conducted studies.

Given these caveats, however, existing data appear to be fairly consistent in two senses. First, even findings from the Southeast provide weak support for the prevalence of the belief that Kurdish and Turkish are viewed as rival categories. When given the chance to choose a combination of identities in surveys, substantial portions of self-conscious ethnic Kurds identify with Turkishness on a national level. This suggests that they do not see ethnic and national identities as mutually exclusive substitutes. Findings on primary identities support this thesis. For example, in a recent nation-wide survey, 12% of the population declared Kurdish as their mother tongue, which suggests that they identify with Kurdishness as an ethnic-linguistic category. However, in response to the question 'Do you identify yourself primarily as a Turk, Muslim, Citizen of the Republic of Turkey, Kurd, Zaza, Kourmanji, or Alevi', only 2.7% and 0.7% chose the categories 'Kurd' and

²⁸ For observations of tensions and discriminatory behavior between ordinary Turks and Kurds see, among others, Kılıç (1992); Belge (1996).

'Zaza' respectively.²⁹ In other words, at least 71% of the Kurdish speakers primarily identified with nation-level categories such as Turk, citizen of Turkey, and Muslim (27%, 35%, and 31% for all respondents), or responded 'other' or 'no opinion' (3.3% and 0.7%). The low percentage of 'no opinion' responses suggests that the respondents did not necessarily think that they would be judged by their answers.

Data on interethnic relations suggest that the ethnic dimensions of the Kurdish conflict rank below socioeconomic dimensions of the conflict in terms of people's own valuation (Özdağ 1995: 73). Social class and ethnic dimensions are difficult to separate in the Southeast where a two-decades-long conflict has deepened an already existing developmental rift between Western and Eastern Turkey. But Turkish-Kurdish relations, as opposed to relations with the state, are not necessarily seen as antagonistic. In one study, where the majority of respondents (70.9%) self-identified as *fully or partially Kurdish* (including Zaza, Kourmanji, and Turkish-Kurdish mixed), people were given a number of options to choose from to describe relations between people from different ethnic backgrounds (Özdağ 1995: 137).³⁰ 73.6% of respondents chose the options 'We are one indivisible nation' (40.8%) and 'We need a bit more tolerance and respect between people from different ethnic backgrounds' (32.8%). Only 5.8% chose the option that 'The relations between people from different ethnic backgrounds are not good, especially those between Turks and Kurds. In the future, these relations will deteriorate.' 3% declined to respond.

Second, existing data on identities reveal significant variation when one moves from Eastern to Western Turkey. Take findings on ethnic-national self-identification. In one study conducted among urban residents of Southeastern provinces and among immigrants from the Southeast to Mediterranean towns, people were asked their primary self-identity (Ergil 1995: 37).³¹ 37.6% primarily self-identified with either Turkishness or a combination of different identities such as ethnic, national, or religious. But the largest percentage of respondents, 40.3%, declared their primary identity as Kurdish. The differences between these findings and those from Western Turkey are striking. In a 1993 poll conducted in Istanbul, 7.67% and 13.3% of the respondents reportedly declared themselves ethnically Kurdish on both sides of the family and just partly Kurdish, in respective order. However, in response to the unprompted question: 'We are all Turkish citizens, but we may be of different origin. What do you feel your origin to be?' only 3.9% of all respondents thought their origin to be Kurdish. In other words, only about a fifth of those who had full or partial Kurdish descent declared their 'origin'

²⁹ Çarkođlu and Kiriđçi study cited above. Preliminary results based on communication with the authors and summaries posted in <http://hamlin.cc.boun.edu.tr/~ces/index.htm>. The survey was funded by Bođaziçi University Research Fund, Istanbul, and the United States Institute for Peace (USIP). It was conducted in November 2001 by a public opinion research company, which surveyed 3086 randomly selected rural and urban residents in 20 provinces. Results are reported to have a standard error of +/-1.8 (95% confidence).

³⁰ This study was conducted by a group of academics for the Union of Metal Workers (Türk Metal Sendikası), based on questionnaires administered by professional interviewers to a representative sample of 8802 individuals living in Southeastern Turkey.

³¹ The survey was funded by the Association of the Chambers of Commerce of Turkey (TOBB in Turkish). It was based on personal interviews with 1,267 heads of household. Reportedly, interviews were conducted in people's private homes and the respondents were ensured that their identities would be kept anonymous. For a summary in English, see 'Chamber of Commerce Report on Kurds Detailed', *FBIS-WEU-95-152*, 8 August 1995.



(suggesting primary identification) specifically Kurdish. The rest felt their origin to be categories cross-cutting ethnicity such as Turkish, Turkish-Muslim, or Muslim.³²

To the extent that ethnic Kurds and Turks hold the compatible definition, one can argue that the rigid public discourse is, as predicted by (1) in the last section, a poor predictor of the underlying private preferences. One might also conclude that ethnic Turks and Kurds could simply reconcile their differences only if their private preferences would be revealed in a less restrictive environment. In light of the theoretical framework discussed, however, the paucity of information on private preferences is not easy to surmount. The distribution of private preferences across the population is largely unobservable to the average person. Therefore, people usually look at the deeds of representative individuals from each group to infer the intentions of others. Insofar as actors who have, or are perceived to have, radical goals represent their groups in public discourse, interethnic distrust would continue to thrive. Hence, the views of PKK members may come to represent the views of all ethnic Kurds in the eyes of ethnic Turks, unless the preferences of other ethnic Kurds are adequately represented in public discourse. Similarly, rigid versions of Turkish nationalism come to represent the intentions of ethnic Turks in the eyes of ethnic Kurds, unless more pluralistic versions of Turkish nationalism are more widely expressed. As implications (2) through (5) indicate, the representations of the whole spectrum of Kurdish interests and preferences cannot be taken for granted simply by eliminating legal-political restrictions. Cascade effects can significantly exaggerate the impact of a vocal, well-organized minority's preferences.

Election results are a major source of information regarding ethnic Kurds' preferences. For various reasons, however, they are hard to interpret. In 1999, HADEP received 4.8% of votes nationally, but enjoyed as high as 60% electoral support in local elections in Southeastern provinces (Robins 2000: 64). The 10% national threshold for any party to enter the parliament may have lead many potential HADEP voters to vote for other parties in national polls. The local election results outside the Southeast show that, as predicted in this article, this party has largely remained a regional party. But, in the absence of alternative political actors representing Kurdish interests, it is hard to deduce the reasons and goals that motivate people to support HADEP. The spokespersons of the party reject separatism, although, as argued, the party is widely associated with separatism and the PKK by ethnic Turks.³³ Once again, what seems to be crucial is not ethnic versus civic definition. Both the PKK and HADEP are ideologically leftist organizations that claim to reject ethnic definitions. However, this does not prevent the perception that they portray Kurdish and Turkish identities as mutually exclusive rivals.

Conclusions

Accounting for the diversity within Kurds explains a great deal of the puzzle posed in the introduction: why has progress been slow on Kurdish reforms although Turkey's interests seem to lie in integration with the EU as soon as possible. As explained, past state policies have crowded out credible moderate actors. Hence, mutually reinforcing versions of extreme Kurdish and Turkish nationalism could sway the political arena in a less

³² Survey reported in Pope and Pope (1998: 254-55), and Önder (1999: 6-7). Conducted by Konda research company for the newspaper *Milliyet*, by surveying 15,863 people. Also see *Milliyet*, February 27, 1993 and August 16, 1995.

³³ Interview with Ahmet Turan Demir, leader of HADEP (People's Democracy Party), *Radikal*, September 18, 2000.

restricted environment. This would be disastrous given the high level of geographical and socioeconomic mixing of ethnic Kurds and Turks, especially in Western Turkey. Pressures to 'unmix' tightly integrated communities on social, economic, and identity levels would be detrimental. It is not clear how the effects of past policies can be rectified through new policies. This may explain part of the resistance to reforms. This article has maintained that research can properly analyze this problem by creating new and endogenous categories of ethnic and national identities. The article has offered new categories and a preliminary analysis of public policy-identities relation.

In terms of projections, one should expect intra-Kurdish divisions of interest to gain increasing importance in the future development of the Kurdish conflict. Competition between moderate and extreme nationalists may make the latter more prone to violence.³⁴ Further ascendance of what has been called rival ethnic activities would inevitably escalate the conflict both within Kurds and between Kurds, ethnic Turks, and the state. The rival definition would compel ethnic Kurds who are integrated with the mainstream Turkish society to make a choice between Turkishness and Kurdishness. Any strengthening of state policies that reject the Kurdish identity would also have the same effect. In comparison, the strengthening of compatible definitions can contribute to the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish conflict.

One cannot expect all Kurds to embrace the compatible definition. From the beginning, Turkish nation- and state-building failed to incorporate a portion of ethnic Kurds, which resulted in a series of brutally suppressed ethnic-religious rebellions during the 1920s and 1930s in Eastern Turkey (e.g., Olson 1989). The participants of these early conflicts and many of their descendants presumably never fully embraced the national identity and hold the rival definition (Bucak 1991; Ballý 1991). Other ethnic Kurds' sense of Kurdishness became steeped in bitterness as a result of the PKK insurgency and the state's equally violent counter-repression. The PKK guerillas who lived for years under extreme circumstances and in isolation from the rest of society, and PKK members and sympathizers who live outside Turkey, are especially apt to have developed hardened beliefs regarding the incompatibility of the Turkish and Kurdish identities.³⁵ The substantial minority of voters who support extreme Turkish nationalist parties can also be expected to hold the rival definition. Nevertheless, it has been argued here that substantial proportions of Turks of various ethnic stripes appear to hold tolerant and non-exclusive beliefs about ethnic diversity. These beliefs could be a basis for the evolution of a more pluralistic public discourse and politics.

In order for the public discourse to change, compatible definitions need to be first formulated by new social-cultural entrepreneurs. It takes time and ingenuity to mold existing private beliefs into new definitions that are consistent with local belief systems and that people can embrace. To provide opportunities for the emergence of compatible Turkish and Kurdish actors is Turkey's greatest challenge. Once this occurs, state policies are crucial to signal a critical mass of people that it is becoming acceptable to adopt a more tolerant and inclusive discourse in public. Another condition for change is the credibility of the actors who represent the change. Actors who have an actual or

³⁴ See Lichbach (1996: 60-61) for a theoretical elaboration.

³⁵ For an illustrative source on guerillas' lifestyles and belief structures see Gürsel (1996). Many of the guerillas reportedly decided to join the PKK as a result of socioeconomic dislocation and experiences that involved excessive use of force, or outright human rights violations, perpetrated by security forces. Also see İçduygu et al. (1999).



perceived track record of separatism are not credible, because their actions can easily be interpreted as strategic falsification of their actual intentions, especially but not exclusively by ethnic Turks. Similarly, mainstream political actors who have promoted ironhanded methods against even moderate Kurdish expressions may find their ability to compromise diminished.

More research is necessary to identify policies that would ensure an open and representative public discourse. These policies may include legal and institutional frameworks to diversify information dissemination and media ownership, and political party and election reforms to encourage more plurality of views expressed within political parties. The emergence of compatible definitions of Turkish and Kurdish identities requires reevaluation of Turkish history from fresh angles and the adoption of educational policies and textbooks accordingly. Cultural-educational policies is an important arena in which external actors such as the EU can have a positive, long-run impact by helping Turks to challenge beliefs that attribute social disintegration to ethnic and cultural pluralism. State behavior and political developments should be expected to significantly affect the self-definitions and political preferences of the large spectrum of ethnic Kurds living in Turkey.

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