

The PKK Threat in Germany

ZELİHA ELİAÇIK

- **Why is the PKK targeting the Turks living in Germany?**
 - **To what extent is the PKK a threat to Germany?**
 - **What is Germany's policy towards the PKK?**

INTRODUCTION

The attacks by the terrorist organization PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) against people of Turkish origin and Turkish missions abroad have increased substantially following the launch of Operation Olive Branch by Turkey in January 2018. According to a recent survey conducted by SETA, the PKK carried out 42 attacks against Turks and Turkish missions in Europe between 1st of January and 15th of March 2018. This represents an increase of 589 percent from the same period a year ago.¹ Meanwhile, the PKK has killed tens of thousands of people in Turkey over the last decades.

With the PKK on the agenda as a result of its recent acts of violence and terrorism, this study seeks answers to questions about the PKK's presence in Germany; the reasons behind these violent actions; whether they pose a threat to Germany; Germany's policy towards the PKK; and the ground of such policy.

1 Muriel Reichl, "Kurden in Deutschland: Im Schatten der Türkei", *Zeit Online*, April 7, 2017, <http://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2017-04/kurden-deutschland-fluechtlinge-kultur-tuerken>, (Access date: March 17, 2018).

THE HISTORY OF THE PKK'S PRESENCE IN GERMANY

Germany hosts over one million Kurdish immigrants. The PKK, which has organized itself in Europe by deploying militants since the 1980s, chose Germany as one of its most important hives of activity.² When the PKK began armed terrorist attacks in Turkey in 1984, skirmishes between the state of Turkey and the group escalated. As a consequence of the 1980 military coup d'état in Turkey, many PKK members easily defected to Germany. Ill-judged integration policies implemented by the German federal state permitted the PKK to use propaganda to indoctrinate Kurdish immigrants – who faced challenges adjusting to society at large – and to seek their support by both peaceful and forceful means.

The PKK was outlawed in Germany due to acts of violence and of terrorism committed by its militants.³ The occupation of the Turkish Consulate in Munich, which left many people injured in 1993 and the block-

2 Muriel Reichl, "Kurden in Deutschland: Im Schatten der Türkei".

3 Wilhelm Dietl, "Der importierte Krieg", *FOCUS Magazin*, February 22, 1999, (Access date: March 18, 2018).

Zeliha ELİAÇIK

Zeliha Eliaçık received her Bachelor's and Master degrees in Political Science and Oriental Studies, with a master thesis about "The social and judicial status of Jews in Yemen" from the Ruhr University of Bochum. She was awarded a DAAD Graduate Study Scholarship to pursue research in Yemen and served as Lecturer and Commissioner for Culture at the German Jordanian University in Jordan. Eliaçık's research interest includes Oriental Studies, minorities in Muslim and European societies, Germany's Islam policy, extremism in Europe and secularism and religion in modern societies. Currently, she serves as a researcher in the Department for European Studies at SETA.

ade of the highways between Karlsruhe and Stuttgart in 1994 are among the group's terrorist activities. The PKK organized in Germany under two structures: one secret and one open. According to data published by Germany's Domestic Intelligence agency in 2016, the PKK has an underground cadre that takes orders from Qandil, the PKK headquarters located in the Qandil mountains of northern Iraq, and enjoys the benefits of the presence and command of legal entities and civilian organizations dedicated to its cause in the country. The PKK had divided Germany into regions such as North, Middle, South 1 and South 2, and further organized them into 31 sub-regions. In 2016, the group abrogated these four main regions and redivided Germany into nine new segments, each of which is administered by a top official appointed by Qandil.⁴

As stated in its so-called constitution, the KCK Charter, and in compliance with the group's maxim "not to leave any Kurd outside the network," the PKK skeleton is based on so called civil society structure and association formations that address all professional and age groups. Although it has been banned in Germany since 1993, the organization continues its activities comfortably owing to this pseudo civil society structure. According to the data given in the aforementioned report, the PKK is the largest terrorist organization in Germany with the highest mobilization capacity, namely 14,000 members and over 40,000 adherents.

Following a series of about 60 violent acts and crimes, such as hijacking, arson, occupation, etc., committed by the PKK against Turkish missions, tourism agencies and banks in 1993, Germany added it to the list of outlawed terrorist groups. For all that, once the group promised not to perpetrate any acts of violence in Germany upon having contacts with German authorities in 1996, the Federal Office of Chief Prosecutor in 1998 designated the PKK as simply "a crime organization."

According to a judicial opinion by the Federal Court of Justice (BGH) in 2010, PKK members became subject to trial. Article 129b of the ruling stated

that PKK terrorists are seen as the "members of a terrorist organization of foreigners." Presently, in Germany the PKK is designated as a crime network and a terrorist organization.⁵

THE PKK AND THE USE OF VIOLENCE AS A MEANS OF COERCION

A closer look into written and oral statements on the PKK by German authorities puts forth a thesis that the group uses Germany as a center of retreat, logistic support and finance for its armed fights in Turkey, Iraq and Syria, and that the PKK is engaged only in front activities in Germany. However, along with the aforementioned activities, the PKK has committed, and still commits, a good deal of violent and terrorist acts in Germany.

The group is involved in various criminal and terrorist activities in Germany and beyond, such as suicide attacks, kidnapping of children and youth so as to recruit new members, attacking Turkish missions and citizens, and injuring dissenting Kurdish immigrants. In fact, the PKK was banned in Germany in 1993 for a series of attacks against foreign missions, particularly Turkish, and because of its uncontrollable acts of violence and terrorism.

The occupation of the Turkish Consulate in Munich by the PKK – an incident known in the media as the "Night of Horror in Munich" – left 16 people wounded.⁶ However, although their activities were banned immediately after these terrorist acts, the group continued its violent actions. The PKK attack against the Israeli Consulate in Berlin in 1999 killed three people and left tens of consulate personnel and police officers wounded.⁷ This attack clearly showed that the PKK has no qualms as regards violence. It is known that PKK violence targets Kurdish groups along with Turkish and foreign missions. The senior management of the organization has executed individ-

⁴ 2016 Report on the Protection of the Constitution, p. 227

⁵ Christian Rath, "PKKler als Terroristen festgenommen", *Taz*, July 29, 2011, (Access date: March 18, 2018).

⁶ "Münih'te Dehşet Saatleri", *Hürriyet*, June 25, 1993, ((Access date: March 17, 2018).

⁷ "Erinnerung an den Kurdensturm auf Israels Konsulat", *Morgenpost*, August 21, 2002.

uals and groups who stood tall against the PKK dicta, and has killed PKK opponents in many European countries including Germany.

First, in 1984, the group murdered a former PKK member in the middle of the street in the German city of Rüsselheim. Then Ramazan Adiguzel, a Komkar member and Kurdish-origin teacher, was shot and killed in a Hannover street in 1987. These incidents stand testimony to the fact that the PKK suppresses other Kurdish groups.⁸ According to former PKK commander Hidir Sarikaya, Filiz Yerlikaya, a female terrorist of the Free Women's Units (YJA-Star), code named "Gulan," was killed by the group in 2002 as a warning to members not to act independently from the organization.

During the PKK's 5th congress in 1995, the terrorist organization decided to increase the frequency of its suicide attacks. This, in the period 1995-1999, it committed 25 suicide attacks. The PKK can be placed among the terrorist groups responsible for the highest number of civilian deaths. After the arrest of the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan in 1999 and the claims that the Federal State of Germany played a role in his arrest, a 17-year-old PKK member, Fatma, chanting "Long live Ocalan" burned herself in the German town of Hechingen.⁹ So-called civil society organizations sponsoring the PKK introduce suicide bombers as role models to the Kurdish youth in Germany and organize festivals in their honor.

German intelligence reports reveal that the PKK attacks to injure Kurdish businessmen and artisans if they refuse to pay tribute to the terrorist organization. Germany lacks a mechanism to protect the Kurdish immigrants who refrain from supporting the organization. In fact, similar aggressions were taken to court in the 1990s when the PKK was not as strong as it is today. Kurdish immigrants feel helpless against the increasing PKK threats and intimidation and they do not dare to go to German authorities anymore.

The PKK and the so-called civil society organizations sponsoring this terrorist organization – in contrary to other Kurdish groups in Germany – have never added the problems of the Kurdish immigrants to their agendas, but, instead, have planned their activities to fully support the PKK's armed struggle. In the end, this led the PKK to carry over developments and clashes from the Middle East to Europe. An assessment on the PKK's acts of violence and terrorism from past to present outside Turkey shows that these attacks develop in parallel with the group's terrorist activities in Turkey and Syria. It is also quite intriguing that the PKK increases attacks when the state of Turkey is successful in its fight against the organization. Apparently, the PKK uses violence and terrorism as a threat in order to force Europe to put pressure on Turkey.

Particularly after the contacts with German authorities in 1995 and the meetings between former CDU Berlin Senator Heinrich Lummer and Öcalan in Damascus, the PKK announced in 1996 that they would put an end to violent actions in Germany. This clearly shows how violence is turned into a bargaining tool by the group.¹⁰ As a matter of fact, Lummer then stated, "The only purpose of the German government must be to prevent violence committed by the organization inside Germany." This once again clarified that the priority of the Federal State of Germany regarding the PKK is "homeland security."

Only several years after the talks held between the PKK and German officials the German Federal Office of Chief Prosecutor removed the PKK from the category of terrorist organizations in 1998 and designated it simply under the category of "a criminal organization." The justification was that the PKK had not committed any terrorist activity for a long time. As a reaction to the capture of Ocalan in 1999, however, launching a new wave of terror, the PKK occupied the Israeli Consulate and as a result 3 militans killed and 16 injured by Consulate security staff. The PKK demonstrated, once again, that it is a terrorist organization that recklessly commits terror attacks.

8 "Wagabunden und Vampire- Eine kurdische Gruppe in der Bundesrepublik attackiert ihre Landsleute", *Der Spiegel*, May 25, 1987, (Access date: March 17, 2018).

9 Wilhelm Dietl, "Der importierte Krieg".

10 Enis Berberoğlu, "PKK ve Almanya arasında pazarlık", *Hürriyet*, September 3, 1997, (Access date: March 17, 2018).



Under the impact of the latest developments in Syria, PKK members have escalated violent actions with an intention of pushing Germany to adopt a pro PKK stance. When stuck in a difficult position, the group uses the Federal State of Germany as an instrument to take action against Turkey and put pressure on its Turkish policy. So far, following erroneous policies, Germany has given the PKK the message that violence works. As the latest example of this, Germany, influenced by the circles which the PKK set in motion, postponed plans for the modernization of Leopard tanks sold to Turkey despite an earlier agreement reached between the two states.¹¹

In fact, the PKK resumed violence and terrorism in Europe as of January 2018 when Turkey announced the launch of Operation Olive Branch to protect its borders, drive the PKK out of the northern parts of Syria, and return the territory to its rightful owners, namely the opponent Kurds and Arabs who were forced by the PKK to leave the region. The following statement was posted on the Internet by a PKK-affiliated gang called “Apoist Youth Initiative” and radical leftist organizations

on March 3, 2018, and is reminiscent of the threats prior to the bloody acts of violence in the 1990s.¹²

“Turkish consulates, AK Party-affiliated associations (UETD), Turkish fascists, cafés and stores owned by these entities, state institutions (SPD and CDU offices, German military, courts), anyone who supports the fight against our people will pay the price. If you do not listen to us, we will set the European streets on fire and burn them to ashes. Europe will understand this: we will never let Afrin fall.”

Putting the aforementioned threats into action, the PKK mobilizes militants through so-called civil society organizations in Germany. The PKK youth branches engage in coordinated urgent campaigns, together with the women corps, and incite their members to commit attacks. In October 2017, the *Komalen Jiwan* (Kurdish separatist youth organization) and the Women Youth Organization calling for *serhildan* (rebellion) announced that actions should not be “passive, routine, marginal and ineffective” and that a period of “massive, impressive and striking action and organizational activi-

¹¹ “Bundesregierung rüstet türkische Panzer vorerst nicht auf”, *Zeit Online*, January 25, 2018, (Access date: March 17, 2018).

¹² “Kurdien-rufenzugewaltsamen protestin Europa auf”, *DW*, March 13, 2018, (Access date: March 17, 2018).

ties” has begun. Interestingly, the so-called civil society organizations sponsoring the PKK specify in their statements that they see any type of PKK action as legitimate.¹³ Mosques affiliated with the DITIB (Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs) have recently been targeted by the PKK; however, the perpetrators are still on the loose – a fact that begs questioning.

THE PKK THREAT AGAINST GERMANY

The terrorist group began activities in Germany in the 1980s and gained strength in the 1990s. Germany has perceived this organization as part of the Kurdish issue from the very beginning, and interpreted PKK terrorism as an external issue involving only the state of Turkey and the PKK. As mentioned above, however, the PKK has brought violence and terrorism to the German streets, expanded its network in time and become one of the largest crime networks in Europe. That has pushed Berlin to take action against the group to a certain extent.

At the beginning, Berlin evaluated the PKK as an internal security issue due to its violent actions. At this point, an examination of the statements issued by the German authorities indicates that the PKK-related risk and threat perception were assessed as tension and strife between the Turkish and Kurdish youth living in Germany. The PKK, however, has proven many times that they are the source of terror and violence rather than a part of a conflict between the two ethnic groups.

The PKK, in acts of violence, not only aims at people of Turkish-origin but also at German society at large. In fact, the group declared Germany as its number two enemy - after Turkey - for banning its activities in 1993 and not helping Ocalan escape arrest. Furthermore, the group accuses Germany of succumbing to Turkey - particularly, when the Federal State of Germany does not accept their demands - and targets Germany through violence.

A view comes into the picture today similar to the second largest wave of violence after the 1990s in

Germany. The PKK has accused Germany of keeping quiet on Turkey’s Operation Olive Branch, and is again targeting official and civilian German institutions. It is telling that in recent calls for violence, the PKK includes among its targets not only the UETD and the AK Party representative offices but also German political parties, courts and all official authorities and civilian venues that ignore or do not support the group’s demands.

Since there is no other leftist umbrella organization in Germany, the PKK comes to the fore as the strongest group advocating Marxist-Leninist ideology, and, together with radical groups, it increases the internal security threat in Germany. In fact, this was obviously seen during the latest G-20 summit when the PKK and radical leftist organizations engaged in aggression and turned German streets into battlegrounds.

The PKK has become a serious internal security problem for Germany, but paradoxically, continues its activities undisturbed, thus seriously harming bilateral relations between Germany and Turkey. Berlin’s clandestine and open support of a terrorist organization by ignoring its activities in Germany that has killed tens of thousands of Turkish citizens and that aims to cause a rift in the unitary state structure of Turkey brings a heavy cost to the two countries’ bilateral relations and forms one of the areas of tension. All social segments – except PKK-affiliated segments - are disturbed by the tolerance Germany exhibits towards the PKK. This betrays Turkish society’s trust towards Germany and stains the image of the country in Turkey.

In fact, the justification of the decision prohibiting PKK’s violent acts states that the group harms Germany’s interests abroad. When Germany, in line with its interests, makes efforts to have close economic relations with Turkey, the PKK puts the Berlin government into a difficult position and nearly encumbers Germany in its bilateral relations with Turkey by mobilizing all of its so-called sponsoring civil society organizations and its offshoots in German politics – most of whose members are of Turkish origin. In addition,

¹³ <https://www.sosyalistforum3.net/showthread.php?t=3637>, (Access date: March 17, 2018).

Germany cannot protect German citizens of Turkish-origin as they have to live with the fear of unexpected PKK attacks every day. None of the perpetrators of the increasing PKK attacks against Turkish missions and mosques in Germany have been caught. This fact seriously harms the trust between the Turkish community in Germany and the state of Germany.

The PKK draws the picture of an “equalitarian and democratic entity” to the outside world, but in fact, it indoctrinates Kurdish-origin immigrants in Germany into the dream of a “Kurdistan” via its so-called civil society organizations. Hierarchically orchestrated by Qandil, these organizations cause the alienation of Kurdish groups from their daily social reality. As Germany has failed in the integration of immigrants, the situation poses a grave problem for the federal state. The youth who are born, educated and socialized in Germany are radicalized by the PKK through propaganda organized by so-called civil society organizations. The PKK transform these young immigrants into potential terrorists who become ready to take action under Qandil’s directive.

Facing a serious radicalization issue, Germany, in recent years, annually earmarks hundreds of thousands of euros for anti-radicalization programs.¹⁴ In fact, for Germany the PKK is as dangerous as DAESH and poses a serious security risk by radicalizing and using young Kurdish immigrants in acts of violence inside and outside of the country. Thus, the data in the Report on Politically Motivated Crimes, released in 2016 by the Department of Criminal Offence in Germany, show that the number of crimes committed that year stands at 1,518. Most of these crimes, under the category of “political crimes committed by foreigners,” were perpetrated by the PKK, according to the police’s crime statistics.¹⁵

The PYD, the PKK’s splinter in Syria, has transferred the administrative and political experience gained

in this region to Germany and plans to upgrade itself from being an association to a central and broader organization under the newly established Democratic Society Culture Centers (DKTM). This administrative model disregards nation states, projects a state-within-state in Germany, a parallel society within German society, and an alternative governing and social system. Furthermore, the forgery of passports and official documents has become easier after the PYD captured several regions in the north of Syria, thus providing easier infiltration for the group’s members into Europe. That means a serious risk both for the security of Germany and other European Union countries. It is also known that, the PKK, other than engaging in terrorist activities, largely controls the narcotics market in Germany. According to the 2016 Report on the Fight against Narcotic Substances, 1,333 people died of narcotic addiction in Germany.¹⁶ For the German federal government that spends millions of euros each year to deal with narcotics, it is crucial to fight the biggest drug trafficker and distributor in Europe - the PKK.

THE FEDERAL STATE OF GERMANY’S PKK POLICY

Exploring the PKK’s transformation from day one in Germany in the 1980s to date will make it easier to understand the stages of the federal state’s position and the variables that have shaped this position with respect to the group. Based on German internal intelligence reports, the number of PKK members stood in the hundreds in the early years of its establishment, while figures have jumped to 14,000 members and 40,000 adherents over the years owing to Germany’s tolerance.

In the beginning, PKK militants infiltrated Turkish associations and, through political and ideological propaganda, struggled to gather Kurdish immigrants around a few associations of their own. In time, however, the group managed to establish over 200 pseudo

14 Isabel Metzger, “Projekt gegen Islamismus vor dem Aus”, *Morgenpost*, January 2, 2017 (Access date: March 17, 2018).

15 <https://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/pressemitteilungen/DE/2017/04/pks-und-pmk-2016.html> (Access date: March 17, 2018).

16 https://www.bka.de/DE/Presse/Listenseite_Pressemitteilungen/2017/Presse2017/170508_Rauschgiftkriminalitaet.html (Access date: March 17, 2018).

civil society organizations, including associations, sports centers, charity associations and faith centers, as a result of Germany's permissive and concessive policy towards the PKK. These institutions are united under an umbrella organization, Nav-Dem, and introduced as civil institutions organizing social and cultural activities for Kurdish immigrants. Yet, essentially, their priority is to raise money and recruit militants for the PKK.

Under the roof of these institutions, Kurdish children and youth are subjected to partisan PKK doctrine and used by the PKK in terrorist activities both inside and outside Germany. Thus, for example, the structure mentioned in German court records, the so-called Kurdish Red Crescent, works as a humanitarian aid organization under the PKK and collects money for the PKK. According to court records, again, the money is sent to people's assemblies of the PKK in the Southeastern Turkish provinces of Cizre, Sur and Nusaybin, etc. so as to support the armed fights of the PKK in Turkey and Syria, or to the PYD terrorist organization which is active in the north of Syria.¹⁷

All activities of this institution were prohibited in the German State of Rheinland-Pfalz in 2010 by the Supervision and Services Directorate (*Die Aufsichts- und Dienstleistungsdirektion, ADD*) for the reason that much of the money collected in donation boxes, reading "Help for Children in Need" on them, were used improperly for helping the group.¹⁸ The German police raided a so-called civil society organization named "Kurdish Parents' Association" and confiscated documents that belonged to the PKK. The association under the guise of a parent school association in Munich was, in reality, a sponsor of the PKK.¹⁹

Germany, on the one hand, outlawed the PKK both as a terrorist and a criminal organization, while, on the other hand, ignores the activities of the major-

ity of the so-called civil society organizations which do nothing but provide support to the PKK's armed fight. This summarizes Germany's indecisive and conflicting attitude and politics regarding the PKK. Berlin's inconsistent policy as regards the PKK is a reflection of dynamics that affect and inform its stance vis-à-vis the PKK. Germany's PKK policy is shaped in accordance with the country's internal security, its relations with Turkey, developments in the Middle East, and the role this terrorist group plays in the region. Changes and inconsistencies in Germany's historical course of politics in relation to the PKK may be read as a consequence of this multi-variable relationship.

Germany, following a balance policy between internal security concerns and foreign policy priorities, sometimes sides with Turkey and at other times, with the PKK. This policy causes Germany to exhibit conflicting attitudes and positions and is the result of simultaneously seeking to balance many factors.

Berlin adopts a softer approach when the PKK decides to withdraw from acts of violence and the danger of internal violence decreases. Berlin takes a tougher stance against the group when it gets out of control, increases aggression and poses a threat to internal security. Meanwhile, Germany has always tried to keep the PKK issue as its trump card for interfering in Turkey's internal affairs. Thus, Berlin did not see any harm in deporting Afghan refugees to countries with no security of life, such as Afghanistan, but sometimes, using Turkey's alleged weaknesses on certain human rights issues as a pretext, has refused to extradite terrorists who have been captured in Germany. This still remains an area of tension between the two countries.

Germany insists on viewing PKK violence as Turkish internal security issue. As a result, Germany overlooks bloody terrorist attacks and acts of violence committed by the PKK in Turkey even when these attacks also kill German citizens. However, regarding its PKK policy, Berlin always has to keep Turkey in consideration due to the latter's pressure on Germany in the fight against the PKK and its warnings that Germany's tolerance towards the PKK will harm bilateral

17 <http://www.heyvasor.com/tr/ji-bo-rojava-banga-lezgin-a-alikariye/> (Access date: March 18, 2018).

18 "Sammlung verboten: Kurdischer-Roter-Halbmond im Fokus", *General Anzeiger*, June 7, 2010, (Access date: March 17, 2018).

19 http://www.muenchenversicherheitlicht.volkskunde.uni-muenchen.de/reportagen/kurd_innen_und_staat/kurdische_organisationen/index.html. (Access date: March 17, 2018).

relations. Germany is adapting its PKK policy according to the growing role in the Middle East.

Germany's PKK policy changes depending on three factors (i.e. country's internal security, its relations with Turkey and developments in the Middle East) but remains full of contradictions. Despite Germany often voicing the claim of being a strong state of law, this inconsistent attitude and position is not only seen in politics but also in judicial decisions. The reluctance of German courts in the punishment of indicted terrorists, and the ideological, subjective and unlawful attitudes of judges as regards overriding and disregarding court rulings are reflected in cases filed against PKK members. The Higher Regional Court in Hamburg sentenced the PKK's regional head, code named Besir, to imprisonment of a year and nine months in November 2016. The judge, however, acquitted the defendant because of his Yazidi origins and the fact that the PKK fights against DAESH in Syria. Furthermore, while announcing his ruling, the judge criticized the state of Turkey and proclaimed his respect for the PKK's struggle in the latter.²⁰

With the power to mobilize many people in Germany, the PKK now has pushed Berlin always to approach the group cautiously. Germany has shown different reactions, at different times, to the risk that the PKK may commit acts of violence in the country. Sometimes, Germany has tried to take the group under control by establishing official contacts and clandestine talks with them and, at other times, punished and subdued the PKK by deporting PKK members, including senior officials.

To support the PKK's discourse and to become a PKK proponent are not against the law in Germany as long as there is no established organic bond with the group, no encouragement towards the group's activities and no opposition to the "Associations Law." The Greens and the SPD coalition government in 2002 lifted the ban on being a PKK adherent. Nevertheless, due to recent DAESH attacks and terrorist threats in Ger-

many, the CDU circles have begun to raise their voice in claiming that statements of sympathizing with the PKK and its intellectual propaganda should be penalized.

The only concrete step Germany has taken against the PKK recently is the regulations that entered into force in March 2017 for the expansion of the ban prohibiting symbols of the PKK and the PYD. Yet, the Federal State of Germany acts inconsistently and in a contradictory manner towards the implementation of this new ban. This attitude does not comply with the state's resoluteness and overshadows the deterrence effect of the ban. For instance, although PYD symbols have been banned since March 2017, a German citizen in Munich, Benjamin Russ, who was indicted for sharing a PYD symbol on Facebook, was acquitted on January 19, 2018.

Similarly, the German Army media outlet *Bundeswehr* included photographs of YPG flags. Under the influence of the recently increasing PKK attacks, German security forces have taken a tougher line against the PKK activities and the so-called civil society organizations affiliated with this group. For instance, German police paid no heed²¹ to the use of banned symbols and flags of the PKK during the Newroz festivities held in Frankfurt in March 2017; but, for security concerns, they prohibited²² Newroz celebrations planned to take place in Hannover on March 17, 2018.

Furthermore, the PKK use the close ties they have established with the anti-Turkey lobby in Germany to put across their demands and be legitimized in the presence of the state and the public opinion. There are many PKK members and supporters among the Left Party representatives and partisans. The Left Party acts like an extension of the PKK in the German Parliament and brings the group's demands and agenda of activities to the floor as parliamentary questions. In fact, the Left Party Hamburg Deputy

20 Bernhardt Sprengel, "Richter kritisiert Türkei in PKK Prozess", *Die Welt*, November 25, 2016, (Access date: March 18, 2018).

21 "Frankfurt'ta Nevruz Kutlaması", *DW*, March 18, 2017, (Access date: March 18, 2018).

22 "Polizei untersagt kurdisches Nevroz Fest", *NDR*, March 12, 2018, (Access date: March 18, 2018).

Cansu Özdemir is indicted by the Hamburg Office of Prosecutor for sharing a photograph of the PKK flag. In reaction to this inquiry, Özdemir, in her statement, stated, “I believe the PKK ban is wrong and a hypocritical policy. I do not see the PYD, the YPJ and the YPG as terrorist organizations, neither do I see the PKK as one.”²³ Keeping in mind that in an earlier inquiry brought against Özdemir for the very same reason she was acquitted, whether this inquiry will bear fruit remains unknown.

CONCLUSION

In order to have an impact on the German public opinion and politics, and become an interlocutor, the PKK strategically claims that they are the sole spokespeople of the Kurds. With this claim, the PKK aims to become a legitimate power and seeks the recognition of the Kurdish diaspora living in Germany and in the regions predominantly populated by Kurds, whose strategic importance gradually increases, in the Middle East. The PKK never brings into question the problems of Kurdish immigrants in Germany. The group determines activity strategies and its demands from the federal state in accordance with its own political and military objectives, and tries to make the official authority appease them.

In fact, the PKK organizes attacks in Germany after they have made political demands and the intensity of these attacks decreases, or increases, depending on the course of armed attacks they commit in the Middle East and Turkey. The PKK resorts to violence to manipulate Germany and have Germany put pressure on Turkey. Throughout the years, Germany has seen the PKK as a trump card. The compromises that Germany has made in the face of the PKK's threats of violence create an impression among PKK members and adherents that committing violence as a means to get across their demands is successful.

Anti-Turkey lobbies support the PKK as a favorable actor; in return, the group provides substantial

financial support and human resources for its war against Turkey through the elbow room the German state creates for the PKK. Thus, the PKK has become both the subject and the object of the anti-Turkey propaganda. On the one hand the supporters of PKK launched an anti-Turkey propaganda and on the other hand PKK has been instrumentalized by many different political actors in Germany to exert pressure on Turkey.

Although Germany sees the PKK as a controllable power, as experienced in the 1990s, the group sometimes becomes unmanageable and turns into a serious internal security threat. Germany faces a similar danger today. The PKK's new wave of terrorism and violence in German streets proves, once again, the inaccuracy of Berlin's naïve misjudgment that the PKK is controllable.

This time, however, Berlin should not be satisfied with bans and soft/brutal police raids only for show, which are not taken seriously even by the group. Instead, Berlin should develop a comprehensive and effective counter-terrorism strategy that includes a fight against the so-called civil society organizations as the PKK's windpipes. As voiced by several reasonable German politicians, acts of terrorism should be stopped at the planning stage, before they take place, before many lives are lost, before material damage occurs, and not after the harm is done. This is one of the most crucial steps in the fight against terrorism.

The propaganda of terrorism and violence and the praising of such acts should be criminalized in the same way that committing such acts is a crime. At this point, banning the activities of the so-called civil society organizations is of critical importance as their organic bond with the PKK has already been recorded in German internal intelligence reports. These civil society organizations, such as Nav-Dem, make calls for terrorism and violence and, thus, support terrorism and violence. Germany ought to understand that a terrorist organization, which does not hesitate to kill thousands of people for its own political aims, cannot have civil society structures under its

²³ <https://twitter.com/CansuOezdemir/status/972175177877516289>, (Access date: March 18, 2018).

roof – similarly to the legal restrictions on the RAF terrorist organization.

The Federal State of Germany should prevent the PKK from transporting its agenda and Middle East conflicts to German streets via its so-called civil society organizations. Germany, on the one hand, marginalizes associations and foundations representing millions of Turkish and Kurdish immigrants, but overlooks the PKK threatening to kill people from every walk of life. Germany's attitude causes risks in the internal balances of society at large. Berlin's inability to protect the lives of Turkish immigrants causes them to lose trust in the Federal State of Germany, since there is no effective mechanism to protect Kurdish and Turkish-origin immigrants in Germany against the PKK's pressure and violence.

In addition to posing an internal security threat to Germany, the PKK also brings in a heavy cost to Germany-Turkey relations. Obviously, Turkey has been transformed into an effective power not only on the diplomatic front but also in the battlefield on account of its operations Euphrates Shield and Olive Branch. Considering that these operations will continue and expand until the terrorist threat is completely eradicated, Germany will inevitably be obliged to revise its balance policy in the context of Turkey, the PKK and the Middle East.

The PKK terrorist organization, having difficulty in following and understanding Turkey's maneuvers, will have to face the fact that the strategy of using violence as a threat, as was the case in the 1990s, will not pay off. It is not rational to evaluate the PKK through the dynamics of the old balances in the ever-changing balance of international powers. Neither is Germany the old Germany, nor is Turkey the old Turkey, nor is the PKK the old PKK. All along, Germany has made

the major strategic mistake of assessing Turkey on the same grounds as the PKK.

Berlin should abandon the strategy of run with the hare, hunt with the hounds when it comes to the PKK and start a serious and genuine fight against this terrorist group. In fact, owing to its uncompromising attitude against terrorist organizations, Turkey forces Germany to make a choice between siding with terrorist organizations and seeking cooperation with its ever-stronger NATO partner. Germany's inconsistent attitude towards the PKK bears strong signs that Germany wishes a strong PKK in Turkey and the Middle East but a weak PKK in Germany. In fact, Germany's punishment and ban of the PKK when the group escalates violence, and the secret talks with the group's leadership raise suspicions of a secret unwritten agreement between Germany and the PKK along the lines that if the PKK does not commit any violent acts in Germany, the country will turn a blind eye to its activities in Germany and terror attacks in Turkey and Middle East.

The PKK policy that Germany has adopted so far signals that it is determined to use the PKK as a trump card against Turkey as the group plunges into a quest for power in the destabilized Middle East and Turkey emerges as the major regional power. However, before it is too late, Germany must recognize the realities and the cost of cooperation with this terrorist group – something already experienced by the United States on the ground. Germany must choose between its Turkey, its NATO partner, and the PKK, a terrorist organization. Germany's PKK politics is full of inconsistencies and contradictions; the politics of balance changes sometimes in favor of Turkey and other times in favor of the PKK. This politics, however, does not appear sustainable as strong winds nowadays blow from beyond the Atlantic.



SIYASET, EKONOMİ VE TOPLUM ARAŞTIRMALARI VAKFI
FOUNDATION FOR POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH
مركز الدراسات السياسية والاقتصادية والاجتماعية

www.setav.org | info@setav.org | @setavakfi

SETA | Ankara

Nenehatun Cd. No: 66 GOP Çankaya
06700 Ankara TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 312 551 21 00 | Faks: +90 312 551 21 90

SETA | İstanbul

Deftardar Mh. Savaklar Cd. Ayvansaray Kavşağı
No: 41-43 Eyüp İstanbul TÜRKİYE
Tel: +90 212 315 11 00 | Faks: +90 212 315 11 11

SETA | Washington D.C.

1025 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Suite
1106 Washington D.C. 20036 USA
Tel: 202-223-9885 | Faks: 202-223-6099

SETA | Cairo

21 Fahmi Street Bab al Luq Abdeen
Flat No: 19 Cairo EGYPT
Tel: 00202 279 56866 | 00202 279 56985