

Mobilizing ethnic conflict: Kurdish separatism in Germany and the PKK

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Abstract

Ethnic separatism often has consequences for countries other than traditional homelands. The Kurdish separatist movement presents a prime example of the diffusion of contention as hunger strikes, protest marches, and terrorist bombings in Germany indicate there is a mobilized Kurdish separatist movement outside of Turkey. Germany is now faced with dilemmas concerning internal policy towards its Kurdish residents as well as tenuous external relations with Turkey. This study examines the diffusion of Kurdish separatist contention to Germany, coordinated by the *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (Workers' Party of Kurdistan) or PKK. To examine these relationships, the study presents a transnational mobilization model and 1) traces the origin of Kurdish discontent in Turkey and the spilling of Kurdish activism into Germany through migration, diffusion, and activism; 2) examines the efforts of the PKK to mobilize the Kurdish population in Germany; and 3) the consequences of such activism for Germany, Turkey and the Kurdish activists in Germany.

Keywords: Political mobilization; diffusion; transnational separatist movements; Kurds; PKK; Germany.

A world cleanly divided into nation-states does not correspond to the contemporary reality of political identity and territory. Many ethnic groups straddle borders and reside within several countries. The Kurds are but one example of this lack of fit and the tensions that emerge with multi-state ethnicities. Kurds also have established enclaves in states outside Kurdish homelands. Interestingly, the struggle for statehood has recently moved into the countries of the European Union [EU], with specific intensity in Germany, which is home to some 500,000 Kurds (Van Voorst 1996, p. 27). The Kurdish separatist movement has become internationalized and has taken root on German soil, which subtly confronts German sovereignty. The consequences are significant not only for Kurdish nationalism, but also for the maintenance of democracy in Germany, as well as Turkey's relations with Germany and other

European countries. Furthermore, while the internationalization of ethnic conflict creates challenges for the home and host countries, it also creates theoretical challenges for understanding this phenomenon.

This study examines the diffusion of Kurdish separatist contention in light of the Kurdish separatist movement in Germany, coordinated by the *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan* (Workers' Party of Kurdistan) or [PKK]. It primarily seeks to explore the modalities of political mobilization by an ethnic group, in this case the Kurds, in a host country. At the same time, it implies that such mobilization also affects the home country. The study proceeds in three stages. First, it reviews the theoretical tools available to facilitate analysis of the diffusion of ethnic and national conflict across state borders. It then briefly traces the origin of Kurdish discontent in Turkey and the spilling of Kurdish activism into Germany through migration, diffusion and deliberate activism (Suhrke and Noble 1977). Next, the study examines the presence of Kurdish separatist organizations in Germany, with specific focus on the activities of the PKK and its efforts to mobilize the Kurdish population in Germany. An overview of PKK activities in Germany and the German response suggests favourable conditions for Kurdish extremist activities in Germany during the 1980s and the early 1990s.

We suggest a model with which Kurdish mobilization in Germany can be explained. The model draws on Doug McAdam's work on political mobilization and argues that Kurdish nationalism was exported from Turkey to Germany through existing migration links between the two countries. It explores the relative ease with which political opportunity and organizational resources could be capitalized on in a liberal democratic state such as Germany, which was initially tolerant to Kurdish dissent. Such exportation of Kurdish nationalism, fostered and maintained by the PKK, embroiled Germany and Turkey in a multi-faceted political dilemma, both domestically and bilaterally. While the study does not cover the full range of transnational linkages, it begins to set the groundwork for more research in that direction by focusing on the effects of exported nationalism on the host country. Finally, it outlines some of the consequences of such activism for Germany, Turkey and the Kurdish activists in Germany.

The international diffusion of ethnic and national conflict

Kurds reside in at least six countries (Iran, Iraq, Syria, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkey). Their case is intriguing – the discontent of certain segments of these separatist movements have splashed into the political pools of other states where Kurds do not constitute a sizeable minority. This presents a challenge for the conventional understanding of ethnicity. Traditional studies on ethnic conflict considered separatist movements and ethnic conflict within the *internal* dynamics of the state in

which the dissenting groups reside. These studies rendered detailed descriptions of cultural traits, myths and language. Although descriptively thick, most provide few conceptual tools to apply to the transnational spillover of ethnic contention (Horowitz 1985, p. xi).

Examining diaspora politics provides an opportunity to overcome this pitfall by considering what Benedict Anderson identifies as 'long-distance nationalism' (Anderson 1991). Understanding transnational ethnic conflict begins by establishing how an ethnic diaspora emerges. Sidney Tarrow (1994), who examines social protest, contributes a framework for understanding transnational contention. He maintains that social contention is the product of popular responses to state policies and contends that social movements often represent a backlash against a consolidation of power by the state that seeks to 'standardize discourse among groups of citizens and between them and their rulers' (*Ibid.*, p. 196). Separatist movements are a type of social movement and provide the context in which to understand the contentious dialogue between a state and a distinct ethnic group.

Many groups that are dissatisfied with the political climate in their home state can opt to migrate to other countries, especially if they find that they cannot find viable avenues for dissent in their homelands. Furthermore, the choice of destination is often informed by the political opportunities provided by the host countries. Current technological innovations, the rapid growth of communications and transportation provide a conduit for the international diffusion of contention through which dissent is sent abroad. Ted Gurr identifies diffusion as the 'processes by which conflict in one country directly affects political action in adjoining countries' (Gurr 1993, p. 133). As those affected by the conflict seek protection elsewhere, refugees and asylum seekers become the most obvious conduits of diffusion. Furthermore, external kin-groups can become mobilized around claims for increased political access based on distinct identities. With advanced communication networks, international demands for labour supplies and free movement of people, the components in homeland societies that are conducive to mobilization are easily transferred from one country to another and ethnic kin already in another country can be enlisted in the pursuit. Gurr posits that disadvantaged groups might be able to increase their potential for mobilization and rebellion at home by drawing on their kinship ties across borders and attempting to recruit and mobilize others (*Ibid.*).

This supplies a partial explanation why Kurds travelled from Turkey to Germany. However, the Kurdish presence in Germany goes beyond simple migration that connects Germany, Turkey and the Kurds in a triad. The PKK, which was highly organized and mounted a protest campaign within Germany, capitalized on the fledgling Kurdish communities in Germany to expand its separatist front. As a result of this phenomenon, German soil became a setting in which to wage a battle

for a Kurdish state. For the most part, this battle is only being waged by a faction within the Kurdish migrant population, effectively launching a 'second front' for the PKK (Leggewie 1996, p. 79).

The relationship of Kurdish separatism to its home and host countries is illustrated in Figure 1. The solid line portrays the traditional understanding of ethnic conflict and separatism as a relationship between a minority population and its government. The broken line indicates common interstate relationships and the dotted lines show the dynamics of bilateral and transnational ethnic conflict. The internationalization of ethnic conflict adds five new dimensions to the traditional portrayal of ethnic conflict (portrayed in line 1) as between the ethnic minority and the home country. Diffusion of contention becomes relevant for third party governments. Ethnic groups in both the host and the home countries can interact, indirectly through their interaction with the host and home governments (lines 3 and 4), or directly between ethnic groups in various countries (line 5). Finally, the host and home governments engage in a political exchange as well (line 2), typical of bilateral diplomacy.

There are six possible dyads to examine in order to gain a full understanding of the international dimensions of ethnic conflict. We begin with a discussion of linkage 1 and trace the origins of Kurdish ethnic discontent in Turkey. We then explore linkage 3 capturing diffusion through the migratory path of Kurds from Turkey to Germany. In this context, we explore linkage 6 illustrated by the organization of the Kurdish population in Germany as the PKK extended its battle into Germany. Within linkage 6, we can also document the consequences of the mobilization for both the German policy process and Kurdish activism in Germany. While these are the main concerns of this article, the analysis will briefly explore linkage 2 highlighting German efforts to elicit policy change in Turkey and the Turkish resistance to such preludes. Linkage 4, one that suggests that Kurdish activists in Germany have some impact on the Turkish government, can be inferred from Turkish attention to the developments in Germany, even though policy change that can directly be linked to the mobilization in Germany cannot as yet be documented. Finally, linkage 5, while indispensable to a thorough review of transnationalization, is left out of this discussion because the existing data do not yet shed light on the dynamics of that dyad.

The origins of Kurdish ethnic discontent in Turkey

Kurds are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East. Within each state the Kurdish minority has faced considerable oppression. The Kurds' quest for expression of their culture and language has been denied by all the states in which they reside and Kurdish access to political representation has been quelled by policies of assimilation and

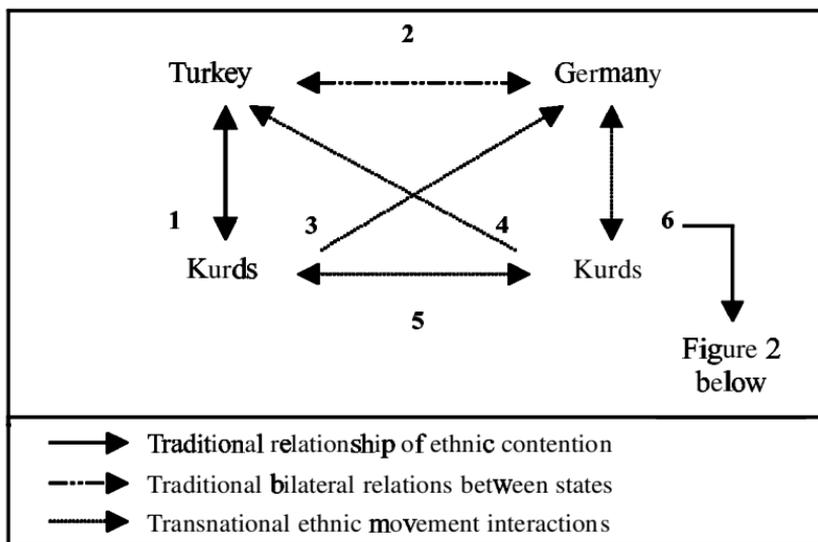


Figure 1. *Transnational interactions of Kurdish separatism*

repression, leading to the discontent which fuelled not only resistance to such policies in Turkey, but was also instrumental in setting the stage for the discussion of discontent to Germany. As such, this section briefly reviews the ethnic contention between Kurds and the Turkish government, highlighted in linkage 1.

Half of the Kurdish community worldwide lives within the borders of the Turkish Republic and most are concentrated in south-eastern Turkey. Statehood has eluded the Kurds in Turkey, partially as a result of historical developments and more recently because of the politics surrounding the territory in which they live.¹ Eager to maintain the country's territorial integrity after the demise of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish policy towards the Kurds has been one of 'assimilating' them as Turks. Since the 1920s, when the republic was created out of the ashes of an empire, Turkey has rejected the notion that separate ethnic identities exist within its borders. The only 'minorities' that were acknowledged were the non-Muslim minorities, mainly Greeks, Jews and Armenians. There was no mention of Kurds, a Muslim group, as constituting a minority. Furthermore, the claim to the ethnic unity of Turkey has been incorporated into various constitutions, which, beginning in 1924, forbade the use of all languages except Turkish, prohibited Kurds from taking Kurdish names and forbade the instruction of Kurdish in Turkish schools.² These measures incited the Sheik Said rebellion in 1925, which was put down forcefully. While many Kurds have since then been successfully integrated into Turkish society and despite some progress on cultural rights in the 1990s – including the legalization of the

Kurdish language on 12 April 1991 and the sprouting of Kurdish newspapers, TV and radio programmes during the latter half of the 1990s – there remain those who adamantly demand their ethnic, linguistic and cultural autonomy. It is in this vein that they seek to create and maintain an allegiance to a Kurdish identity, at home and abroad, which is a relatively new phenomenon.³

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Kurds in Turkey began to protest Turkish denial of Kurdish cultural and political identity. This activism was quickly crushed and many of its organizers were imprisoned or killed. During the 1970s and early 1980s, protests grew and the Turkish regime increased its repression. In 1984, separatist Kurds in Turkey began a series of violent protests, the result of which was thirteen years of civil war, which claimed the lives of some 30,000 people (Cohen 1999, A1). Soon afterwards, the Turkish government adopted an Emergency Decree in 1987, which covered the ten south-eastern provinces with large Kurdish populations. Accordingly, the regional governor could censor news, ban strikes or lockouts, and impose internal exile (*US Department of State* 1995). Governmental response to dissent included imprisonment, torture, raids on Kurdish communities, and a complete ban on freedom of speech and expression.

Such restrictions and the stepping up of the assimilationist policies elicited resistance by segments of the Kurdish population in Turkey, paving the way for political and military efforts ranging from calls for autonomy to cessation in the late 1970s. Perhaps the most radical of these was the PKK, which emerged in Turkey in the late 1970s and was headed by Abdullah Öcalan. In 1984 the organization launched a guerilla war in Turkey using acts of violence against Turkish authorities to voice its separatist claims (German Interior Ministry 1997). PKK's platform consisted of a mixture of communist and nationalist ideologies and it fought for the establishment of a 'Free Kurdistan'.

The first act that brought the PKK into the limelight was its attack against a Turkish military post on 15 August 1984, after which the organization became classified as a 'separatist terrorist organization' by Turkish authorities. Not long after that, the organization 'exported' some of its activities to Germany, where it found a democratic society unwilling to clamp down on dissent and a population of some 500,000 who could potentially be mobilized. From then on, PKK continued its activities in Turkey and strove to flourish in Germany.

Diffusion of discontent to Germany: migration, and international activism

Linkages 3 and 6 in Figure 1 seek to explore the interaction between the ethnic group and a country that is not the traditional homeland. This section begins to explore that dynamic in light migration of first workers

and then refugees who carried their homeland politics to Germany. In many cases, Kurds chose to flee the repression in Turkey, first to the west of the country and then abroad. In line with Tarrow's predictions, Turkish policies focusing on assimilation resulted in the uprooting of Kurdish people as they fled intrusive state policies (*US State Department* 1995, Sect. 1). Germany became a favourite destination of the Kurdish exodus from Turkey, though the origins of these migratory trends predate the escalation of Kurdish dissent in Turkey. Kurds went to Germany as Turkish nationals in the 1960s. The guestworkers who were welcomed into Germany in those years became the first trickle of Kurdish immigrants from Turkey. These early immigrants were limited by Article 10 of the 1965 Aliens Act, which established that residence and working permits could be suspended if a foreign resident impaired 'significant interests of the Federal Republic of Germany'.⁴

After the recruitment halt in 1973 as a result of sluggish economies and the oil crisis, Kurdish migratory flows took on a different form. Kurds, who could no longer be recruited as workers, opted to apply for political asylum in Germany. Given the situation in Turkey, German officials were willing to offer them protection and Kurdish asylum seekers soon came to account for 90 per cent of asylum applications lodged by Turkish nationals. During those years, Germany continued to attract Kurdish asylum seekers who, in addition to being able to hook into existing ethnic networks, could also receive generous social security benefits (Uzulis 1998, p. 1). Compared to other countries with an influx of Kurds, such as France and Italy, Germany's recognition process as well as its reception and support infrastructure made it a superior destination.

Soon, there was a Kurdish diaspora in Germany which could be mobilized to protest activity directed at calling attention to the plight of Kurds in Turkey, forcing the German government to put pressure on Turkey to reconsider or recant its forced assimilation of its Kurdish minority, and indirectly force Turkey's hand into a redirection of its policies. Such mobilization occurred both as a result of the activities of the Kurdish cultural organizations that mushroomed in Germany in the 1980s and 1990s, some of which developed close ties to and facilitated the strengthening of the PKK in Germany. It could thus complement its domestic efforts by opening a second front in Europe in general and Germany in particular.

Mobilization of ethnic dissent in Germany

This section explores further linkage 6 by reviewing the political activities of some Kurds in Germany after the emergence of the diaspora. Although there was a hint of anti-immigrant sentiment in the 1980s, the presence of the Kurdish diaspora within Germany by and large did not

interfere with the domestic political environment until an extremist separatist faction exported its activities from Turkey on to German soil. One way of explaining why the Kurdish separatist movement, specifically the PKK, has targeted Germany as a base of operations is by applying a model of group mobilization. This article operates on the premise that 'ethnopolitical rebellion is primarily driven by grievances among an ethnic group and by how well an ethnic group is mobilized and, hence, in a position to take collective action' (Gurr and Moore 1997, p. 1083) and attempts to portray the interaction of the domestic and international dimensions of ethnic conflict. The model is depicted in Figure 2.

Separatist movement mobilization is the product of three general forces: a consolidated and politicized identity, operational resources and political opportunity. This process of mobilization is an extension of Doug McAdam's 'political process model' in which he presents three streams that lead to mobilization (cognitive liberation, organizational resources, political opportunity structures). He argues that when these converge, they produce the fertile ground for the mobilization of people (McAdam 1982, p. 51). This article alters the model slightly by adapting the first tier of the model, cognitive liberation, to discuss the framing of Kurdish political identity. The formation and politicization of an identity group establishes the foundation for ethnonationalism. Secondly, the building of resources, financial and organizational, is paramount for the movement's viability. And finally, political opportunity must be present to lend both support and optimism to the movement's formation and potential success. The following section highlights the confluence of these variables and traces the components of mobilization that were present in Germany but absent in Turkey.

Expression of Kurdish identity

One of the most significant aspects that contributed to the transnational diffusion of Kurdish separatism was the development of the collective

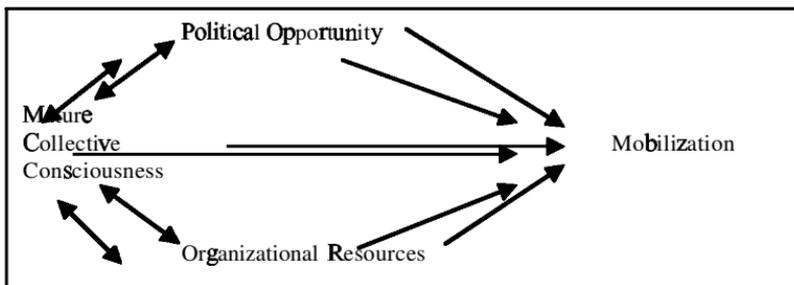


Figure 2. *Process of PKK mobilization in Germany (Lyon 1999, p. 51)*

insurgent consciousness. Many Kurds have not been able to express their 'Kurdishness' in any of their traditional homelands. Of these countries, the Turkish state has been the most emphatic in denying cultural and linguistic autonomy. Thus, when they came to Germany in the 1960s and 1970s, the barriers to the expression of their identity were lifted in the territory of a liberal democratic state and it became possible to explore and express Kurdish cultural and linguistic identity.

The expression of ethnic, linguistic and cultural traits provides a foundation for developing community ties and awareness. Unlike Turkey, Germany's liberal democracy allowed the expression of otherness, as long as the means were in line with German laws on associations and public manifestations, making it possible for Turkish citizens to discover and, more importantly, express their Kurdish identity (Leggewie 1996). The formation of cultural associations, typical in migrant communities in host countries and possibly prohibited in the homelands, further led to the consolidation of this Kurdish identity in Germany. The drive to experience, express and share the Kurdish identity can be observed in the dramatic proliferation of Kurdish cultural organizations in Western Europe as well as an increase in their print and Internet publications.

These associations played an important identity-forming and maintaining role by celebrating Kurdish national holidays such as Nawroz, the Kurdish New Year, fostering the use and informal teaching of the Kurdish language, and providing a gathering point where those who identified themselves as Kurds could convene. Preliminary observations suggest that these cultural organizations took on the dual role of maintaining an allegiance to the Kurdish identity and recruiting other migrants to follow suit. Initial evidence of this dynamic is documented by Östen Wahlbeck's study of Kurdish cultural associations (Wahlbeck 1999). The PKK was not indifferent to these developments and actively sought to penetrate the cultural organizations in an effort to recruit activists and secure funding.

Political opportunities for the mobilization of the PKK in Germany

Although identity is an important aspect of mobilization, it does not alone explain the timing and methods of PKK contention. A group with cognitive awareness of itself as politically relevant also needs to perceive the attainment of political gains and have optimism concerning successful attainment of increased political power. Understanding the political space that needs to be present for mobilization to occur is facilitated by the idea of political opportunity. Tarrow sees opportunity structures as 'consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent – dimensions of the political environment that provides incentives for people to undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or failure' (Tarrow 1994, p. 82). Democratic institutional structures tend to

benefit insurgent groups. In fact, the strategic position of all challengers appears to be enhanced when political structures encourage debate and political dialogue.

There were multiple efforts at mobilization within Turkey. However, state sanctions became so powerful that optimism concerning success as well as fear of retaliation discouraged most types of Kurdish political dissent. The lack of access to Turkish political institutions, and the lack of significant allies seem to have thwarted successful mobilization within the Kurdish minority in Turkey. By contrast, Germany, guided by the principles of liberal democracy which protects freedom of expression and association, offered a political climate within which mobilization carried considerably less risks. In fact, during the late 1970s and early 1980s when the PKK began to organize within Germany, the German government was acquiescent towards protest activity. What is key in this discussion is that the political institutional structures of Germany provided access to the political dialogue without the fear of repression. In this climate, the PKK was able to effectively marshal its organizational cadres and resources towards its multiple goals.

The PKK's organization and resources

In addition to the freedom to manoeuvre and a sense of Kurdish group cohesiveness, resources, ranging from leadership to communications channels, are also key to realizing protest activities and mobilizing dissent (McAdam cited in Smith and Pagnucco 1992, p. 176). Beginning shortly after its inception, the PKK was quick to cast its organizational net, which consisted of various governance levels, in Germany. The PKK divided Germany into eight 'regions,' *ca.* thirty 'sub-regions' and numerous 'lodges' or boroughs. YEK-KOM, the Federation of Kurdish Associations in Germany, is the umbrella organization that brings together the Kurdish associations that work closely with the PKK. In Germany, the PKK tried to expand its sphere of influence by establishing close links with associations that cater to special groups such as Alewites, youth and women. While estimates are often disputed, one source puts PKK membership at 11,000 (*Frankfurter Rundschau* 1999, p. 3). It has welcomed, if not supported, the mushrooming of various NGOs that bring together journalists, writers and legal experts who support the Kurds' struggle for independence.

One of the most important objectives for the organization has been to spread awareness in Germany, as well as other places in Europe, about the plight of Kurds. To that end, the organization published a newspaper, *Serxwebun* (Freedom), which continues to serve as the PKK's propaganda organ (German Interior Ministry 1996). Until 1996, the PKK also used MED TV, the organization's official TV channel, for its political means.⁵ Until that time, it had been a venue of choice for the PKK leader

who made frequent appearances to announce actions to be taken against the German government, a subject to which we shall return later.

The activities of the PKK and its related organizations are financed through the contributions of members, the sale of publications, and donations, which were used for PKK's operations in Europe and Turkey (German Interior Ministry 1996, p. 5). The organization has been able to collect impressive contributions, part of which was allegedly procured through forced donations. In 1994 the PKK was found to extort money from Kurdish asylum seekers (*Tageszeitung* 1994b, p. 4). Kurdish business owners brought charges against individuals who extorted money from them in the name of the PKK (*Tageszeitung* 1994c, p. 22). Some who refused to pay the 'protection money' or 'contributions' have even been assaulted (*Tageszeitung* 1994d, p. 4). Furthermore, the German Ministry of the Interior argues that the organization actively encouraged some of its members to get involved in the lucrative narcotics trade.

When speaking of the PKK as an organization, one must also highlight the role of entrepreneurial leadership in the organization. Abdullah Öcalan, the long-time uncontested leader of PKK and one-time student of political science, founded the PKK in 1978. Subsequently, Öcalan ran the PKK with an iron fist, sometimes likened to Stalin in his leadership style. He was supremely in charge of an outfit that trained some 30,000 guerillas to stage a war in what the PKK claimed to be the Kurdish homeland in Turkey. With his capture in Kenya in 1999, the PKK lost its charismatic and ruthless leader, raising questions about its future viability as an organization. Until his capture, however, he was instrumental in strategizing PKK activities both in Turkey and in Europe.

The contentious politics of the PKK in Germany

There were three general groups of activities that involved the PKK in Germany. First, the PKK seized every opportunity to bring the conflict in Turkey to the attention of the German and European public. This was done by staging demonstrations decrying Turkish military engagement in south-eastern Turkey, organizing hunger strikes, holding large-scale protests to promote visibility and solidarity, and engaging in highway blocks. A second set of activities that brought the PKK into the lime-light were the attacks against Turks, Turkish businesses and associations in Germany. Later on, a new kind of protest activity emerged as PKK sympathizers began to protest against German actions taken against the PKK. Though PKK activities in Germany go back to the late-1980s, they gathered steam in the early 1990s. As a result of a series of events we shall discuss below, the PKK was banned in Germany in 1993. Instead of stopping the protests and the violence associated with them, this ban was followed by an additional three years of protests and escalating

violence until mid-1996 when PKK changed its course and opted for toning down both its rhetoric and its violent activities in Germany.

Late 1980s to 1993: setting the stage for PKK activism

The PKK was instrumental in staging large-scale demonstrations in various urban centres in Germany to protest against the political situation in Turkey. Large-scale demonstrations would be staged on anniversaries or landmark days (such as Nawroz) or soon after heightened Turkish military activity in south-eastern Turkey. These types of demonstrations initially ended without incident. For example, in April 1990, 10,000 Kurds assembled in front of the Cologne Cathedral in a demonstration that was supported by the PKK. They protested against the military course pursued by Turkey in relation to its Kurdish minority and called for Kurdish autonomy in Turkey (*Tageszeitung* 1990, p. 7). Likewise, the PKK's thirteenth birthday was celebrated in a peaceful gathering by 8,000 in Bremen on 9 December 1991 (*Tageszeitung* 1991, p. 21). In many of these cases, either large urban centres were selected as places to gather, helping visibility, or the protests were staged in front of the various Turkish consulates in the country.

Hunger strikes were also a frequent form of public demonstration for the PKK as well as a sign of solidarity. Staged in places with high visibility in major German cities, they were supplemented with propaganda material to mobilize Kurdish and German support for the aims of the PKK. They were often organized with numerous participants and were sometimes coordinated with other demonstrations in other European countries. For example, a 120-person hunger strike was begun simultaneously in Hamburg and Kiel. This event was coordinated with a 700-person affair in Brussels, protesting against the forced migration of Kurds out of some 300 villages in south-eastern Turkey.⁶

Beginning in 1992 and continuing with increased intensity until 1996, Turks and Turkish businesses became the targets of what was now becoming a violent struggle on the part of the PKK. On 22 March 1992 a Turkish bank and travel agency were severely vandalized in Bremen and an estimated 150 demonstrators blocked the entrance of the Bremen local government for several hours (*Tageszeitung* 1992, p. 21). During this event, eighteen demonstrators, all of whom had PKK propaganda materials, were arrested. During the early-1990s, Turkish cultural and sports associations as well as businesses were the targets of such attacks (Asendorpf 1994, p. 4).

Violence in Germany involving Kurds also presented itself in the form of attacks that targeted other Kurds. As early as 1987 there were growing tensions between several competing Kurdish organizations in Germany, most notably KOMKAR (The Association for Kurdish

Workers for Kurdistan). Tensions between the PKK and KOMKAR occasionally broke out in violence in the late 1980s and early 1990s and some PKK members were later sentenced for the murder of several KOMKAR members.⁷ In addition to the turf war with challengers, the PKK has not been accommodating of dissent among its own cadres. As early as 1984 ex-PKK members who had either fallen from grace or decided to leave the organization were dealt with firmly by the PKK, often being killed execution style (*Tageszeitung* 1995a, p. 5).⁸ This suggests an effort on the part of PKK to maintain its organizational upper hand.

Consequences of PKK activism in Germany and the German response

In 1985 soon after PKK began mobilizing protest movements in Germany, the *Bundesverfassungsschutz* (the Office of the Protection of the German Constitution) started monitoring its activities and began recording these in its annual report (Lavel 1987, pp. 8–9). What followed was mounting tension between the German authorities concerned with violence and the PKK seeking to gain ground in Germany. As early as 1987 the German Ministry of the Interior, as well as the Office of the Federal Prosecutor, were concerned about the escalating PKK violence in Germany. The PKK was increasingly perceived as a criminal organization and this began to erode Germany's willingness to tolerate Kurdish expressions of dissent in general. The violence that caused headaches for German administrators was mostly related to the turf battle between the PKK and KOMKAR, which had claimed the lives of some and left others injured. It was during this time, and apparently as a direct consequence of the turf-battle-related killings, that German authorities first began to consider a ban of the organization.⁹

German authorities had a difficult time shaping the idea of a ban, partly because the federal prosecutor could not find sufficient evidence that the PKK had an established military wing in Germany or whether other individuals were being flown in to commit the acts of terrorism (Lavel 1987). While there was evidence that there was some chain of command in the organization, it did not have a formal structure that was easy to identify. Rather, it was organized as a thick net of Kurdish workers' organizations, sports clubs, cultural centres, and Kurdish migrants' organizations. Each of these organizations appeared to function under the direction of governing boards which, the organizations claimed, functioned in complete autonomy.

Uncomfortable about proceeding directly to a ban which could be seen as an excessive curtailment of the freedom of association and opinion, German authorities first tried to respond by engaging the legal system. As early as 1988, charges were brought against Kurds by the Federal Prosecutor.¹⁰ Perhaps the biggest legal offensive against the PKK began in

1989. The Federal Prosecutors Office charged nineteen PKK members in a 'mammoth court case against the PKK in Düsseldorf' and used Article 129a of the Federal German penal code which sanctions 'membership in a terrorist organization' (Markmeyer 1989). The PKK and other Kurds and Turks responded by demonstrating in front of the courthouse.¹¹ Because Article 129a was *not* applicable to foreign organizations, the prosecution chose to adopt a line that called the PKK a 'terrorist organization', paving the way for the 1993 ban that was placed exactly on the same premises. After beginning to monitor the PKK in 1987, German police also began surprise raids and searches on PKK premises in 1987. These search-and-seizure operations were continued and the PKK responded with further demonstrations protesting against these sting operations staged by German officials (von Appen 1993, p. 17).

1993: Germany bans the PKK – political opportunity structures in jeopardy

As a result of mounting political pressures – ostensibly both from the domestic political process and from Turkey which was extremely unhappy about Germany's lenience towards the PKK – Germany outlawed the PKK in 1993, almost a decade after it started monitoring the organization. In June 1993 several coordinated events were staged in three European countries that served as the long-awaited opportunity for Germany to justify a ban. The ban came after Kurds occupied the Turkish Consulate in Munich and took several people hostage in a standoff. Interestingly, the protests were not confined to Germany. On 24 June 1993 several individuals who identified themselves as Kurds stormed into Turkish consulates in Munich, Marseille (France) and Bern (Switzerland) and took the personnel hostage. Simultaneously, many Turkish businesses, banks and travel agencies, were attacked in almost all the major German cities causing significant material damage. The PKK was initially quiet on the issue. The Kurdistan-Committee, the unofficial speaker for the PKK in Europe, argued that these acts were not orchestrated and that the Kurds involved had 'spontaneously' engaged in this wave of events, an explanation that did not hold much water (Hahn 1993, p. 3). Others argued that the PKK was behind these actions, and that only the PKK could organize such a widespread outbreak of events that seemed to be coordinated not only in Germany but across borders.

The goal of the Munich occupation was clearly to put pressure on the German government to assume a mediating position in the resolution of the Kurdish problem in Turkey: the occupiers wanted Chancellor Helmut Kohl to make a public appearance on TV in which he was to ask the Turkish government to stop 'the war against the Kurds' immediately (*Tageszeitung* 1993b, p. 1). This, of course, was an attempt to indirectly

impact policy in the home country by attempting to draw the host country into the conflict and urging it to use bilateral diplomacy to secure a desired outcome. Meanwhile, there was unrest unfolding in other cities in Germany during the same day. After a sit-in in front of the Turkish consulate in Karlsruhe, demonstrators attempted to raid the consulate and clashed with the police (*Tageszeitung* 1993c, p. 1). In other words, the dynamics of linkage 6 in Figure 1 were set in motion to cause the dynamics captured in linkage 2 as Kurds in Germany sought to pressure the German government to influence Turkish domestic policy. Hostilities escalated until November 1993, when one person died and several others were seriously injured during attacks against Turkish businesses. This was apparently the last straw. The immediate reaction from Bonn was to intensify calls for banning the PKK and its affiliated organizations (Hahn 1993a, p. 3). The politicians in Bonn were not necessarily clear about what the ban could achieve, or worse still, trigger. However, they were able to agree that such acts could no longer be tolerated in Germany.

The episode had further domestic political consequences for Germany and highlighted the difference of opinion across the political spectrum. This wave of violence against Turkish businesses allowed the Christian Democratic Federal Minister of Interior, Manfred Kanther, the opportunity to adopt an even harder line against the PKK, calling for the full implementation of the ban (*Tageszeitung* 1995c, p. 2). His opponents, mainly the Greens, argued that any such response would not only not stop the attacks, but also drive a larger number of individuals, who through such acts would feel singled out and cornered, towards even more violence. By contrast, the Social Democrats, the second largest party in the country, supported Kanther's position.¹²

In the end, the hardliners won over the sceptics. In November 1993, four months after the Munich episode and immediately after the latest hostilities, Kanther placed the PKK and thirty-five of its affiliated organizations in eleven *Länder* under a federal ban.¹³ Not surprisingly, demonstrations followed the announcement of the decision. In Frankfurt, 300 Kurds occupied a Kurdish cultural centre that was closed as a result of the ban. In defiance of the announcement, in November 1993, one day *after* the Kurdistan Committee was banned along with the PKK, 3,000 celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of the founding of the PKK (Rabinbach 1993, p. 416–18). A leading PKK figure, Kani Yilmaz, the PKK's spokesman in Europe, warned that 1994 would be a very dangerous year for tourists in Turkey. Another leading figure from the ranks, Beyram Aslan of the Kurdistan-Committee, argued that the real loser was the German Minister of the Interior because the German government 'made itself a party to the war through its decision (to ban the PKK)' (*Tageszeitung* 1993d, p. 17). Several solidarity demonstrations were staged in the subsequent days in various German urban centres,

apparently unhindered by the German police who initially took a 'wait and see' approach.

The PKK after the ban: 1993–1996

Just as the sceptics feared, taking restrictive action against the PKK initially did little to stem the violence. On the contrary, contention escalated between 1993 and 1996. The individual *Länder* also took their own steps to outlaw other organizations that were suspected of being front operations for the PKK.¹⁴ The bans on these various organizations were subsequently upheld in German courts.¹⁵ After the ban, arrests of suspected PKK members and leaders accelerated. The federal attorney general litigated against thirty-two people in leadership positions within the PKK, charging them with membership in a terrorist organization.

After the ban on the PKK, German police had ample grounds to intervene in Kurdish demonstrations and occasionally to use force in dispersing them. They refrained from issuing permits to non-PKK demonstrations for fear that they would turn violent, a move that, in the interest of abundance of caution, restricted the freedom of expression for those persons and organizations that were not affiliated with the PKK (*Tageszeitung* 1996b, p. 5). However, on several occasions, protesters sought to stage their demonstrations anyway, clashing with the intervening police in the process (*Tageszeitung* 1996a, p. 4).

The German Ministry of the Interior was first to acknowledge that, despite the ban, 'the PKK had nonetheless remained active' (*Ibid.*). Its members and sympathizers disregarded the laws against PKK demonstrations, continued to collect donations on behalf of the organization, and distributed propaganda material. Demonstrations, authorized or not, were organized that decried the outlawing of the PKK, sometimes resulting in hostilities between the police and demonstrators who had propaganda material for the PKK (*Tageszeitung* 1995e, p. 4). On 17 June 1995 200,000 supporters of the PKK staged the largest demonstration up until that time in Bonn. (German Federal Solicitor 1995).

In March 1996, the Free Kurdish Women's Association (associated with the PKK) staged a demonstration on International Women's Day. The demonstration in Bonn, 1,200 people strong, broke out into hostilities during which the German police officers were attacked. (German Interior Ministry 1996, p. 4) It appeared that, despite the ban and perhaps because of it, Germany's control of the situation dwindled alongside mounting domestic criticism that the principles of liberal democracy were being trampled upon.

Unhappy that the windows of political opportunity were rapidly closing on the organization in Germany, Öcalan engaged in harsh rhetoric accusing Germany of condoning violent activities both in Germany and in Turkey in 1995 and 1996. In January 1996, Öcalan

threatened with massive uprisings in Europe with many casualties, particularly in Germany, if the Turkish government did not respond to the PKK ceasefire in south-eastern Turkey. He then threatened to attack Turkish vacation resorts – favourites for German travellers – which would cause bloodshed, especially around Nawroz, arguing that Kurds should protect ‘their democratic rights in Germany with utmost determination’. His threatening tone against the German government reached its climax in March 1996 when he claimed in a MED TV interview that ‘Germany has launched a war against the PKK . . . Should Germany decide to stick to this policy, we can return the damage. Each and every Kurd can become a suicide bomber’.¹⁶

In subsequent interviews, he continued to blame Germany for being an accomplice in genocide and announced that there would be suicide bombings, particularly on the coastline of Turkey. On another occasion, he lashed out at the German government, accusing it of siding with Turkey and clamping down on Kurdish freedom of expression in Germany (Lüders 1996, p. 7). Surprisingly, his harsh tone and threats came to an abrupt end in mid-1996, marking a change in PKK strategy. Cognizant that his tone and the violence staged by the PKK was costing the organization the sympathy it had slowly mustered over the years, Öcalan opted for a new strategy. This time, he toned down the threats and attempted to gain legitimacy as the spokesperson for *all* Kurds. He began publicly to denounce the violence of the past as a mistake and argue that a non-violent political dialogue was needed between the PKK and Germany. This shift in his tone can be interpreted as an effort to regain lost ground in Germany and to unplug the political opportunity structures.

The PKK's about face: a new strategy?

Beginning in mid-1996, Öcalan began to preach moderation to his followers. Öcalan now claimed that what he in fact wanted was a political dialogue with Germany, which would lead to a political solution. To facilitate such dialogue, he promised an end to PKK-led violence in Germany. (German Interior Ministry 1997, p. 3). Öcalan repeated his plea for moderation at every opportunity and PKK members, by and large, abided by his call. As expected, with the decline of criminal incidents, it became unfeasible for Germany to justify a continued ban on an organization that was keeping a low profile and steering clear of violence. In early 1997, there were increasing pleas for lifting the ban from the left as well as the right of the political spectrum. CDU officials began pushing for a lifting of the ban in early 1997. Heinrich Lummer, a CDU representative from Berlin proclaimed at the *Bundestag*: ‘We have had relative peace with the PKK in Germany during the last year. Should it continue to act responsibly, I don’t see why the ban should be continued’ (quoted in Krump 1997).

Also in 1997, two high-level German officials met with Öcalan in Damascus, Syria, in an effort to persuade him into calling off attacks against Turks and Turkish businesses in Germany. Following this meeting, Lummer had a similar meeting with Öcalan during which he repeated the German government's plea. In the face of the growing public unpopularity for the PKK's attacks in Germany, as well as insistent German officials, Öcalan guaranteed an end to violence and on 13 January 1998, based on the decrease in PKK violence, the Federal Prosecutor's Office announced that the PKK was no longer regarded as a terrorist organization but rather as a criminal organization.¹⁷ This represented a reward for PKK and meant that its members, if sued, would no longer be charged with membership in a terrorist organization (Article 129a); rather, they would be charged with crimes such as extortion, manslaughter, and possession of unregistered weapons (*Tageszeitung* 1997, p. 4). Shortly after, an article appeared in Istanbul in the Turkish unofficial PKK periodical *Özgür Halk*, signed by the PKK's leader's pen name Ali Firat, in which Öcalan conceded defeat against the Turkish army (Koydl 1998). Moreover, he seemed to be trying to distance himself from a war that the PKK was losing, as well as reformulate his strategy towards striving for political recognition in Europe along the lines of the PLO. Currently, the PKK claims that after meeting in January 2000, it reached a decision to lay down its arms and will now seek political solutions (Kinzer 2000, p. A14). In turn, Germany now fully recognizes that the presence of the Kurdish diaspora influences its relations with Turkey, and its politics at the *Land*, regional, and federal levels. German authorities thus face a dual challenge: international criticism if they extradite PKK members back to Turkey where they may be in danger; or accusations by Turkey of harbouring a terrorist organization.

The situation took a new turn as Turkish commando forces captured Öcalan in Kenya on 15 February 1999. The arrest spurred massive protests across Germany, including the occupation of the Greek consulate in Berlin. After a highly publicized trial in Turkey, Öcalan was found guilty of treason and sentenced to death. In response to the conviction, Kurds in Germany again voiced their displeasure as thousands of protestors took to the streets. A few months later, a similar scenario was played out in Cologne in response to a Turkish appeals court upholding the death sentence. German Interior Minister Otto Schily issued appeals for calm from the large Kurdish minority and repeatedly reminded protestors that Turkey will not carry out the sentence until the European Court of Human Rights hears Öcalan's case. At the same time, Germany also placed Turkey under intense diplomatic pressure. Germany's Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer travelled to Turkey and requested that the death penalty be lifted against Öcalan. Here again we see linkage 2 indicated in Figure 1 as the Kurdish presence in Germany

has influenced Germany's bilateral relations with Turkey. In addition, the EU enlargement Commissioner has warned Turkey that if the death penalty *is* carried out, Turkey's chances of becoming a future EU member would be slim. Öcalan's lawyers are appealing to the Strasbourg-based European Court of Human Rights, a process that could last up to two years. Turkey is very aware that the 'Kurdish situation' has grown beyond the borders of traditional Kurdish homelands and now threatens the long-term Turkish goal of integrating economically and politically into Western Europe.

Conclusion

This article has documented why and how Kurdish separatism was exported from traditional homelands to Western liberal democracies and highlighted factors that contribute to the diffusion of ethnic conflict. Firstly, countries with established migration links to countries of origin are more likely to be confronted with the consequences of the mobilization of ethnic separatism. These countries, like Germany, which at one time had favourable immigration and asylum policies, unintentionally facilitated the diffusion of contention, which resulted in established Kurdish enclaves. The political opportunity structures provided by the liberal democratic German state allowed for the consolidation of political identity, the aggregation of resources and the sprouting of protest activities through both institutional and non-institutional means. This process affected the domestic politics of Germany as the country sought to come to terms with migrant activism. It also contributed to mounting domestic turmoil in Turkey.

Secondly, this model of international mobilization provides some insight into why the Kurds – specifically the PKK – were successful in their efforts within the liberal democratic structures of Germany. In terms of the consolidation of identity the model helps illuminate that the measures taken to outlaw the PKK and prosecute its members may actually have contributed to a further building of cohesiveness within the Kurdish diaspora population (Henkel 1996). Furthermore, the PKK was able to take advantage of the opportunities for dissent that is, within the parameters of the law, guarded by liberal democracies. While Germany ultimately outlawed radical expressions of Kurdish separatism, specifically PKK activities, this was the product of a lengthy domestic debate, and the legal tools used by the German government to bridle PKK activities were gentle compared to the measures taken in Turkey.

The concept of political opportunity helps to explain why the PKK and Öcalan had their recent about face in terms of the tactics they employ and their rhetoric concerning the use of violence. It can be argued that the windows of opportunity closed after 1993 and the use of violence became counterproductive. Thus, after the ban, the PKK sought

an alternative method of protest that was more suited to the current political milieu, distancing the PKK from violence and couching the struggle as a political, not military, struggle within a democratic setting (*Tageszeitung* 1996a, p. 4).¹⁸

While this article was primarily concerned with the bilateral diffusion of ethnic conflict, it implies that these developments also have regional implications, especially in Western Europe. Not surprisingly, the diffusion of Kurdish separatism does not stop at Germany's doors but is as much a regional phenomenon as it is domestic and international. The Kurdish question has become a thorny issue between the EU and Turkey, especially because it figures prominently in the EU's refusal to consider Turkey's applications for membership on human rights grounds. It is quite clear that 'the internal Turkish conflict has also become international: a steady stream of refugees, military assistance to Turkey from NATO countries and the presence of the PKK in European countries: this has embroiled European governments in Turkish affairs' (Ansary 1991, p. 81). One would also have to add that the Turkish government is now embroiled in the affairs of European governments too, as it seeks to pressure many EU members to discontinue their acquiescence vis-à-vis Kurdish separatist groups.

The German case suggests that the model of mobilization adapted from Doug McAdam is a useful tool in understanding ethnic conflict in host countries. However, the model needs to be supplemented by an analysis of the responses to mobilization in other host countries. Mobilization is not the end of the dynamic political struggle that lies beneath separatist efforts. The voicing of dissent elicits responses from the host countries which forces the dissenting factions to rethink their options in the host country and, at the same time, search for other venues to further their cause.

Notes

1. These issues concern access to natural resources like water and the commercially important infrastructure such as the Turkish/Iraqi oil pipeline which runs through the region.

2. The constraints placed on the expression of Kurdish identity continued through other constitutions that were subsequently drafted. More recently, the 1982 Turkish Constitution stated that 'no political party may concern itself with the defence, development, or diffusion of any non-Turkish language or culture; nor may they seek to create minorities within our frontiers or to destroy our national unity' (Article 89 of the Constitution of the Turkish Republic). In another effort to clamp down on separatist activities, Turkey adopted an Anti-Terror Law in 1991 which allowed for a very broad definition of terrorism, giving the government *carte blanche* authority to prosecute separatist activities.

3. Beginning with the first organized resistance to assimilation, which dates back to the mid-1920s, we see sporadic efforts to create a collective Kurdish consciousness. These efforts have intensified during the last forty years. See Kirisci and Winrow 1997.

4. Article 10, Para. 1 Nr. 11 of 1961 Aliens Act. This clause left extensive leeway for interpretation because it could be applied so broadly and 'a foreign worker could be deported for insignificant offences, such as a traffic accident or disobeying a traffic rule' (Ansary 1991).

5. MED TV was shut down in 1996 after the contract to use a satellite to broadcast was terminated. The station struck a deal with a Polish company after a French company would not renew the PKK's contract. In 1996, the Polish company also cancelled MED-TV's contract, putting an end to its broadcast. (*Tageszeitung* 1995b, p. 5).

6. One poignant episode was the death of Gülnaz Dagistanli, a Kurdish woman living in Germany, who died during a hunger strike in 1995. Her death unleashed a series of protest marches that gathered some 15,000 people, some of whom travelled from all over Germany to Berlin for the memorial ceremony (Kugler 1995).

7. For example, in 1987 a 37-year old recognized refugee, apparently a KOMKAR member, was murdered in Hannover as he was on his way to a KOMKAR meeting. KOMKAR charged the PKK with the murder, arguing that the deceased had been continuously harassed and threatened by PKK functionaries in the weeks preceding his murder. It was argued that this act of the PKK was an act of revenge for the death of one of its members during a Nawroz celebration in Munich (Voges 1987).

8. Before the first ex-PKK member was killed at the hands of the PKK, there were reports that the organization had been threatening critics, dissidents, and other groups for at least three years. The individual charged with the murder, Ali Tas, was a leading figure in both the PKK and BIRKOM, another Kurdish separatist organization that was founded by close supporters of Öcalan who left Turkey for Germany in 1980 (Lavel 1987, pp. 8–9). See also (Abadan-Unat 1997, pp. 229–51).

9. These concerns were voiced after the PKK attacked KOMKAR members during a Nawroz celebration. Two KOMKAR members were seriously injured, one subsequently died (Lavel 1987).

10. Two of these individuals, Mehmet Bingöl who was killed in May 1984 and Murat Bayraklı who was killed in June 1984, were ex-PKK members who appeared to be prosecuted by the organization (*Tageszeitung* 1988a, p. 5). Six years later, one of those individuals was found guilty of murdering under the PKK's orders (*Tageszeitung* 1994a, p. 4).

11. As another example of how the movements are closely linked across borders, Kurdish women occupied the garden of the German Embassy in Paris in protest against the case that began in Düsseldorf (*Ibid.*).

12. (*Tageszeitung* 1995d, p. 4). In highway blocks that occurred some time after the ban, the police became increasingly obstructive, dispersing the demonstrators with water cannons. The blocks provided ample ammunition for law-and-order politicians who have begun calling for stricter laws which would deal firmly with those foreigners, even those with permanent resident status, who were abusing Germany's welcome through acts that disrupted public safety (Gottschlich 1994, p. 3).

13. Among the other organizations to be banned were ERNK (Kurdistan National Liberation Front), the Berxwedan Publishers, Kurdish news agency Kurd-Ha, the Federation of the Patriotic Kurdish Worker and Cultural Association, and the Kurdistan Committee, (Hahn 1993b, p. 3). See also (*Tageszeitung*, 1993a, p. 2).

14. For example, the Land Minister of the Interior for Baden-Württemberg banned the 'German-Kurdish Friendship Association' in Stuttgart on 13 May 1996, arguing that the association was working as a central hub for the PKK and that it had taken part in violent acts. In an act of defiance, some 200 demonstrators gathered in Stuttgart on 18 May 1996 to condemn the decision (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutzbericht* 1996).

15. On 9 April 1996, the Upper Administrative Court (*Oberverwaltungsgericht*) in Bremen ruled against the appeal of HEVALTI-Kurdish-German Association for the Friendship of Peoples that the ban on its activities be lifted. Similarly, on 29 May 1996, the Upper Administrative Court in Münster ruled against the appeal of the Agri Publishing Company which was ordered to shut down earlier. The publishing company was found

guilty of having distributed PKK/ERNK propaganda material (*Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutzbericht* 1996).

16. Interview with MED TV on 24 March 1996. Quoted in the *Bundesverfassungsschutzbericht* 1996.

17. The Turkish government immediately responded with a protest. Ismail Cem, the foreign minister, claimed that the federal prosecutor had no reliable basis for taking such an action. See (Yilmaz 1998).

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