

“Germany Was and Still is Part of the War Against the Kurds”

An interview with Duran Kalkan, member of the KCK Executive Council

The History of German- Turkish Relations / International Solidarity / Building a Global Democratic Confederalism

In an extensive interview, Duran Kalkan comments on the history and characteristics of German-Turkish relations, international solidarity and the establishment of a global Democratic Confederalism. The interview was conducted in March 2018, but has lost nothing of its relevance. On the contrary: Germany’s participation in the current attacks on North and East Syria and North Iraq but also the ever increasing repression against Kurds and other democratic forces in Germany, who stand up for peace and freedom, speak volumes.

We have been organizing ourselves under the umbrella of the Kurdistan Democratic Communities Union (KCK) since 2005. Organized in different areas of life – economy, culture, self-defense, law, social life, diplomacy, politics – we strive to support and build structures of self-governance in all four parts of Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora. All our member organizations come together under the roof of the `People’s Congress` (Kongra Gel) which constitutes our highest decision-making institution. Thus, even under the hardships of war and colonial state policy we work everyday to put our vision of a self-governed, just and sustainable society into practice.

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Even though German-Turkish relations officially began in the Seljuk period in the 11th century, one can speak of a joint relationship only from the 19th century onwards. How did the relations between Prussia and the Ottoman Empire develop in the 19th century and how can the character of these relations be characterized?

With the development of European capitalism and the growth of the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire became increasingly weaker from the 17th and 18th centuries onwards and found itself in a phase of decline. In the early 19th century, this became increasingly evident. The Russian Empire in the east was pressuring the Ottoman Empire around the Black Sea and in the Caucasus, as was the European capitalism of England and France, which was gaining

increasing influence. The Ottoman Empire lost more and more territory due to military defeats and was weakened militarily.

The Ottoman Empire's efforts at the beginning of the 18th century to adapt to the development of European Capitalist Modernity could not stop the empire's decline. To prevent its increasing disintegration, it began to limit the autonomy that had been granted to the various societies within the empire in the early 19th century. In particular, military campaigns in the interior served to limit the autonomous administrations, especially of the Kurdish and Armenian societies, and to place their local and military force under the control of the empire.

The Ottoman Empire came under pressure because of the expansion of the capitalist system and could not protect itself from it. According to the motto "He who cannot beat his donkey, beats the pack saddle", it therefore sought an internal solution and pursued a policy of centralization and concentration of political and military power, restricting the rights of the autonomous administrations in the empire in order to ensure its continued existence. Beginning with the Rewanduz attack, continuing with the measures taken against the resistance of Şêx Êbeydûllah in the early 1880s, and ending with the joint attacks with Iran against the principality of Botan to break the influence of Prince Bedirxan, the Ottoman Empire embarked on a one hundred-year war and military occupation of Kurdistan.

This situation, on the one hand, reduced the political and military power of the Kurdish princes to the center of the Ottoman Empire, and on the other hand, it led to more control of the Ottoman Empire over the properties of the Armenian society. Despite these domestic measures and the political, military, and economic resources captured in the process, the empire could not withstand pressure from external forces - particularly the de facto alliance of England, France, and Russia. In search of external support against this constriction from outside, the Ottoman Empire found the emerging German Empire as an ally.

The German Empire, united only by Prussian power politics, was largely isolated at the time of the development of Capitalist Modernity in Europe - similar to the Ottoman Empire as well. Capitalist relations had developed earlier in England, the Netherlands, Spain and France than in Germany. Moreover, Germany lacked the necessary unity, so that German influence in the European context was very weak.

This did not change until the middle of the 19th century. Advancing modernity through the state-led development of capitalism promised advantages. This, combined with the unification of all the small German states into one empire, created by Prussian power politics, made the German Empire a major political and military force in Europe in the second half of the 19th century. Because of this belated capitalist development, the German Empire, this now very strong, unified German state, was particularly greedy and exploitative. New colonial territories were urgently needed and sought after.

Due to the Anglo-French-Russian alliance, the Ottoman Empire lost strength and importance and was pushed further and further into a corner. At this point, it offered itself as an important

partner to hungry German capitalism. The Ottoman Empire became both an important partner for the German Empire in the struggle against political-military opponents and a colonial space that fulfilled the needs of German capitalism as a new field of exploitation. Thus, the relations between the two empires, which developed intensively at the end of the 19th century, can best be described.

Both sides needed each other in many ways. Also, both empires were under pressure from the same enemies. The interdependence and the struggle against the same enemy increasingly strengthened their relations. The process of partnership that began with the construction of the Berlin- Baghdad Railway led to the community of fate in World War I against the British-French-Russian bloc and enabled the continuation of both states.

From the perspective of the German Empire, the large territory of the Ottoman Empire, which had not yet been seized by capitalism, offered itself as a space for investment. It also opened up the possibility of acting in the Asian region against European and Russian competition. After German capitalism had established its unity and reformed itself, it pursued the goal of becoming a global hegemon and taking over the leadership of Capitalist Modernity.

In the last quarter of the 19th century, this process, characterized by increasing militarization, began. Because of the multiple relationships and alliances, this culminated in the First World War, which was essentially a German-British war. We also know that the system of Capitalist Modernity was developed to become a global hegemony itself, that is, to spread everywhere. At the same time, a struggle for distribution took place between the leading capitalist forces. The late awakening and the zeal of German imperialism against the already colonially developed powers of Great Britain, France and Russia led to a renewed struggle for distribution and to the war for the conquest of new territories and spheres of influence.

In this struggle, which was primarily about a new distribution of power in Capitalist Modernity led by England, the Ottoman territories - characterized by exploitation of their own territories and as a gateway to Asia - were most useful to the strategy of German capitalism.

Obviously, relations with the Ottoman Empire gave the German Empire great advantages in the struggle against English domination. Therefore, it always attached importance to establishing relations with the central leadership of the Ottoman Empire. In the Ottoman Empire's search for external allies to escape the decline caused by the expansion of English and French capitalism in Europe and the confinement caused by the Tsarist Empire, the German Empire presented itself as a savior in need. These were the causes and motives of their partnership, which led to the fateful alliance in the First World War. For the Ottomans, who were on the defensive, external support from the German Empire was a strategic defense necessity.

For the German Empire, which was undergoing a statist-capitalist development, a central motivation for this alliance - as mentioned above - was to use the territory of the Ottoman Empire as a sales market and as a gateway to Asia.

With the construction of the Berlin-Baghdad Railway in the mid-19th century, relations intensified. Thus, Germany achieved an important exploitation base. For a time, this alliance benefited both powers, until in World War I it could no longer withstand the attacks of England and France and its strategy failed. Germany failed to become the leading global power. Later, an attempt was made to achieve this goal by means of Hitler's fascism. The Ottoman Empire could not stop its disintegration. The Republic of Turkey was founded on the ruins of the Ottoman Empire, which tried to recover from the war losses by means of the Kemalist movement.

How do you evaluate German imperialism in this context? What are its central characteristics?

First of all, it must be mentioned that German capitalism developed quite late in the European context. In addition, it developed - as I said - by reforming from above, based on the state. In contrast, the capitalist system and capitalist relations in numerous other European states developed as a result of the fact that feudal structures, due to the developments at the time, were increasingly in contradiction to the existing structures.

In Germany, the principalities united with Prussian forces and established a state leadership. Capitalist relations drew on this state power; they were established as state-based capitalism and became dominant in the economy and politics. Thus, the development of German capitalism was fundamentally different from that of the other European states because it was managed "from above," brought about by state power. It was centralist, monopolistic and hegemonic from the beginning, which also meant greater weakness and increased aggressiveness.

We must therefore recognize the following: A belated capitalism that develops with state power is less sovereign. It is very aggressive, centralistic and monopolistic. The capitalist leadership aspirations of Germany led to the First World War.

The main reason for attacking Russia in World War II was not, as some think and often articulate, to be against communism, to defeat Soviet communism, and to become the defender of capitalism. It was about more than just dominating Capitalist Modernity. Rather, it was about reaching Iran via the Caucasus and India from there.

Certainly, the anti-socialist, anti-communist character played a role. Through the struggle with the Soviet Union, the English and French leadership was to be pushed into the background. One wanted to generate advantages from presenting oneself as a defender as well as a pioneer of the capitalist world. In this way, all capitalist circles were to be addressed and their support secured. These are all influencing factors, but they are not the decisive reason. The intention was to reach India and to stop England's expansion there or to drive England out. The efforts to weaken the Soviet Union and to reach India via the Caucasus and Iran were related to this. Thus, Soviet resistance to Hitler's fascism played a central role in thwarting the German imperialist strategy. Thus, Hitler's attacks on Soviet soil and the expansion into Caucasus and Iran could be stopped.

At this point, Hitler's only option was to establish relations with the Republic of Turkey and enter South Asia via this route. However, due to the influence of states like England, France and the Soviet Union on the İnönü government, this path was not available to German capital and Hitler's government. Even though the İnönü-government supported Hitler's government during the war, it had to reject the demands of Hitler fascism for fear of the alliance of the aforementioned states. So German imperialism was defeated a second time.

Although Germany had made extensive preparations to colonize the Middle East before World War I, it ultimately suffered a major defeat. Historians even refer to this as Germany's 'Mesopotamia Trauma'. In your opinion, what are Germany's interests in the Middle East?

Basically, Germany has been carrying out serious colonization efforts in the Middle East via Istanbul for the last 150 years. This process began with the construction of the Berlin-Baghdad railroad and has continued until today despite some interruptions. Even today, the German state and German capital are the forces that have the best relations with the Istanbul bourgeoisie and the Turkish Republic. There are extensive trade relations. Germany is always in the leading position in the Turkish economy. Consequently, there is colonization in a very important area of the Middle East. Within the borders of Turkey, first of all, German capital exploits the country. In Iran, too, German capital is one of the exploiting forces. Here, too, perhaps German capital is in the first place.

Apart from this there is the Arab region, where German capital may not be a leading exploiting force. However, since German capital is in the forefront in Turkey and Iran, the two hegemonic regional powers of the Middle East, one can by no means say that there is no exploitation of the Middle East by German capital.

The strategic concept of German capital to extend its influence to India via the Ottoman Empire has failed. The reason is that despite the construction of the Berlin- Baghdad railroad, which even reached as far as Basra, the economic, social, political and military activities of the allied countries of England, France, the Soviet Union, as well as the First World War, stopped this process. This is the only point where the Germans did not succeed and suffered defeat.

Another point is that German politics and German capital in the Middle East have always been partners of central state structures. The leadership of the Ottoman Empire was the only interlocutor. The same is true for Iran. The German system has not paid much attention to the local authorities in the Ottoman system and that is why it has not established relations with them. If we take into account that in the Arab region such local authorities have the greatest influence, then Germany has lost at this point as well.

In contrast, countries such as France and England, established stronger relationships with local authorities rather than favoring relationships with central administrations. This has allowed them to gain influence in many places in the Middle East, especially in the Arab region, and gain control over much of the Middle East despite the Ottoman Empire. This has resulted in the oil

and energy resources coming under the control of countries such as England and France, denying German capital access to these sources.

This is related to the German way of doing politics and the way its capital spreads. For example, the style of France, England and even America is different. America has followed a similar style to England and France in the Middle East. It has established relations with broader circles, more with local authorities, not limiting itself to one area and balancing setbacks in one place with successes elsewhere.

The nature of the relationship, expansion and influence of German capital and German politics is different. It has always taken central planning, the central system and itself as its starting point. This is related to the history of its own emergence. We have mentioned before the connection with the emergence of German capitalism. In Germany, capitalist development has originated from the transformation of the feudal principalities. It is monopolistic and thus has always taken the central system as its starting point in political and economic expansion. In the past, this has been reflected in its relationship with the Ottoman Empire. Based on its relations with the Ottoman Empire, Germany exploited much of the Ottoman soil. Until its defeat in World War I, Ottoman soil was the most efficient area of exploitation for German capital. Between the world wars, there was also a lively exchange between the Turkish Republic and Germany, which lasted until the fall of Hitler fascism. Turkey had the best economic and political relations with Germany under İsmet İnönü until 1944. Through relations with Turkey, Hitler was able to secure access to the raw materials necessary for the war.

After World War II and the establishment of the EC (European Community) and NATO, Germany in particular, as a Western country, established economic relations with Turkey. Germany's interest in the Middle East lies in economic relations with the central states, which are still effectively implemented in Turkey and Iran today.

We do not know exactly how the `Mesopotamia Syndrome` came into being, but the German Empire had started a big project with the Berlin-Baghdad Railway. It had planned a long-term exploitation with the aim of making the Middle East its own sphere of influence, including its relationship with the Ottoman Empire. But this policy failed with the defeat in the First World War. If this is what is meant by the term `Mesopotamia Syndrome`, it is true.

In the phase of the growing global hegemony of capitalism, the First World War was a war between Germany and England for control of the Middle East. Germany's policy resulted in an alliance between England, France and Russia. After this alliance had contacted local authorities in the Middle East and had dragged the Middle East into the existing conflict, the way was paved for the First World War.

Germany's plans were decisive factors in the development and outbreak of the war. The fact that states like England, France and Russia came together in an alliance and a World War broke out was due to Germany's plans. Of course, there were other factors as well, but it is important

to also see this reality as an important reason for the outbreak of such a great war as the First World War.

How have German-Turkish relations developed since the founding of NATO? Are the basic factors economic interests? What is the significance of Germany's relations with Turkey?

Without a doubt, Turkish-German relations did not begin with the establishment of NATO or the accession of Turkey and Germany to NATO. The relations date back to the middle of the 19th century. Above all, they are based on the German-Austrian-Ottoman alliance against the Triple Entente, which was established at the beginning of the 20th century. I already mentioned this. In any case, it would not be right to see the developing relationship between the two countries within the NATO system as the starting point of the Turkish-German relationship. That would be a break with historical reality and would prevent us from grasping the fundamental peculiarities.

The relations that were established between the German and Ottoman Empires in the middle of the 19th century and that were increased at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century have some basic features. We have tried to mention them all. Undoubtedly one point is that the German capital wanted to exploit the Middle East with its rich energy reserves and natural resources with the help of the Ottoman Empire. But economic interests are only one dimension of the relationship. There are also political, military and security aspects. Therefore, Turkish-German relations must be viewed holistically. One characteristic feature, among many others, is that the relationship between the two resulted from the interplay of German capital's exploitation of Middle Eastern resources and the Ottoman Empire's need for security against the expansion of England, France, and Russia. For example, the capitalist transformation processes in Germany and Turkey resemble each other. Germany, at the beginning of its national capitalist development, was a "Junker state" in the sense that there was monopolization by the state, based on the large landowners, the "Junkers". In Turkey, too, capitalist relations were developed in a central way by the state from above. In this respect, there is no democracy in the Turkish and German systems of capitalism, but dictatorship and centralism are used as the basis. Repressive authority is in the foreground. Capitalism means maximum profit. The character of German and Turkish capitalism is based on the most brutal forms of exploitation. Therefore, the systems are similar and they get along well with each other. They can develop these colonialist relations mutually easier and more effectively. This is the reason why Turkish-German relations have developed so quickly and have always been functional.

Another point is that Ottoman soil is strategically important to the goal of German capital to expand its domination and become the primary hegemonic power of capitalism. Of course, it was not only Ottoman soil that was of strategic importance to Germany. Similar considerations applied to Iran, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. German capital had planned to advance as far as India via these routes, but the territory of the Ottoman Empire always offered the possibility of implementing the strategy there as well. The still very close Turkish-German relations today

stem from this fact. German capital still has similar tendencies. Consequently, Turkey is always seen as a place where its own strategy can be implemented.

For the Ottoman Empire and later Turkey, the German Empire and later the German state - including the fascist Hitler regime - has always been an external security guarantee. These are the important factors of Turkish- German relations. The economic profit interests have developed within this framework. This means that the relationship is strategic. The Turkish authorities have always considered and valued the relations with Germany as strategic. The German capital system has always taken a strategic approach, as relations with the Ottoman Empire and Turkey serve its global expansion. This does not mean that the economic interests in Turkey itself are in the background. They also have a huge significance.

After the Second World War, within the NATO partnership, Germany and Turkey were given a place in the restructuring efforts by the United States. They were part of the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. Turkey was strengthened as a part of the global capitalist system as the southeastern flank of NATO. It was seen as a country defending NATO and US interests in the Middle East. Therefore, it was supported. Turkey was a model for the new colonization by the USA. It received financial, political and military support under both the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine.

In this context, when Germany and Turkey were restructured within the framework of NATO after the Second World War and the old relations were also resumed, very strong economic relations developed. The present economic relations of Germany with Turkey are really at the highest level. The most important exploitation area of German capital has always been Turkey. In this respect, there is an interdependence of Turkish and German capital at the highest level. There is a common monopolization that is so intense that it is often difficult to keep the two apart. It is almost as if they are two states with a common capital structure. In any case, it is unclear how much they are really two different states.

It is well known that we were jailed in Germany for six years. We discussed with the judge and the lawyers on two days every week for six years. From these discussions the question arose for us: "Is Turkey governed by the government in Ankara or by the then German government in Bonn, now Berlin?" The German judges and prosecutors displayed a political attitude as if there was no Turkish government. The government in Ankara was considered as a colonial province. It seemed as if the German state was running Turkey. Everything in Turkey was seen as an attack on its own interests. "Our interests are being harmed," they said. They assessed the situation as if a fight against Germany was taking place and as if the PKK's political-military struggle against the Turkish state was being waged against Germany. The reason is the aforementioned interdependence, both in economic and strategic terms. For the expansion of German capital Turkey is an important partner, and for the security of the Turkish state system Germany continues to be an external support: Like a colonial power it stands guard over Turkey. Thus, the German-Turkish relationship cannot be reduced to one single aspect. That would be a narrow view and would not grasp the broader scope.

You are one of the politicians who were arrested in the context of the “Düsseldorf Trial” at the end of the 1980s. From the beginning, the German state has taken a hostile stance against the freedom movement. Why?

We have answered this question in part in the previous answers. Why has the German state been hostile towards the Kurdistan Liberation Movement from the beginning on? One must explain this with the historical basis of Turkish-German relations and the present-day interdependence of the two states. This is where the roots of this hostility can be found. We have already tried to explain the historical dimension of this relationship and what it means for both sides.

In the current situation, the Kurdistan Freedom Movement, which envisages to radically change the dominant mentality and politics in the Turkish state, is not only changing Turkey. It is also changing the German mentality and politics, which are similar to and linked with the Turkish one. Turkey expresses this at every opportunity. The German state, its power structures and capital forces know this strategy very well. Therefore, they consider the Kurdish existence and freedom as contrary to their own interests.

We have explained the following before: England, France, Russia and the USA have pursued strategies in the Middle East that are more aimed at building relations with local authorities and different social forces. The German state policy and capital expansion, on the other hand, has tried to build everything through the central relations with the Ottoman Empire and Iran and later Turkey. Thus, the interests of German capital and the state become one with the interests of the central power structures in Turkey. Thus, ideas and struggles that weaken and threaten the Ottoman Empire and later Turkey are simultaneously seen as weakening the capitalist system and the state foundation in Germany - a common enemy, in other words. This has been the case since the beginning of relations, since the construction of the Berlin-Baghdad railroad at the end of the 19th century. Just as the Ottoman Empire always saw the local administrations in Kurdistan as separatist in the 19th and 20th centuries, so too did German capital and German politics view them that way.

In our court cases, we tried to present this historically and to place the political situation in a historical context. We went back as far as the Crusades in our analyses and evaluations.

The German government considers Turkey as a federal state of Germany. We can basically add Turkey to the other sixteen German federal states. The migration of Turkish workers to Germany and the consequent merging of the two societies have encouraged this attitude. Thus, a new factor emerged in addition to the political, military, strategic and economic aspects.

The NATO system is another factor. Especially during the fascist military coup of September 12, 1980, we saw that the Turkey Department of NATO is based in Germany. Yes, the NATO center is in Brussels and from there the NATO system is coordinated and managed, but there is also a department for Turkey in Germany. As part of the restructuring of Germany and Turkey after World War II with the help of the Marshall Plan and the Truman Doctrine, NATO's Turkey

Department was apparently established in Germany. One also had in mind the economic and strategic relations of both countries. This means that the headquarters of the 1980 military coup was located in Germany. The coup was not directed in Ankara, but in Germany. The first attack against the PKK struggle and the preparations of the guerrilla struggle were made from Germany. Provocative, destructive and separatist tendencies and forces were supported and agents were ordered to attack the PKK.

Thus, there was not only hostility, but Germany was the center in which the mentality and the policy for the annihilation and denial of the Kurds was supposed to be established. It is not only about the hostility towards the Kurdish Liberation Movement. Germany is the center where the strategies and tactics are developed and applied to defeat and suppress the Liberation Movement. The war against the PKK in recent years is essentially organized, planned, directed and coordinated via Germany.

Recently there has been talk about this having changed and NATO headquarters having been moved to France. There is also talk of other places, but we don't know that for sure. If we look at the current situation it doesn't look like that. Maybe it is not as obvious as it was before, but in the system of Europe and NATO, no matter how strained the relations are, Turkish-German relations are always, whether secretly or openly, at the highest level.

While the German state criminalizes the PKK, the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) receives great political, economic and diplomatic support, even though all the accusations against the PKK also apply to the KDP. What does Germany want in Kurdistan? What kind of "Kurdish policy" does Germany have?

What kind of 'Kurdish policy' does Germany really have? Does it have one or not? Does Germany accept the Kurdish existence or not? Does it accept the Kurds as a nation or not? If it considers the Kurds as a people, does it accept their democratic and political rights or not? All this is unclear. The politicians in Germany are the ones who talk the most about human rights. They also talk about the Kurds. Kurdish conferences are organized in Germany and they participate in them. In Germany, they use phrases like "rights of the Kurds". We witnessed similar approaches from the judges and lawyers during the 'Düsseldorf Trial'. For example, the judge said, "We are also for the existence and rights of the Kurds, but against the terrorist organization PKK." My lawyer formulated the following equation: "Kurd = PKK = Apo". This is the formula, he said. Those who do not accept this formula only pay lip service to the rights and existence of the Kurds. The judge wanted to push us in a certain direction. During this time, there were disagreements between the German and Turkish governments. The German government wanted to exploit Turkey even more economically. It wanted to sign contracts for this purpose and therefore exerted pressure on the Turkish government. The judge in Düsseldorf said, "Don't criticize Germany or German-Turkish relations, but you can call the government in Turkey fascist or say whatever you want." The intention was to tie Turkey even more intensively to Germany. We were supposed to be used as a trump card against Turkey in order to get even more economic concessions from the government of Turkey. Germany's acceptance of Kurdish existence and Kurdish policy can be viewed in this framework.

Germany wants nothing else in Kurdistan. It wants to exploit Kurdistan, the Kurdish existence and the democratic rights of Kurdish society. It does this against the Turkish government, but also against the Iranian government; it does this in Kurdistan itself, and this is how it treats other forces in the Middle East.

Why does Germany establish good relations with the KDP while rejecting the PKK? Because the PKK represents the will of the free Kurds. If Germany accepts the PKK, it cannot continue its policy of exploitation. The KDP does not represent any free will. Relations with the KDP allow Germany to pursue its interests in Kurdistan without any obstruction. The “terrorism” term is an empty and meaningless concept. Basically, it was invented to denigrate opponents of the ruling state order. This is how they try to suppress the opposition, this is how exploitative relationships are established. Based on the “anti-terrorism struggle”, many interests are revealed: everything that benefits one’s own interests is advocated. Everything else is being accepted, whether human rights violation, despotism, dictatorship or fascism. They simply close their eyes and ears. If, however, it is a matter of one’s own interests, even the most democratic force will be treated with hostility. These are the standards. This is the basic principle of European capitalism. They will do anything for profit.

From this point of view, the rulers in Germany are absolutely incapable of accepting a society with democratic rights in Kurdistan. They only speak of “Kurds” and Kurdistan in order to exploit the raw materials there. They build good relations with those who provide access, while those who deny access are defamed as `terrorists`.

The current discourse does not indicate that Germany recognizes the Kurds and their rights. There are no plans for any such thing. It is only about interests, exploitation and profit. Their principle is exploitation.

In this respect, they see the Kurds as their historical enemies. They see them as an obstacle to the global expansion of German capital. Because they have always been one with the Ottoman Empire and Turkey, they understand Kurdish existence and the Freedom Movement as enemies. Even if they talk about “Kurds” from time to time, it has no other meaning than to deceive the Kurdish society and democrats.

In 1993, one day before the 15th anniversary of the foundation of the PKK, the PKK was banned in Germany. In what context did this happen? What was the intention?

In November 1993, the German government and parliament declared the PKK a criminal organization and banned its activities. Since the ban was declared on the eve of the 15th anniversary of the foundation of the PKK, it may well have been a response to the anniversary. However, as someone who directly experience that time, I think it was rather not.

When the German government banned the PKK as a criminal organization in November 1993, it was not so much worried about the anniversary, but about the ongoing trial in Düsseldorf. The

trial stagnated, could neither continue nor be brought to an end. Six years of imprisonment had passed. They could not produce any evidence against those who had been imprisoned for six years and therefore could not convict them. The trial had been prolonged for four years. It had become a problem, a burden for the German state.

The process had started with extensive propaganda, but had led to the unmasking of Germany's general policy and its Kurdish policy. Its anti-democratic attitude had been unmasked. The question arose as to how the state would deal with it, with what sentences or punishments the trial would end. Those who were most concerned were the judges and prosecutors of the Düsseldorf court.

What happened in court before the government made such a decision? This is not known to anyone. So far, no one has asked us either. We have not had the opportunity to explain what happened ourselves. But now that the opportunity has come, we can talk about it. Before the PKK ban was imposed, there were calls for an agreement with the judges and prosecutors to end the process and thus relieve Germany of this burden. Our lawyers informed us of the judges' and prosecutors' desire to talk. As defendants, we agreed to this. We conducted negotiations with the judges in our cells together with our lawyers.

The subject of the negotiations was the following: "We want to end the process. It cannot go on like this. You have been in custody for six years. Germany will not declare itself guilty and therefore cannot acquit you. Therefore, you must receive a sentence. A criminal act is required for a conviction. If you are convicted and admit your guilt, you will be released immediately. You have already served the time in custody corresponding to the sentence. The German state would impose a sentence on you and thus save its honor. And you would be released. Let us thus come to an agreement." That was their proposal.

This situation surprised us. "Why should we accept a crime when we are innocent? We have already spent enough time in prison. If such an offer had come without having been imprisoned, it would have been understandable. But we have spent six years in prison. Now we are supposed to accept our guilt so that we can go free. They would finish the process and the German state would have saved its honor. What about us? What results for us? We will be released from prison. We have been in detention for six years, and we will remain in detention for another six years if necessary." With these words we expressed our attitude and rejected their proposals. This surprised the judges and prosecutors very much. They then reported the situation to the government.

The court could not impose a legal penalty or reach an agreement with us. So the only option left was to declare the PKK a criminal organization. This, in turn, could only be done by the government. For this reason, the German government imposed the PKK ban in November 1993. It declared the PKK a "criminal organization" and the Bundestag ruled accordingly. On this basis, the judges of the Düsseldorf trial sentenced me to six years' imprisonment. I had been arrested in April 1988. At that time, there had been no law declaring the PKK to be a criminal organization. The 1993 decision was applied retroactively and we were sentenced unlawfully.

This is how the Düsseldorf trial ended. The government and the Bundestag passed a law. The court ruled accordingly and ended the trial. We were released in the spring of 1994. A few months passed with discussions. This is the context of the PKK ban. There is no other reason. There was no connection with the struggle in Kurdistan, the relations between Germany and Turkey or the struggle in Germany. There was an attempt to establish such a connection. There had been protests in Germany and the ban had been imposed for that reason. However, it had absolutely nothing to do with that.

The only reason for the 1993 PKK ban was the need to be able to finish the Düsseldorf trial. For the people who had been illegally imprisoned for six years, a crime had to be created for which a conviction was possible. The criminal offense was created when the Bundestag passed a law that the PKK was a criminal organization. They could not find any other criminal offense. "The PKK is a criminal organization, they are PKK members", therefore we were found guilty and sentenced. How legitimate the PKK ban is, is for the public to judge.

Higher instances revised the verdict. The ECHR found the German state guilty, but was not consistent enough. The verdict could have been stricter. Because we were held hostage for six years. Without legal backing, without any concrete accusation, we were imprisoned for six years. Where was justice, where was democracy? When it comes to the Kurdish question, democracy, law and justice do not apply. Anyone can deal with the Kurds as they please, imprison them innocently and finally negotiate with them.

There have been appeals from your movement to the German state. Did you ever receive a positive response, or has there been a phase of dialogue?

I do not know everything in this context because I was not responsible for the PKK's relations with Germany. Until the international conspiracy, our leader Abdullah Öcalan coordinated these matters. After that, there was a collective leadership. Different friends led the movement at different times, determined its policies and conducted diplomatic relations. Political-diplomatic relations, talks and discussions took place with Germany and other states, organizations and political forces. I know that Germany is an important center in terms of fascist, colonialist-repressive policies against the Kurdish people. The German policy is influential. Regarding the contradictions and clashes between the Kurdish people's struggle for freedom and the colonialist-repressive system, Germany belongs to the latter. Thus, Germany is a party in this struggle.

Because of the intensive economic relations between Germany and Turkey, any emancipatory movement in the context of Turkey also harms Germany's economic interests. Business and politics are very cautious when it comes to avoiding damage. We know that German politics and the government are intensively involved in the struggle in Kurdistan for this reason.

There is a large Turkish community living in Germany, but also many Kurds. They have come to Germany from Turkish-occupied Northern Kurdistan and other parts of Kurdistan as migrant workers or refugees. They constitute an important group there. Thus, every conflict between Turks and Kurds has a direct impact on Germany.

The effects of the aggressive stance of Tayyip Erdoğan's government towards Germany in recent times are well known. It is also known how much the activities of the MIT (Turkish Secret Service) disrupt public order in Germany, especially as they result in terrorist acts. In this way, the Kurdish people's struggle for existence and freedom also influences Germany's internal structures. We know that German politics follows the developments in Kurdistan and the struggle of the Kurds closely and tries to control them. Therefore, there have been discussions from time to time between representatives of the German state and the leadership of our party.

Has Germany as a state ever sought a solution to the Kurdish question? I personally do not believe so. Of course, this does not apply to German democrats, socialists and individual politicians, but rather to the government. The sympathizers and friends of the Kurdish Freedom Movement are very strong in Germany. We have German members, martyrs and wounded. I send my greetings to all of them. We have a lot of appreciation for them. However, I am talking about government policy. This must not be confused with each other.

In the 1990s, there were isolated arrests made by the guerrilla. In this context, there were also contacts with the German state. However, this did not lead to a discussion at the political level or to mutual promises. It was not a dialogue in terms of a solution to the Kurdish question; rather, it was about preventing negative repercussions of the struggle in Kurdistan on Germany. They were rather dialogues with representatives from the extended circle of the government, with people from the intelligence sector.

Germany is not like the other states. Basic state policy is to profit from existing conflicts. We know that Germany in particular profits from the contradictions and conflicts between the PKK and Turkey. It would be worthwhile to research what economic concessions and gains Germany has made by fighting the PKK.

I also do not believe that our movement has turned to the German state for help in solving the Kurdish question. There were certainly appeals from the PKK along these lines: "You are becoming part of the crimes in Kurdistan. It shouldn't be like that. What is needed is a democratic approach and respect for the existence and freedom of the Kurds." Our movement has also made such appeals to Turkey. With regard to a solution to the Kurdish question, we have made appeals to all sides in the past.

Germany had also decided to arrest our leader Abdullah Öcalan and put him on trial in Düsseldorf. An arrest warrant had been issued. This decision existed until our leader Apo came to Rome. If Germany had abided by its own laws, it would have had to demand that Italy extradite Öcalan and put him on trial. But Germany did not do that. It also rejected Italy's

proposal to hold a Kurdistan conference. The arrest warrant issued in 1987 was revoked in early 1999 and Öcalan was declared “persona non grata.” He was banned from entering Germany. All these aspects are well known. Such a force cannot be a partner in the search for a solution to the Kurdish question.

People generally say that German-Turkish relations are rather bad at the moment. Do you agree with that?

Even a broken clock shows the correct time twice a day. The tensions and contradictions in German-Turkish relations should be assessed in this way. It is a dispute between siblings who cannot agree on the inheritance of their common parents. Beyond that, there are no fundamental tensions in German-Turkish relations. German-Turkish relations are based on a profound system of interests. Within this system, both sides try to assert their own interests. The tensions arise from this competition.

Germany has Turkey under its control. Turkey, in turn, is committing massacres and human rights violations in Kurdistan. And German politicians do not know this? How can they knowingly support these massacres and at the same time call themselves democratic? When it gets tough, the blame is put on Turkey, but politically nothing changes. Recently, Turkey has been accused of various rights violations, including war crimes in Kurdistan. But the tanks and weapons that are being used are “Made in Germany”.

Germany has no problems with the sale of tanks and weapons. On the contrary, more and more are being sold. The basic political-economic relations never experience any turbulence. They continue unimpeded in the background. Sometimes they argue like siblings and do not talk to each other for a while. The tensions between Germany and Turkey are of this nature. Erdoğan has recently gone a bit too far, calling Germany “Nazis” and “successors to the Hitler regime”. And yet the politicians are shaking hands. The German foreign minister visited Erdoğan several times in recent weeks in strict secrecy. As a result, some journalists were released under the “rule of law”. Germany stated that it was a decision of the “independent Turkish judiciary”. Of course, it was not. Negotiations for their release took place just like on a market. Anyway, the arrests had been due to the above-mentioned tensions within the system of interests. What else were these people accused of? Nothing! Their arrest was a serious offense. They were victims of the interests of the state.

While predominantly left-wing and green parties criticize fascism and the state of emergency in Turkey as well as the total isolation in İmralı, state officials and business circles fail to do so. There are more serious contradictions between the United States and the Erdoğan clique than between Germany and Turkey. In Germany, for example, many Turkish NATO soldiers have applied for asylum. They are currently considered a problem and serve as leverage for Germany. I don't think there are problems beyond that. The fascism of the Erdoğan-Bahçeli regime and the massacres in Kurdistan do not interest the German state in the slightest way. Daily tensions are overcome with daily negotiations.

In the last two years, the pressure on the Kurdish Freedom Movement in Germany has increased. This includes bans on Öcalan portraits, PKK flags and even legal institutions and associations in Germany. People are getting criminal charges for sharing YPG/YPJ flags on social media. What is your opinion about this? Why is this happening right now?

This question should be answered by friends from Germany and Europe. Why now? I don't agree that the repression has increased in the last two years. In the past, it was not significantly less.

I personally spent six years in German detention without any justification. From 1988 on, many people were arrested in the same way and put in solitary confinement. The German state had an underground courtroom built especially for us at an expense of eight million German marks. We were tried in the "Düsseldorf Trial" accompanied by a large media presence. In this way, the German public was presented with an image of very dangerous terrorists.

So the repression is nothing new, even more so in the last two years. It was no different in the past. PKK flags were not allowed to be carried in the past either. We were not allowed to wear PKK badges during our court hearings. Demonstrations and rallies were criminalized, flags and symbols of the Kurdish Freedom Movement or pictures of Abdullah Öcalan were the cause of house raids, intimidation attempts or arrests. In some cases, people were even deported.

The only new thing in the last two years are perhaps the symbols of the YPG/YPJ and the distribution via the so-called social media. The latter in particular is something new for the distribution of information. The repression, however, goes far back into the past. The German state has always pursued an oppressive-colonial policy towards the Kurdish people and the Kurdish Freedom Movement. Not only as a third or fourth party within the conflict, Germany has considered itself responsible for the oppression in Kurdistan and the fascist struggle against the Kurdish guerrillas and people. Germany was and still is part of the war against the Kurds.

A center of NATO was located in Germany and organized the war in Kurdistan. From this center, the biggest crimes and massacres in Kurdistan were planned and executed. In addition to the repression in Germany, the German state has actively supported Turkey in the war against the Kurdish Freedom Movement. This was justified under the guise of "bilateral relations" and with the NATO partnership. However, Germany was and still is part of the war. Everyone needs to be aware of this fact.

If the facts are not called by their names, then a distorted picture is created and the German guilt in the war is presented as less than it actually is. As if Germany was not participating in the fascist front alongside Turkey, but was merely taking a few isolated measures. This is not the case at all. German responsibility should be properly recognized. Kurdish activists are put behind bars for years, demonstrations are banned or criminalized. Basic democratic rights such as raising a flag are banned.

Currently, the repression is directed against the YPG and YPJ. These organizations are the symbol of the fight against the so-called Islamic State. Even the USA has declared that they deserve gratitude. The YPG and YPJ have indeed fought on behalf of humanity. Banning the YPG and YPJ is tantamount to legitimizing IS. There is an international coalition against IS, of which Germany is supposedly a member. The YPG and YPJ are also in this coalition. Germany sees this as a “necessary evil” and definitely not a reason to deviate from its policy. Germany’s contribution to this coalition is more symbolic. In truth, Germany has nothing in common with the forces fighting IS. It is a shame that people in Germany receive punishments for displaying YPG and YPJ symbols.

In France, YPJ commanders were received at the Elysee Palace. The U.S. has publicly expressed its gratitude. Banning those forces that liberate humanity from such a threat raises the question of whether Germany is positioning itself on the other side. This question inevitably arises in view of the repression. It is impossible to be against IS and against the YPG/YPJ at the same time. To position oneself against the YPG/YPJ means covert support for the IS. This is actually very fatal from Germany’s point of view. In fact, Germany is on the same level as the regime by which it is called “Nazi”. And this is justified with German interests.

In an earlier issue of the magazine `Kurdistan Report`, you called on the democratic international to discuss Democratic Confederalism instead of Proletarian Internationalism. How do you think common resistance should be shaped in view of the repression against the left in Germany?

This question cannot be discussed comprehensively here. However, international solidarity and cooperation must be redefined. During the period of real socialism, the concept of `proletarian internationalism` emerged. The Third International in particular was organized within this framework. Socialist organizations allied under one roof. States that called themselves `socialist` maintained relations with each other, but after a short while, conflicts of interest came to the fore. This paradigm based on nation-states resulted in positive as well as negative international relations. At stake was the international dimension of ideological-political resistance for freedom, equality and socialism based on the nation-state. There was much talk about international solidarity. Internationalism stood out as a principle. However, state interests increasingly came to the fore and displaced solidarity. This was true, for example, of the Soviet Union and China. All that remained of internationalism was theory; politics was dominated by interests. Socialist principles receded into the background. This was detrimental to international solidarity.

Together with our critique of real socialism, we want to develop a theory, a new ideological-political line and new ways for a strategic-tactical resistance. This is our new understanding of revolution. Abdullah Öcalan has analyzed and evaluated this fundamentally. The `democratic social paradigm` based on social ecology and women’s liberation is the result of this analysis. According to him, socialist parties do not strive for nation-state or power, but for a socially oriented economy, women’s liberation and a democratic society. Abdullah Öcalan suggests that it is a mistake to call the crushing and replacement of one nation-state by another a revolution.

Even if the leadership of a state is replaced, exploitation and conflicts of interest will always persist in a nation-state. This does not change even if the new nation-state to be built is based on the proletariat instead of the bourgeoisie. Every kind of state has the property of oppressing society. Therefore, no distinction can be made between `good` and `bad` states.

Under real socialism, we observed that the means became the end. The claim was made that the bourgeois state was bad, but the new state was good. Socialism cannot be built on a nation-state paradigm. State and socialist principles are at odds with each other.

Abdullah Öcalan has called this non-state system Democratic Confederalism, which is based on Democratic Autonomy. It is a system in which all social groups are organized and represented equally. It is a democratic association in which all the components have their own characteristics and can represent them based on their free will. This is an alternative proposal to the nation state and the social problems it creates. The focus is on an organization `from the bottom up` at the local and communal level.

Therefore, our international relations cannot be based merely on international solidarity or internationalism if we propose such a theory of revolution. That would be far too short-sighted and superficial. We need to find a more comprehensive definition based on global Democratic Confederalism. This means that relations and solidarity go far beyond simple declarations and that international cooperation takes place within the framework of Democratic Confederalism. This defines a whole new level of cooperation, support and solidarity that inevitably entails joint organizing and action planning.

We should work towards this goal. For this, joint committees that discuss this type of cooperation and plan actions must be created. This can start with simple meetings and discussions at the local level. At the global level, committees can be established.

To achieve this goal, we must take the lead. We have to prove that we are organizing everywhere, fighting for a democratic society and standing for women's liberation, so that international solidarity and common organizing take shape. This cannot be achieved if we cannot demonstrate the necessary effectiveness.

Unfortunately, we cannot claim to have been particularly strong in this area in the past. This should be understood as self-criticism on the part of the PKK. The Kurdish youth and women's movements have taken certain steps in this direction, but as the PKK we have not yet developed this approach as much as we need to. We need to develop Democratic Confederalism at the national level so that we can develop it further at the global level. This is one of the greatest tasks required of us by our ideology and circumstances. We consider it a task that we now face.

The success of new democratic-socialist movements depends very much on the implementation of the above-mentioned practice. The revolution will be successful to the extent that international solidarity is implemented. Otherwise, it will dwell very superficially at

the regional level. Even if regional and communal organizing is a core characteristic, it cannot survive if regional resistance does not result in international solidarity based on Democratic Confederalism.

Finally, do you have a message for the German government and public?

The German state established and developed its system 150 years ago. For the Kurds, this system envisaged division and annihilation. The German state is the founder and operator of this system. It knows its trade better than anyone else. Therefore, we must ask: Why do you knowingly support the annihilation of a people? Why are you not against assimilation and massacres? The Kurdish people have to bury their martyrs every day. Will the suffering of this people never be taken into account?

It is an irresolvable contradiction to be part of human rights violations for one's own interests and to speak of law and order, democracy and freedom at the same time. Such contradictions result in double standards. Therefore, the German state should decide on which side it stands: On the side of the murderers or on the side of those who fight for their freedom. That is the fundamental question.

It does not make much difference whether we bring up these facts. A message or appeal is generally made to those who do not know or have forgotten. However, all governments know the facts. They behave this way because of their own interests.

What can be said about this? The greater their mania for oppression, the faster they will drown in it. We can only say: You will drown in the blood you have shed. In the 21st century, no one will gain anything from this. Those who want to annihilate the Kurds make themselves guilty before all of humanity.

The Kurds are not like they used to be in the past. They are organized and they resist. They have found the true and beautiful life in their resistance. Perhaps this life has no material dimension, but it brings with it determination and excitement. The Kurds live with dignity and with their heads held high, even if it is a short life. This is the most beautiful way of life. If they have to, they will live like this for another hundred years. Everyone must be aware of this.

It is no longer possible to exterminate the Kurds. These times are over thanks to Abdullah Öcalan. The people have the determination, the courage and the willingness to make sacrifices in order to go all the way. And no one will be able to stop the Kurds from doing so. Especially our friends, the democratic-revolutionary public, the women and the youth should be aware of this. All of them should know that the Kurdish youth, women, guerrilla and people are not fighting only for themselves. They are fighting for the existence and freedom of the Kurds, for democracy in the Middle East and for the freedom of all humanity.

A free Kurdish identity means at the same time a democratic Middle East and a liberated humanity. This is how far the fronts have already been drawn. The freedom of the Kurds and

that of humanity have become intertwined. The fact that in Kurdistan, where oppression and barbarism originated, such a consciousness, euphoria and liberation movement exist should be taken as an indication that this is possible everywhere. Much bigger and stronger freedom movements can emerge everywhere, if only people believe and work for it.

Freedom and democracy movements can emerge at the regional and local level, which in turn can lead to global movements that can limit capitalism or put an end to it. This would result in a freer and more democratic world. A new world and a free life are definitely possible, but for this to happen, effective work must be done and the right kind of consciousness must be developed. On this basis, I salute all those who develop this consciousness and resist.

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