

# KURDISH MOVEMENTS IN SYRIA

## SURİYE'DE KÜRT HAREKETLERİ

### التحركات الكردية في سوريا

ORTADOĞU STRATEJİK ARAŞTIRMALAR MERKEZİ  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EASTERN STRATEGIC STUDIES

مركز الشرق الأوسط للدراسات الاستراتيجية



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**ORSAM Report No: 127**

**August 2012**

**ISBN: 978-605-4615-23-0**

**Ankara - TURKEY      ORSAM © 2012**

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*In Turkey, the shortage of research on the Middle East grew more conspicuous than ever during the early 90's. Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies (ORSAM) was established in January 1, 2009 in order to provide relevant information to the general public and to the foreign policy community. The institute underwent an intensive structuring process, beginning to concentrate exclusively on Middle affairs.*

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## *Abbreviations*

**KDPP:** Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party  
**KNC:** Kurdish National Council in Syria  
**KPM:** Kurdish Patriotic Movement  
**KDEP:** Kurdish Equality Party  
**KPP:** Kurdish Patriotic Party  
**KFP:** Kurdish Freedom Party  
**KDUP- Democratic Yekiti:** Kurdish Democratic Union Party  
**KUP - Yekiti:** Kurdish Union Party  
**SKDP:** Syrian Kurdish Democratic Party  
**PYD:** Democratic Union Party  
**UKDF:** Union of Kurdish Democratic Forces in Syria

## PRESENTATION

Syria has become the most important agenda item in the recent period. As the civil war across the country continues at full speed, it is also argued what might happen after toppling the Assad regime. During this period, Syrian Kurds started to gain importance. In the beginning Syrian Kurds, who remain in the background due to their relatively weak positions and their conflicting relations with the opposition, are indeed an important part of the Syrian society. Kurds, who have strengthened their positions since the uprising in Qamishli in 2004, have constituted one of the most important agenda items in Turkey in the recent weeks as well. As a result of the process, which was launched on 19 July 2012 when Kobane was seized by Syrian Kurds and which involved some other settlements in northern Syria, the idea regarding a new Kurdish region emerged in northern Syria gained wide currency. Within this framework, an intense discussion was initiated in Turkey on Syrian Kurds. As ORSAM, we wanted to contribute to this discussion as well. The interviews we had made with the representatives of Syrian Kurdish parties in Northern Iraq on February 2012 were already published on the website of our organization. We have carried on our studies related to Syrian Kurds in detail since then, and a quite comprehensive report was prepared as a result. In the report, which was prepared by ORSAM Advisor Assist. Prof. Dr. Serhat Erkmen, quite extensive information on demographic structure of Kurdish population, Kurdish settlements and political parties take place. Besides, the developments taking place in the recent period are assessed in terms of the internal dynamics of Syria, the actors such as PYD, KDP and PUK, and the international balances. Our report is the first study that has been carried out on this subject in Turkey. We aim at updating this report by carrying out new field studies in the forthcoming period. We hope that this study contributes to debates in Turkey.

Best Regards,

*Hasan Kanbolat*  
*ORSAM Director*

## **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Serhat ERKMEN**

Serhat Erkmen, who was born in 1975 in İstanbul, graduated from Ankara University Faculty of Political Science Department of International Relations. He completed his master's degree and doctoral study at Ankara University Institute of Social Sciences. Working as Middle East Researcher in Center for Eurasian Strategic Studies between the years 2000-2008, Erkmen has been working as ORSAM Middle East Advisor since 2009. Also, Erkmen has been Head of Department of International Relations at Kırşehir Ahi Evran University since 2009.



By: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Serhat Erkmen

## KURDISH MOVEMENTS IN SYRIA

### 1. General Information about Syrian Kurds

#### 1.1. Demography and Kurdish Settlements in Syria

There are various information about the number of Kurdish population in Syria. As the Syrian opposition movements have begun to come to the forefront with the effect of the recent developments, they started to claim that the Kurdish population in the country is actually much more than it had been mentioned in the past years. The Kurdish opposition movements put forward that Kurds number between 3.5 million and 4.0 million in Syria's total population as far as seen on the reports, information and interviews in the international media.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, as the censuses, which shows ethnicity or mother tongue, are not conducted in Syria, generally detailed information related to the population distribution are based on the figures, of which the origins are not known, rather than detailed studies or statistics. In addition to this, as a considerable part of Kurds did not have an identity for a long period of time, it is not possible to reach an accurate figure about this. On the other hand, in various publications such as reports, articles, books etc. which are accepted worldwide as of 1960s, the number of Kurds living in Syria are suggested to compose 10 percent (generally 8-9%) of the population.<sup>2</sup>

The current settlements of the Syrian Kurds and the demographic situation in the area are actually created by the agreement, which had been signed between France and Turkey in London in 1921 and which was amended for a couple of times afterwards. After the aforesaid agreements, three important places with majority of Kurdish population in the Syrian border remained. These areas can be listed as: Kurd Mountain and surrounding areas, Ayn-al Arab, and Jazeera (al-Hasakah). Some part of the Kurdish settlements located within the Syrian borders are the demographic extension of certain regions, which are situated in southeast of Turkey and composed of Kurdish population in majority. The other districts where Kurds live in the rest of Syria are known as the places where Kurds have been living for centuries. For instance, the area that is called Kurd Mountain is known to be a Kurdish settlement even before the Crusades that started in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, and the fact that the areas, where Alawite Mountains are located, as well as the Kurdish settlements in Hama and its neighborhood date back to centuries ago can be found in the historical studies carried out in the past. Among the three aforesaid areas, Jazeera (al-Hasaka Province) is the city where the most of the Kurdish population live in Syria. On the other hand, even in this city, Kurds do not constitute the majority of the population. The major settlements (excluding villages), where Kurds are densely populated in al-Hasaka province, are the city center of al-Hasakah, Qamishli, Qahtaniyah, Maliki-

yah, Darbasiyah, Amudah and Ras al Alyn. The second and the smallest Kurdish area in Syria is the district, which is called Ayn al-Arab and which is located in the eastern part of the point that Euphrates River enters in Syria. Although the neighborhood of the area is surrounded by Arabs, the majority of Ayn al-Arab, which is the largest town in this area, is comprised of Kurdish population. Kurd mountain, on the other hand, is a mountainous area. In this area where Afrin, city of the Aleppo Governorate, is the central district, the Kurdish settlements partially extend into Idlib and Jarablos.

## 1.2. Kurdish Settlements in Syria

As it can be seen in detail below, Kurds cannot constitute a majority in any province of Syria. Besides, it is seen that a considerable part of the Kurdish population in Syria lives in different parts in the northern part of the country. Taking the Syrian geography into consideration, Kurds are densely populated in al-Hasakah Province in the northeast of the country, in Ayn al-Arab which is the point that the Euphrates River enters in Syria, and in Afrin which is located within the borders of Aleppo. While Kurds constitute the majority in some of those settlements, it is known that in some others they are in minority or in similar amounts with the other ethnic/secularian groups. Although the Kurdish population in Syria is denser in Aleppo, al-Hasaka, Damascus and Latakia, they also live in cities such as Hama and Homs. Considering the cities where Kurds live in Syria and the distribution in these cities within this scope, we see a table as follows:

### i. Aleppo:

City Center: Kurds, who immigrated from other districts in the past, live in central Aleppo. There are two Kurdish Neighborhoods in central Aleppo. One of them is Ashrafiyeh,

and the other is Sheikh Maqsoud. However, these neighborhoods are not totally composed of Kurdish population. There is no any accurate information about the total Kurdish population living in central Aleppo.

Afrin (Kurdish: Efrin): Afrin is located 65 kilometers northwest of central Aleppo. Afrin is composed of the city center and the towns and villages in rural area. The total population of Afrin is about 250.000. And approximately 70.000 of the population lives in central Afrin. Kurds constitute the majority of population. However, Kurmanji-speaking Yazidis are also considered as Kurdish population. Also Sunni Arabs reside in rural areas of Afrin.

Ayn al-Arab (Kurdish: Kobani): It is located 165 kilometers northeast of the Aleppo city center. Ayn al-Arab is an ancient Kurdish settlement. Arab population resides in the neighboring settlements of this district, the center of which is almost completely composed of Kurds. The population of central Ayn al-Arab is approximately 70.000. The total population is about 200.000 along with the rural population.

Jabal Siman: Approximately 12.000 Kurmanji-speaking Yazidi population reside in Jabal Siman, which is located in the south of Aleppo city center.

### ii. Al-Hasakah:

City Center (al-Hasakah) The total population of Al-Hasakah Province, which is located in the intersection point of Turkey-Syria-Iraq triangle in the northeast of Syria, is 1.512.000 based on the data of 2011. On the other hand, the total population of Hasakah city, which is the city center of al-Hasakah province, is approximately 190.000. Sunni Arabs constitute the majority of central population. In addition to this, Christians and Kurds also live here. There is also some Yazidi population in the city center.

**Qamishli** (Arabic: Al-Qamishli, Kurdish: Qamişlo): Qamishli, under the administration of Hasakah province, is located right across Nusaybin. It is located 80 kilometers northeast of Hasakah city center. Currently Christians, Sunni Arabs, some Armenians and mostly Kurds reside in the city, where Assyrians lived in the past. The total population of Qamishli city center and its rural area is approximately 400.000. Kurds constitute some 70 per cent of the total population of the city. The majority of Kurds live in central Qamishli. However, central Qamishli is not only composed of Kurds. Almost 20 per cent of the population is composed of Sunni Arabs and they are generally settled in rural areas of Qamishli. Most of the Arab population in Qamishli is composed of Arab tribes, settled in the area by the Syrian government in the past. An other 10 % of the population is composed of Christians. They are also mostly settled in central Qamishli.

**Amudah:** (Arabic: Amudah, Kurdish: Amude): Amudah is a settlement under the administration of Qamishli, and located 30 kilometers west of Qamishli. Amudah is composed of a city center and 156 villages. The total population is approximately 100.000. Kurds constitute the majority of population both in central Amudah and its rural areas. In addition to Kurds, Yazidi and Arab population also live in Amudah.

**Qahtaniyah:** (Arabic: Al Qahtaniyah, Kurdish: Tirbesipi): The total population (central and rural population) of Qahtaniyah under the administration of Qamishli is some 125.000. The central population is approximately 25.000 and composed of Syrians of Kurdish, Christian, Yazidi, Armenian and Sunni Arab origins. The rural population of Qahtaniyah, which is composed of 140 villages, is some 100.000.

**Malikiyah** (Arabic: Al-Malikiyah, Kurdish: Derik): Malikiyah is located in the western border of northeast of Syria. The total population of Malikiyah, including its rural population, is approximately 200.000. Some 50.000 of this population reside in the city center. Kurds constitute 60%, Christians constitute 30%, and Sunni Arabs constitute 10% of the central population. In its rural areas, on the other hand, lives Sunni Arab population who were placed afterwards in the area.

**Jawadiyah:** (Arabic: Al-Jawadiyah, Kurdish: Çil Axa): Jawadiyah is a settlement under the administration of Malikiyah. The total population of Jawadiyah, which is a small town, is 5.000. The half of its total population is composed of Kurds, while the other half is composed of Sunni Arabs.

**Ras al Ayn:** (Arabic: Ras al Ayn, Kurdish: Sere Kaniye): The total population of Ras al-Ayn is about 50.000. The majority of the population is comprised of Kurds, while Christians and Sunni Arabs who were placed afterwards also reside in the area.

**Darbasiyah:** (Arabic: Al-Darbasiyah, Kurdish: Dirbesi): Darbasiyah is a settlement under the administration of Ras al-Ayn. The total population is approximately 90.000, and 30.000 of this population lives in the city center. Although the Kurdish population constitutes the majority in the center, Sunni Arabs live in the rural area.

### **iii. Damascus:**

Historically, the settlement of large number of Kurds in a city, where Kurdish population already reside, starts as of 1960s. Domestic migration began due to the economic problems in the areas where Kurdish population lived, and Damascus started to shelter a considerable number of Kurdish population in the course of time. This migration further

increased due to the economic reasons as of 2004. As a result of this, approximately 10-15% of the total Kurdish population in Syria started to be comprised of those living in Damascus. It is estimated that some 250,000 of the total population of Damascus, which is 2,835,000, is composed of Kurds. Kurds are dispersed over different parts of the city, but most of them reside in the neighborhood

called Rukneddin or in Hay Al Akrad, and in the suburban area called Zorova in Damascus.

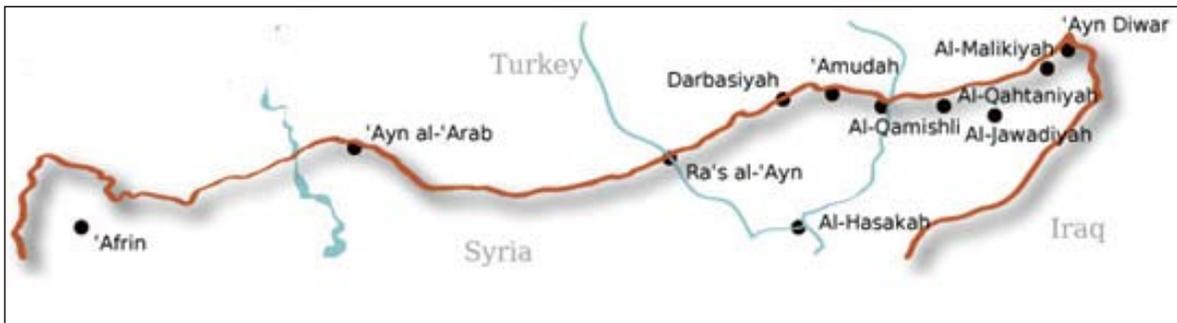
**iv. Latakia Province:**

Kurds live in the area called Kurd Mountains, different from the area known as Kurd Mountains in Afrin within the province of Latakia. In central Latakia is found Kurdish neighborhoods comprised of majorly those immigrated from the Kurd mountain.

Map 1: The General Map Showing the Distribution of Kurds in Syria



Map 2: The Settlement Map Showing the Areas with Considerable Number of Kurdish Population



### 1.3 General Information on Political and Social Structures of Kurds in Syria

The Kurdish population in Syria generally constitutes the poor segment of the population. As the natural conditions of Jazeera are suitable for agriculture in the area, the majority of the population work in the field of agriculture. Despite the fact that Hasakah Province, where Kurds are densely populated, is unique and the richest area in Syria in terms of the oil resources, there is no investment in the area due to the policies of the government. In addition to this, as it is going to be mentioned below, Arabs were placed within the Kurdish population through strategic projects and a demographic balance was strived to be established. As a result of both economic policies and also social engineering works, a substantial part of Kurds in Syria preferred to establish close relations with the central government for many years. In addition to this, the emergence of Kurdish political movements in Syria is not a recent development.

As the borders were determined in the Middle East in the post-World War I, less amount of Kurds from Iraq and Turkey remained in Syria, which was under the French mandate. However, after the Kurdish uprisings in Turkey were suppressed in 1920s and 1930s, and the Khoybun Committee was created in 1927, many Kurds entered in Syria as refugees. During the 1920-1946 mandate government, all

different ethnic components, who came to the country within the framework of “creating an ethnic diversity” policy of France, were naturalized as Syrian citizens. The French government, which supported the minorities in the country against the Arab majority, reserved a share beyond the population of Kurds and the other minorities to take part in the army and police. However, the government did not accept the demands of Kurds such as; establishing schools, recognizing Kurdish as the official language, and appointing Kurdish authorities to districts with Kurdish majority, and thus an alienation started after this process.

They did not have much problem until mid-1950s, but as Baathists gained power in 1956, the tension, which has been going on between Arabs and Kurds, started. As the Arab nationalism rose, restrictions were placed on the use of Kurdish, prohibiting the language in education and broadcast media. The fact that oil was found in the areas, where Kurds lived in Syria in late 1950s, resulted in major problems between the regime and Kurds. Besides, the Arab nationalism, which greatly rose with the effect of the United Arab Republic created by Egypt and Syria in 1958, affected the relations between Kurds and the regime, and hundreds of Kurds including high ranking officers were discharged from the Army. These events increased the political mobility among

Kurds, and the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria was created also with the influence of Iraqi KDP. This group, which was a source of attraction for most of Kurds in the beginning, entered in the process of disintegration as many party officials were arrested along with Nureddin Zaza, the General Secretary of the party, in 1960.

Since the late 1950s and early 1960s, the political problems between Arabs and Kurds became more intense in Syria. As a result of this, Syrian governments considered Kurds as a threat against the unity of the country and the Arab identity, and placed certain restrictions. The census, conducted in the district where Kurds resided in the beginning of 1960s, is the origin of the most important problems between Kurds and central government that have not been solved yet. The fact that Kurdish uprising that took place in Iraq during the mid-1960s reached success worried the Syrian government and a comprehensive strategic plan was started to be implemented towards Kurds. As a part of this plan, the assets of most of the Kurdish local landlords were distributed within the scope of the land reform. The fact that theoretically 43% of the lands transferred as a result of the land reform implemented across Syria were located in al-Hasakah is an important evidence showing the fact that Kurds were targeted, rather than a large mass of people through the reform.

In addition to the land reform, the census that was conducted in 1962 constituted the origin of many current problems. Despite the fact that the purpose of census was indicated to be to detect how many Kurds illegally crossed the border from Turkey and Iraq to Syria, the main purpose is the Arabization of northeastern part of the country rich in agricultural production. During the census pro-

cess, the obligation was imposed on Kurds to prove that they have been living in Syria at least since 1935 in order to acquire citizenship. Kurds, who could not prove it, lost their citizenship. In the census, which was carried out on the ground of distinguishing different ethnic components arriving afterwards, approximately 120.000 Kurds lost their citizenship. Then it was followed by the restrictions related to the use of Kurdish language, and the Kurdish names of places were changed. During the Hafez Assad period, the Arab tribes from different areas of the country were brought and Arabs were strived to be placed on Iraqi and Turkish borderline within the scope of the plan called "Arab Zone". It was aimed at creating a cordon between Syria and Kurds living in Iraq-Turkey within the framework of this plan.

Considering the current problems of Syrian Kurds, it is seen that the effects of the census still continue. Although it is stated in the international sources that 350.000 Syrian Kurds do not have identity and that they face problems because of this, there are major concerns about the reality of this figure. It appears that in the past studies carried out on this issue and especially in the U.S. documents, this figure was exaggerated. Although the precise figures are not known today, it is known that many Kurds are foreign (called *ajanib* in Syria) and "unregistered/*maktumen*" (those who do not participate in census, or children of Syrian people who marry to those with foreign status). The foreigners in this category do not have opportunity to own land or property. It is not possible for them to serve as doctor or engineer. They cannot work in public institutions. Their marriage is not officially recognized. They do not have political rights such as voting, and they cannot legally leave from or return to Syria as they are not given passport either. The situation of those who are not registered is much worse. Those people do not

have even identity cards and they do not have official registers either. This problem came to the forefront again with the influence of Arab Spring. As a matter of fact, one of the first actions carried out by Bashar Assad administration was to confer citizenship to Kurds who did not have identity in Syria. However, it is said that the number of people who applied for citizenship did not exceed 35.000.

## **2. General Outlook on Kurdish Opposition in Syria**

Currently, the Syrian Kurdish parties have been carrying on their efforts to get rid of the disorganization that has been going on for years. Syrian Kurdish opposition movements have continuously struggled for leadership since the short-term disintegration of the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria that was created on 14 June 1957. Struggles for leadership, organization problems and the relations with external powers led the Kurdish opposition movements in Syria to turn into a disorganized, weak and indecisive structure.

Due to the pressures of the Syrian regime and their infiltrating parties, there has been a constant instability in parties. Besides, the KDP-PUK split that appeared in the Kurdish movement in Iraq also spread to Syrian Kurds. The political parties of Syrian Kurds clashed with one another depending on their relations with KDP or PUK. The influence of Kurdish movements in other countries on Syrian Kurds is not limited with Iraq. Since the escape of Khoybun Committee to Syria in 1920s, a group of Syrian Kurds have always brought up the Kurdish problem in Turkey to the agenda, and it has been affected by the Kurdish movements in Turkey. Despite the decline in the efficiency of this group since the formation of Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria in 1957, a group from Syrian Kurds has focused on the Kurdish problem in Turkey

again since the late 1970s. With the support that Syria gave to PKK during the period of Hafez Assad, the Kurdish problem in Turkey had a very important place in the political vision of Syrian Kurds. The fact that the Ba'ath regime in Syria tried to export the Kurdish problem to Turkey by supporting PKK attracted attention among Syrian Kurds, and achieved success to some extent. As a matter of fact, many Syrian Kurds joined PKK and developed terrorist actions towards Turkey.

The fact that PKK lost the direct support provided by the Syrian regime as a result of the developments in Turkey-Syria relations in early 2000s resulted in formation of a front organization among Syrian Kurds that are close to the PKK. This organization, known as PYD, led the perception of Turkey-centric Kurdish problem that has been going on among Syrian Kurds from past to present to continue. Thus, two political discourses, one of which is more Syria-oriented and second of which is focused on Kurdish problem in Syria as much as on the Kurdish Problem in Turkey, dominated the political structures of Syrian Kurds.

On the other hand, the invasion of Iraq in 2003 created a new expectation among Syrian Kurds. Syrian Kurdish parties, which are in quest of a federal district like its precedents in Iraq, organized the al-Qamishli uprising in 2004. Although it was alleged that the events developed spontaneously, it is seen that there was a preparation before the outbreak of protests when we look at the process. Even though the 2000s partially means a new period among Syrian Kurds, it did not create a major disengagement from the past. However, a new period started also for Kurds after the Arab Spring spread to Syria on March 2011. In this new period, the Kurdish parties realized they needed to agree on what they want. However, the parties clashing within themselves went through severe problems in the

process of creating a new organization, rather than developing a concrete and explicit political discourse. It is seen that Kurdish parties have been in a major process of organization for the last year, but that they have staggered in this process to a large extent. The relationship between Kurdish parties, which created different coalitions in themselves, and the Arab opposition is inconsistent as well. Although there were certain Kurdish parties or individuals within the Syrian National Council (SNC) in the beginning, Kurds aimed at pursuing a different policy of political identity as in the model of Iraqi Kurds by creating a different opposition group. However, they conflicted in themselves in this process. Certain prominent Kurdish parties were gathered under a single roof with the support of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government. On May 2011, the Kurdish Patriotic Movement (Conference), which gathered all Kurdish parties and included completely different formations and discourses in itself, was created as a result of this effort. Afterwards certain Kurdish parties (Yekiti, Azadi and Future Movement) joined the opposition coalition created by the Arab opposition movements which are rivals to one another. Nevertheless, in due course they left these groups and embarked on a quest of forming their own coalition.

In their quest of creating a coalition among themselves, Kurdish parties followed a strategy on excluding those who left the parties, rather than a strategy on political discourse or policy. For example, SKDP led by Abdulkhakim Bashar excluded Abdurrahman Aluji's group from the coalition, and PYD laid not including Rekeftin, which was split from the group, in Kurdish National Council as a condition to join the Council. However, they started to create a larger-scaled umbrella organisation due to the lack of international recognition because of organization problems they went through in due course, and due to the advises

of Iraqi KRG. Within this scope, three main umbrella organisations were created such as: Kurdish National Council (KNC), National Council (NC) (then the name of this umbrella organisation was changed into the West Kurdistan Popular Assembly), and the Union of Kurdish Democratic Forces in Syria. Nevertheless, at the end of the developments that took place within the last 6 months, only KNC could become an umbrella organisation and the others turned into formations under a party. Today NC is under the control PYD, and the Union of Kurdish Democratic Forces in Syria is under the control of the Future Movement; and despite the fact that they are called umbrella organisations, they have lost their characteristics in practice.

### **2.1. Information on Leading Kurdish Political Parties in Syria**

As it can be seen in detail below, the majority of Kurdish parties in Syria derived from the same origin. Clashes frequently took place among the party members conflicting with each other as a result of the pressures and infiltration of the regime, and many parties, which are not different from each others both in ideological and political terms, were created. The first official split from the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria, which was created in 1957, happened in 1965. As a result of this split, two major parties emerged as in Northern Iraq: Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria and Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria. And the rest of the parties were created by splitting from these parties in due course, new alliances were created from time to time, and sometimes they were split again. So that, 12 of 14 parties to be mentioned below derived from the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (SKDP)

Today, it is suggested that there are 17 Kurdish parties in Syria. Three of these parties only

have their names. And the other 14 of them are large and small parties. In the following part the names, power bases and the prominent figures of these parties and their opinions on main subjects can be found.

**2.2. Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party in Syria (Kurdish: Partiya Pêşverû a Demokrat a Kurdên li Suriyeyê, Arabic: Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Taqadumi al-Kurdi fi Suriya, Other names: Peşveru (Kurdish) Progressive Party (English))**

Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party (KDPP) is the only party, which left the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria and was created in 1965 and which has been continuously holding the leadership among Syrian Kurds since then. Abdulhamid Hadji Dervish, leader of the party, is the most senior politician among Syrian Kurds. Dervish, who has been the secretary-general of the party since the creation of the party (for 47 years), has been continuing his personal relations with lead-

ing cadres of Kurdish parties in many places including Turkey. However, it might be suggested that KDPP has a good relationship especially with PUK in Iraq. Other prominent figures of the party other than Dervish are; Ali Shemdin, who is the Sulaymaniyah representative of KDPP as well as the Northern Iraq representative of KNC, Ahmet Bereket and Faisal Yousef who make statements to the press from time to time. Currently, KDPP is the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).

The views of the party on main subjects can be listed as follows:

- The new Syrian Government should include all the groups.
- Decentralized structure should be created in Syria.
- The political and cultural rights of Kurds should be recognized in the Constitution.
- The Party is against any external intervention in Syria.



Abdulhamid Hadji Dervish



Ali Shemdin

**2.3. Kurdish Equality Party (Kurdish: Partiya Wekhevî ya Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê, Arabic: Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Taqadumi al-Kurdi fi Suriya, Abbreviations: Wekhevi (Kurdish), Al Musawat (Arabic) Equality (English))**

This party was created after splitting from KDPP in 1992. The leader of the party Aziz Dawe is the former executive member of KDPP. As a result of the struggle for leadership within the party, he left KDPP and created Kurdish Equality Party with the figures close to him. There is no major ideological or organisational difference between this party and the others. The Equality Party is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).

**2.4. Kurdish Patriotic Party in Syria (Kurdish: Partiya Demokrat a Welatparêz a Kurdî li Suriyê, Arabic: Hizb al-Watani al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdi fi Suriya; Abbreviations: Welatparez (Kurdish), Patriotic Party (English))**

The Kurdish Patriotic Party in Syria (KPP) was created in 1998 by splitting from KDPP. The leader of the party is Tahir Sadun Sifuk. Sifuk also left the party as a result of the struggle for leadership in KDPP. The party is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).

**2.5. The Kurdish Freedom Party in Syria (Kurdish: Partiya Azadî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê, Arabic: Hizb Azadi al-Kurdi fi Suriya, Other known names: Azadi (Kurdish) Freedom Party (English))**

Kurdish Freedom Party (KFP) is a party composed of those who left the leftist group within SKDP. This party is known with its name

“Azadi” in the political arena, rather than its long name. As a result of the struggle for leadership within KDP, the group called ‘left wing’ in the group created Yekitiya Gel (Unity of the People) in the leadership of Salah Bedreddin, who is a founder of the party, by splitting from SKDP. In 1980, Bedreddin changed the name of the party into Kurdish People’s Union Party in 1980. This party was split again in 1991. A group splitting from the party kept the name of the party, and the other one united with the Yekiti Party. In 1994, the group which named itself as Kurdish Democratic Unity Party was split from Yekiti. Then in 2005, certain members of the Kurdish Left party, led by Hayrettin Murat, and Kurdish People’s Union Party, led by Mustafa Cuma, joint their forces in 2005 and created Azadi. (Thus, 5 parties were derived from Yekitiya Gel created by Salah Bedreddin.) In 2005, Hayrettin Murat Azadi was elected as the secretary-general of Azadi. On the other hand Mustafa Cuma, the other wing of the party, was arrested in 2008, and then he was released in 2011 along with the other prominent figures of the party such as Muhammad Said Hussein and Sadun Mahmoud Shekhi.

In the final congress of the party that was carried out on October 2011, Mustafa Cuma was elected as the secretary general of the party, while Bashar Emin became deputy secretary general of the party. Besides a new politburo was announced. Then Hayrettin Murat and his group left the party. Thus two Azadis bearing the same name emerged. Hayrettin Murat lost his power within his own group in a short period of time and left his seat to Mustafa Hidir Oso. To sum up, currently there are two KFP’s, one is led by Mustafa Cuma and the other led by Mustafa Hidir Oso.

Azadi is one of the most efficient Kurdish parties in Syria. The party, which proved its efficiency in al-Qamishli Uprising in 2004,

became one of the leading parties triggering the anti-Bashar Assad demonstrations among Syrian Kurds by inviting their supporters to participate in demonstrations on 6 June 2011 along with two important parties (Kurdish

Union Party and Kurdish Future Movement). Azadi is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).



Mustafa Cuma



Mustafa Oso

**2.6. The Kurdish Left Party in Syria (Kurdish: Partiya Çep a Kurdî li Sûriyê, Arabic: Hizb al-Yasari al-Kurdi fi Suriya; Abbreviation: Left Party)**

The Kurdish Left Party derived from Yekitiya Gel, which was mentioned above and created by the anti-PUK supporters within KDP. When Salah Bedreddin changed the name of his party, some figures preferred staying in this party and declared themselves as the Kurdish Left Party in 1997. Therefore Muhammad Musa Muhammad is considered as both the founder and the leader of the party. The party was split within itself on March 2012. Two Kurdish Left Parties emerged as a result of the struggle for leadership between the leader of the party Muhammad Musa and the Northern Iraq representative of the party Shelal Geddo. One of them called Kurdish Left Party (Congress) is led by Muhammad Musa, while the other one called Kurdish Left Party (Central Committee) is led by Shelal Geddo. The party is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).



Shelal Geddo

**2.7. The Kurdish Democratic Union Party in Syria (Kurdish: Partiya Yekîtî ya Demokrat a Kurdî li Sûriyê, Arabic: Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdi fi Suriya, Abbreviations: Democratic Yekiti)**

The Kurdish Democratic Union Party is one of those which split from the Yekiti Party. The party has taken part in many demonstrations in Syria from past to present. The party,

which has relatively powerful enough to stage demonstrations in Aleppo, Kobani and Afrin, is a more efficient party compared to a couple of years ago. Nevertheless, the party considerably lost power after the death of İsmail Omar, the most important leader, in 2010. Following the death of Ismail Omar, Muhiyiddin Sheikh Ali, who had been the secretary of the party since 1993, became the leader of the party. The other prominent names of the party are Kamuran Beekes and Mahmoud Ali Muhammad (Abu Sabir). KDUP is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).



Mahmoud Ali Mohammad

**2.8. The Kurdish Union Party in Syria (Kurdish: Partiya Yekitî ya Kurdî li Sûriyê, Arabic: al-Hizb al-Wahida al-Kurdi fi Suriya, Abbreviations Yekiti (Kurdish), Union (English))**

The Kurdish Union Party (Although the short name of the party is KUP, it is mentioned as Yekiti almost in all sources.) It was created in 1999. The leader of the party is Ismail Hami. Yekiti is the leading party among those which

have been most actively supporting and organizing the demonstrations, where Kurds are in majority, since the beginning of the protests in Syria. They can pour their supporters, most of whom are composed of the young, into streets and mobilize them in masses in a short period of time. Supporting the Damascus Declaration in the past, the party joined the coalition called National Union of the Forces for Democratic Change, which is a rival organisation to Syrian National Council after the outbreak of protests in Syria. However, the party withdrew from this formation on August 2011. The most prominent and efficient figures of the party can be listed as follows: the leader of the party Ismail Hami, the former leader and the Northern Iraq representative of the party Abdel Baki Yousef, politburo member Sadetin Mele, Hasan Salih, Fuat Aliko and İbrahim Biro. Yekiti, is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).

The views of the party on major subjects can be listed as follows:

- The party lays emphasis on the necessity of changing the system in Syria, but it does not issue a call for topple of the regime. Besides, the party explicitly argues that the current regime doesn't have legitimacy anymore.
- They believe that the Kurdish Problem should be solved within a democratic framework.
- They demand constitutional guarantees on rights of the Kurdish.
- They demand Kurdish language to be recognized as the second official language in the Constitution and the self-governance of Kurds in the areas with the majority of Kurdish population in the Constitution.



İsmail Hami



Sadettin Melle



İbrahim Biro

### 2.9. The Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria (Kurdish: Partiya Demokrat a Kurdi li Suriye, Arabic: Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdi fi Suriya; Abbreviations SKDP (English),

SKDP is the most important successor of the first party that was created by Syrian Kurds in Syria. As mentioned above, the party was created on 14 June 1957. Today SKDP, which has gone through many splits since then, is not as powerful as it was. Currently there are 3 parties bearing the name SKDP. However, the real successor of SKDP and the most powerful one among these three parties is SKDP Al Parti, led by Abdülhakim Bashar. One of the most important characteristics of SKDP, which plays leading role within KNC, is the role that it has been playing since 2000s to bring other Kurdish parties together. The other characteristic of the party is its close relations with the Iraqi KDP. The leader of the party Abdülhakim Bashar was elected as the first leader of KNC following the creation of this institution. Besides, Bashar also comes to the forefront in the meetings, in which KNC participates, both in Turkey and in other countries. SKDP is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC). The views of SKDP on major subjects can be listed as follows:

- Kurdish language should become an official language in Syria.
- External intervention might lead to a civil war.
- The young should be supported to pour into streets for democracy and freedom.
- The Kurdish area cannot be saved through armed resistance, and even if the area is saved, these armed forces cannot protect the area.
- The only solution for Syria is Federalism.



Abdülhakim Bashar, SKDP leader

Al-Qamishli and Afrin should become province.

- All Kurds, including those who do not have identity card, should be given national identity cards.

### 2.10. The Syrian-Kurdish Democratic Party (Kurdish: Partiya Demokrat a Kurdi ya Sûrî, Arabic: Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdi al-Suri; Other known names: Syrian Kurdish Party)

The leader of the party has been Jamal Baqi Mula Mahmud since the creation of party in 1997. The Syrian-Kurdish Democratic Party is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).

**2.11. The Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria - Nasreddin İbrahim's Group (Kurdish: Partiya Demokrat a Kurdî li Suriyê (el-Partî), Arabic: Hizb al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdi fi Suriya (al-Parti); other name: Nasreddin Ibrahim's Al Parti)**

This party is a wing that was created after splitting from SKDP. When it lost the struggle for leadership within the party, it preferred leaving the party and moved on by keeping the name of the party it had left. This party is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).

**2.12. Kurdish Democratic Party- Syria - Abdurrahman Aluji's Group: (Kurdish: Partiya Demokrat a Kurdî - Sûrî, Kurdish Democratic Party- Syria, other name: Abdurrahman Aluji's Al Parti)**

This party was formed in 2004 by splitting from SKDP. The leader of the party Abdurrahman Aluji is one of the former leaders of SKDP. After splitting from SKDP, the name of the party was changed into SKDP Al Parti, in order to distinguish themselves from the other party. However, due to the fact that two Al Parti emerged after Nasreddin Ibrahim's Group split from SKDP in 2007, this party is called Aluji's Al Parti. The party, which was formed by PYD due to its bad relationship with Bashar's SKDP and which is a member of the Union of Kurdish Democratic Forces in Syria that is against KNC, joined KNC in the late February 2012. After the death of its leader on May 2012, the party lost power to a large extent.



Abdurrahman Aluji

**2.13. The Kurdish Future Movement in Syria: (Kurdish: Şepêla Pêrojê ya Kurdî li Sûriyê, Arabic: Tayar al-Mustaqbal al-Kurdi fi Suriya, other names: Future Movement (English))**

This party represents a new movement within the Syrian Kurdish politics. The founder of the party and the most important leader was Meshal Tammo, who was killed on 7 October 2011. Working in Kurdish People's Union Party created by Salah Bedreddin for more than 20 years and being promoted to leading cadre, Tammo left this party in 1999. Then he created an NGO called 'Committee for the Revival of Civil Society' along with some other activists, and he also organized the Bedirhan Cultural Forum in al-Qamishli. Pursuant to these two structures, he formed the Kurdish Future Movement in Syria on 29 May 2005. Tammo, who was an active politician, was sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment on May 2009 and he was released by the regime on June 2011 as a precaution against the expansion of events in Syria. Two months after his release from prison, he was attempted to be assassinated and he narrowly escaped assassination. A month after the first assassination attempt, he was assassinated again in al-Qamishli and this time he was killed. In the assassination attempt against Tammo, his daughter and son were injured.

The Future Movement established relationship with Syrian Arab opposition before most of the other parties. The Party became a part of the National Independence Conference by taking part in the opposition meeting held in Istanbul on 16 July 2011. In fact Tammo, former leader of the party, is a member of the committee responsible for organizing a similar meeting in Damascus like the aforesaid opposition meeting. Nevertheless, despite his active approach, Tammo withdrew due to the fact that the presence of Kurds and their rights were not recognized in the final declaration.

Following the death of Tammo, certain party members claimed for leadership, and power struggle took place within the party. The opposition against Rezan Bahri Shaykhmus, who came to the forefront after Tammo's death, rose. Finally in the beginning of July 2012, it was declared that a general assembly was held and Shaykhmus was expelled. Shaykhmus did not recognize this decision. As a result of this, two parties, one of which is led by Jandigar Muhammad and the other led by Rezan Bahri Shaykhmus, emerged under the name of Kurdish Future Movement in Syria.

The Future Movement is not the member of KNC.

The views of the party on main subjects can be listed as follows:

- Regime should be toppled.
- Civilian and democratic Syria, where different ethnic groups could have their rights, should be built.
- A Constitution should be written.
- Europe or the U.S. might achieve lots of things to topple the regime through economic embargoes or political pressure.
- The party argues against the toppling of the regime through an external military intervention. Nevertheless, Western countries might help to stop the Assad Regime from killing people without discrimination.

#### **2.14. The Democratic Union Party: (Kurdish: Partiya Yekîtiya Demokrat, Arabic: Hizb al-Itihad al-Dimuqrati, abbreviation: PYD)**

The Democratic Union Party (PYD) was created by PKK members in Syria in 2003. The senior officials of the party that was created with the initiative of PKK members, residing in Syria for many years, and in the late 2010 most of them escaped to northern Iraq as a result of the pressure of the Assad regime. It is suggested that the majority of those members started to return as of March 2011, when the uprisings broke out in Syria. After they came back to Syria, PYD started to open Kurdish language schools, cultural centers and party offices with the permission of the Assad regime.

Although PYD has a more effective and expanded base, the places where the party is most influential can be listed as: Afrin, Kobani, Sere Keniye in al-Qamishli, Derik and Ras al-Ayn. It is seen that PYD has been controlling the streets in these areas for a long time. It is also observed that PYD has been playing a double game against the protests in Syria. While the party adopted a more pro-Assad attitude in the beginning of the protests, then it started to pursue a bidirectional policy. On the other hand, PYD intervened in the protest demonstrations of the other parties and resorted to violence to convince the demonstrators in the areas under its own control or where it is influential, in order not to let the other Kurdish parties become organized against the Assad regime. It is known that PYD members and the other parties (especially the Future Movement) frequently conflict. On the other hand, PYD started to seem like "defender of the Kurdish rights", in order to control the reaction among Kurds against the Assad regime. Sometimes, the party clashes

with the Assad forces, stages anti-Assad demonstrations (even though the main theme of demonstrations is supporting Abdullah Öcalan) and strives to gain sympathy by performing the tasks stemming from the authority gap. It can also be suggested that the party increased its influence among Kurds both by striving to give Kurdish education and also by supporting those who are indigent. To sum up, PYD strives to suppress these organisations by using violence against the anti-Assad Kurdish organization, and on the other hand, the party accuses the others of being collaborator by arguing that the party is the real defender of Kurds.

The party was led by Fuat Omar between 2003 and 2010. Currently, the co-chairs of the party are Salih Muhammad Muslim and Ayşe Abdullah.

The views of the party of major subjects can be listed as follows:

- Democratic autonomy in Kurdish areas without changing the regime.
- Kurds in Syria should have self-determination and the Kurdish problem should be solved on the basis of democratization.
- An external intervention to Syria would increase the influence of Turkey in this country. And this would work especially for Muslim Brotherhood in Syria.



Saleh Mohammed Muslim



Asya Abdullah

**2.15. Kurdish Accord (Wifaq) Party in Syria: (Kurdish: Rekeftina Demokrat a Kurd ya Suri, Arabic: Hizb al-Wifaq al-Dimuqrati al-Kurdi al-Suri, other names: Wifaq (Arabic) and Rekeftin (Kurdish)).**

This party was created by the split of a group as a result of a conflict within PKK on May 2004. Kemal Şahin, first leader and founder of the party, was killed by PKK in Northern Iraq on February 2005. The present leaders of the party, which is currently a small and does

not have a major influence on Kurds, are 32 year-old Fawzi Shingar (his real name is Fawzi Aziz Ibrahim) and Nezhed Muhammad. After splitting from PYD, Rekeftin supported the anti-Assad regime Damascus Declaration along with some other Kurdish parties. In the recent period, PYD has been preventing the party from joining any Kurdish opposition group from new alliances or coalitions. Nevertheless, as a result of the increasing problems between PYD and KNC, Refektin was accepted in KNC in the early 2012. The party

is currently the member of Kurdish Patriotic Movement (KPM) and Kurdish National Council of Syria (KNC).

The views of the party on major subjects can be listed as follows:

- Sooner or later there will be an international intervention in Syria.
- If such an intervention takes place, Kurds should control and seize al-Hasakah.
- Negotiations with the regime is possible only if the Syrian regime apologizes from the Syrian people.
- The only solution in Syria is federalism. Syria should be divided into 4 districts: Central district (central and eastern part of the country); Western district (western provinces and northwest of the country); Northern and Southern Districts (the area where mostly Druzes live and which is close to Lebanon and Israel).

## 2.16. Demands of Kurdish Parties in Syria on Important Issues

It is seen that demands of the Kurdish parties in Syria on important issues differ from one another. This differentiation is not only observed among the parties which are members to PYD and KNC, but also among the parties within the same coalition. Besides, the differences of opinion among the parties composing this coalition were strived to be overcome in the Erbil Meeting held by KNC, but the problem could not be completely overcome. On the other hand, parties put forward certain common notions. These notions might be listed as: Self-determination, decentralization, democracy, autonomy, parliamentary and pluralist system.

These notions are sometimes used in a way to substitute each other and in an uncertain way. In political literature self-determination

has two definitions: The first one means the decision of the people on how they wish to be ruled. And the second definition is related to whether the people want to be a part of the state or they want to be independent. On the other hand, the self-determination was considered the same as independence in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, Kurds in Syria suggest they generally use it in its first definition, but Syrian Kurds' having only one definition of the self-determination is out of question. This version was considerably affected by Iraqi Kurds' using the same notion. Iraqi Kurds used this notion for many times after the invasion. Iraqi Kurds generally use this notion like: "As Kurds, we have the self-determination. Right now, we want to be in Iraq and this is our choice. But in the future, we can use the self-determination to establish an independent state." Therefore, it might be observed that Syrian Kurds have been affected by this use of the notion. From this point of view, it is not certain whether the notion of self-determination used by Syrian Kurds means independence, autonomy, federalism or something else. In fact, this notion changes its meaning largely depending on the political party.

The Syrian Kurdish Party, Kurdish Patriotic Party in Syria, Democratic Union Party, SKDP and Kurdish Democratic Party explicitly argue for federalism. KDPP and certain other small parties argue for autonomy. PYD, on the other hand, demand for democratic autonomy in Turkey, similar to the demand of BDP.

Syrian Kurdish parties' approach towards federalism is contradictory. Even the parties arguing for federalism avoid saying it out loud. The main argument of those parties is the fact that there are differences between Syrian and Iraqi models. They believe that Kurds in each country have different history. Accord-

ingly, Syria has its own distinctive characteristics and it might lead to a civil war in order not to have federalism after Assad. Nevertheless, despite the fact that they think so, they cannot explicitly mention this idea due to the Arab parties' anti-federalism attitude. As Arab opposition parties explicitly oppose any kind of federalism, the idea of federalism creates a major difference among Kurds. Another reason of the Kurdish parties opposing federalism is their ideas on Turkey's policy. Most of the Kurdish parties believe that Turkey has been trying to alienate them. They think that an international intervention or creating a safe zone would increase Turkey's role in Syria.

Another notion as problematic as federalism is autonomy. The parties which argue for autonomy do not have a clear definition either. The most known and the clearest definition of autonomy is made by KDPP. This party argues that there should be a single parliament that governs Syria and Kurds should be represented in the parliament in proportion to their population. Within the scope of this system, political and cultural rights of Kurds should be protected by the Constitution. Accordingly, Kurds can use their own language in educational and cultural issues in order to reach these constitutional rights, and if needed, they should use Kurdish in administrative and political issues as well. Generally this approach is further supported by the Arab parties.

The democratic autonomy approach of PYD, on the other hand, means self-governance and expanding administrative powers. As there is no political demand, it doesn't give damage to the relations with Damascus. The most important advantage of this demand for PYD is letting it continuing its relations with Assad, and on the other hand, providing it with increasing its influence by winning the local elections.

## 2.17. Kurdish National Council (KNC)

KNC is an umbrella organization which was created after the meeting held in al-Qamishli between the dates 26- 27 October 2011. 257 people, 100 of which from members of the parties and the rest of which from the representatives of various groups, took part in the meeting, in which all the parties participated except for PYD, Future Movement, Aluji's KDP and Rekeftin, which are all the members of the Kurdish Patriotic Movement that was created on May 2011. In this conference, an executive committee, composed of 45 members, was elected. They are all independent people, 20 of whom are party representatives (head of each party and a person from each politburo) and 6 of whom from the youth groups. As a result of the conference, the Kurdish Patriotic Movement (Conference) was created. It is seen that most of the parties could not exactly reach a consensus on their discourses despite the fact that the demands in the final declaration of the conference are important as they are the first concrete demands of Syrian Kurdish parties. The most important demands that came out at the end of this meeting can be listed as follows:

The crisis in Syria can be overcome only through changing the authoritarian and totalitarian system. The security state should be subverted and instead more democratic, pluralist, parliamentary and decentralized structure should be created.

The security forces and the army should withdraw from cities.

The Kurdish population, living in their own historical territories, is a significant part of the social, national and historical structure of Syria. This situation requires the recognition of Kurdish population as an important part of the Syrian population, and the democratic

solution of problems by accepting the self-termination of Kurds in a united Syrian state.

Freedom of religion and minority rights should be guaranteed by the Constitution.

As a part of the Syrian opposition, the Conference refuses a personal dialogue with the regime. All Kurdish Coalitions (Political Council, Kurdish Democratic Coalition, Coordination Committee), composed of the parties represented within the KPC, will be dissolved.

KPC will cooperate with all Syrian Kurdish opposition movements accepting the majority of the demands of the Conference.

The memberships of all Kurdish parties within all Syrian opposition coalitions should be ended.

As it can be seen, KPC was created as an umbrella organization by gathering Kurds under a single roof to provide an advantage in talks with other opposition organizations and to create a national agenda. After that stage, the second meeting to gather Syrian Kurds under a single roof was carried out in Erbil. This meeting, which was planned to be held between 17-18 December 2011, was postponed due to various disagreements and could be carried out in late January. The Conference in Erbil was held in Saad Abdullah Convention Center, which is the largest conference hall of Erbil and KRG in 28-29 January 2012. Although the conference was financed by KRG, the organization of the conference was rather carried out by the KDP than the KRG as a whole. The declared objectives of the conference are listed below:

To bring Kurdish intellectuals and civil society members together to talk on the problems of Syrian Kurds,

To develop a moderate approach on the demands of Syrian Kurds,

To detect possible stages after the collapse of the Assad Regime, and to seek protecting Kurds by closing the security gap that could be created,

Together Kurdish parties in Syria under a single roof.

The Erbil Conference is considered as the second most important meeting that was held after the conference carried out in al-Qamishli in Syria on 26-27 October 2012. To a certain extent, it is the complementary of the al-Qamishli conference. Syrian Kurds suggest that the objective in al-Qamishli Conference was to create an organization to form a basis for the Kurdish opposition movement, while the goal of the Erbil Conference was to bring people abroad together and to create a common agenda. During the Erbil Conference, Executive Committee, which would serve as a kind of assembly for Syrian Kurds, was created. There are 47 members in this committee. Initially, it was planned to be composed of 20 members. This figure, which was decided at a stage when 10 parties were expected to participate in the meeting, increased up to 22 (two representatives from each party) as the number of parties to participate increased to 11. As the groups other than the parties in the meeting insisted, in addition to 22 people from 11 parties, it was agreed to include a 25-person group of independents encompassing NGO's, youth groups, women club and certain independent activists to the Executive Committee. In due course the Kurdish parties, which did not participate in the meeting held in October or which were excluded, joined KPC as well. Especially after Rekeftin and Aluji's KDP also joined in KPC in late February, the only Kurdish parties which has not joined KPC are PYD and the Future Movement.

### 3. The Expectations, Goals and Strategies of Kurdish Parties in Syria in the Post-Uprising Period

The fact that Kurdish parties seized power in Kobani on 19 July 2012, and that some other cities and towns were also seized by Kurdish parties (mostly by PYD) in the following couple of days, is an important turning point for Syrian Kurds. The expectations and policies of Kurdish parties and alliances that have been continuing for more than a year before this development, which can be considered as the most comprehensive and strategic action of Syrian Kurds since the 2004 al-Qamishli uprising, are contradictory.

As a matter of fact, it is seen that Syrian Kurds have also participated in the demonstrations since the beginning of the protests against the Assad regime in Syria. Due to the fact that the demonstrations, which have been simultaneously carried out with the same slogans along with the opposition demonstrations by the Kurdish parties across the country for a long time, have not witnessed frequently witnessed violence actions, they have not grabbed much attraction. However, Kurds have become a part of the Syrian opposition either through the alliances among themselves, or through becoming member of various opposition movements or coalitions. During this process, various coalitions and formations were created as mentioned above. However, two main actors came up: these actors are PYD and KNC, created under the roof of KRG. The relationship between these two actors continued in the axis of conflict for a long period of time. While KNC strived to expand its base by taking part in the anti-regime opposition, PYD tried to become powerful among Syrian Kurds through establishing relations with the Assad regime. Although both actors sent moderate messages to each other from time to time, these actors stayed

in opposite fronts until June 2012. On the other hand, PYD and KNC decided to act in unison within the frame of causes and facts to be mentioned below. Taking the aforesaid decision did not immediately give result, and the Erbil Agreement, signed in June, was put into force in July. Following the last talk that was carried out on 12 July, the partnership created by PYD and KNC launched the 19 July process.

The fact that these parties started to control certain areas, composed of the majority of Kurdish population, starting from Kobani on 19 July is an important strategic move indeed. The most important goal of Kurds with this last move is actually to lay the foundations of the Syrian Kurdish region that they want to create within Syria in the long term. Neither Syrian opposition nor the regime has accepted the presence of such a Kurdish region in Syria so far. There are major ambiguities regarding what kind of structure this area, called "Syrian Kurdistan" or "Western Kurdistan", will have; which areas it will include; its population; and who will rule and how it will be ruled. Therefore, during the debates in Turkey, the questions that are being asked are like; "Does 'Northern Syria' exist? Doesn't it exist? Is there a possibility?" However, as far as it can be seen, what is important for Kurds are not the challenges of creating a region or how the ambiguities could be overcome, but rather the priorities listed below:

1. KNC and PYD (They can also be called KDP and PKK. Currently the media organizations which are very close to KDP publish articles regarding this move as a KDP-PKK or even Kandil/Erbil joint action, rather than PYD-KNC cooperation or agreement.<sup>3</sup>) They launched an important initiative to create a Kurdish region by making a joint move in Syria. This situation is the indicator that the rivalry, which has been going on between

Kurdish movements in Turkey (PKK) and Kurdish movements in Iraq (KDP-PUK) for decades, might turn into a cooperation. The underlying factors behind these policies of Kurdish movements, turning into a cooperation from a relationship based on rivalry in the past, might be suggested as follows:

a. Both actors started to take the collapse of Assad regime for granted. PYD has changed its attitude for the last two months, and started to remain distant from Assad by degrees.<sup>4</sup> Similarly KDP, which has been taking cautious steps on Syrian Kurds for a long time, also pressed the button not to miss the train when they believed that Assad would leave.

b. These parties themselves have been damaged by the fight between one another so far. The historical rivalry has ideological cultural, political and international dimensions. But in present situation, it might be understood that PKK thinks it cannot reach a desired structure in Syria without a logistic and financial support to be provided by KDP. On the other hand, KDP is aware of the fact that the political parties close to itself are actually quite weak. The influence of parties within KNC is almost none as you go towards west in the areas where Syrian Kurds live. There is a limited amount of settlement, where the parties in KNC are currently influential. In fact, it is observed that they lost their influence in the areas other than al-Qamishli to a large extent. Therefore, even if KDP enters in an explicit power struggle with PKK on Syrian Kurds, its chance of turning the groups close to itself efficient is almost none under current conditions.

c. Even if KDP finds an international support for its effort to have an influence on Syrian Kurds, the Kurdish parties within the borders of KRG do not have a single policy on the Kurdish parties in Syria and on the devel-

opments. For instance, while KRG follows a much more cautious policy on Syrian Kurds, the opposition parties in KRG are frequently criticized due to the policy pursued by KDP.

d. Although the conflicts in Syria currently take place between the forces of the Assad regime and the Free Syrian Army, Kurds believe that Syria will ultimately be drifted into an ethnic and/or sectarian war. In case such a war breaks out, Kurds will become a very important ally or an actor to establish balance both for the supporters of the current regime and also for the new formations seeking to come to the power. Thus, as observed in Iraq after the collapse of Saddam regime, in Syria as well, Shiites will need Kurds to balance Sunnis and Sunnis will need Kurds to balance Shiites after the collapse of the Assad regime. Therefore, the Kurdish parties competing in Syria started to think that they need to put the problems among themselves aside at least for a while and to join their forces.

2. The cooperation between PKK and KDP does not eliminate the fact that there is a rivalry between one another. While a cooperation started between the two powers, the struggle still continues. While joint flags are unfurled in the demonstrations that have been taking place in the cities under the control of Kurdish groups since 19 July, only PYD pennants are found in government offices seized. Furthermore, it is observed that PYD has the influence to a large extent in the areas controlled, and that the administration does not participate in practice despite the fact that it should do so. The tension between the two actors has become clearer after especially certain cities and towns were controlled. For instance, KNC claimed that the armed forces of PYD seized the court and police station after seizing power in Derik, and that these took place without their notice.<sup>5</sup> Also, an argument took place as a result of the major-

ity of PYD flags in the regions where Kurds seize the power, and as a result of the fact that KNC fell behind on this subject. All in all, it was decided to adopt a common flag in order to overcome the tension caused by the flag-pennant problem.<sup>6</sup> Another evidence showing that the power struggle between PYD and KNC (KDP and PKK) still continues is that the prominent figures of the parties within KNC (even the current leader of the party) stated they are in need of arms in the face of some 2000 militants of PYD in Syria.<sup>7</sup> (Some sources suggest that this figure is 4000-5000 in the recent period).<sup>8</sup> In addition to all these, in the developing process of the events, Mas-soud Barzani declared that Syrian Kurds are trained in Northern Iraq and they are prepared to be sent back. In the statement made by KRG, it is suggested that the effort of Syrian Kurds, trained in KRG, to go back to Syria is in order to protect Kurds in Syria from the Assad administration.<sup>9</sup> However, it is controversial whether KDP aims at protecting those Kurds from the Syrian regime, or it aims at creating an influence or providing support to those who strive to create an influence against the influence of PYD through its armed forces and its organisation in the base. Considering the fact that even people who took part in the meeting held in Erbil under the supervision of Barzani were taken into custody by PYD when they came back to Syria and that they could be released only through the mediation of certain politicians, it is hard to suggest that KDP and PKK act in union.<sup>10</sup> Despite the current cooperation ground between the afore-said two actors, there are two main factors that make it difficult to extend this cooperation to a long-term and to make this cooperation continue by getting deeper:

The first factor is the position of KDP in Iraq, and the second one is the regional alliance of these two actors. It has been clearly observed for a while that KDP has been playing to the

leadership of all Kurds, not only to the leadership of Kurds in Iraq. However, as the events taking place in Iraq in the recent months have showed as well, KDP has limited ability and capacity to canalize the other Kurdish parties to a particular purpose. In fact, it is seen that KDP doesn't have a total command over Kurds even in Iraq. It should be kept in mind that both PUK and Islamist opposition as well as Gorran are non-ignorable powers within the power balance of KRG. Finally, it might be suggested that KDP saw the limits of its power in Iraq as well as the limits of the alliances within KRG in the Maliki crisis. Even if KDP pictured the efforts to overthrow Maliki as the common problem of Kurds other than the internal political assessments in KRG and put forward that it is a part of the Kurdish case in Iraq, at the end it was seen that the jargon of joint efforts and struggle of Kurds did not work in Baghdad. In Baghdad, neither Gorran nor PUK or KDP acted in unison. Today it is seen that the discourse of the common cause of Kurds is used by KDP in Syrian issue. Nevertheless, despite the fact that all Iraqi Kurdish parties discursively support the policy of KRG on Syrian Kurds, it is observed that all parties do not act the same way in practice.

Another factor that would prevent the KDP-PKK cooperation from continuing by getting deeper is the relations/alliances of both actors with external powers. The relations between KDP and Turkey, and Turkey's policy towards PKK limits the KDP-PKK relationship. The close economic and political relations, which have developed between Iraqi Kurds (particularly KDP) and Turkey for the last couple of years, have become quite important for both parties that cannot be put aside. Especially the fact that the problems stemming from the oil agreements added to the political problems with the Iraqi central government in the recent period paved the way for a quite strategic development for KRG. The fact that KRG

directly sent the oil it drilled within the scope of the oil agreements signed independently from the Iraqi central government might be considered as the most important strategic gain for Kurds in the recent period. For KRG, which suggested that it has earned much less income than the share it should have received from Baghdad for some years, the income it generated from the trade with Turkey is important not in terms of the amount, but rather due to the fact that it is the first step to turn oil into a source of income independently from the Iraqi central government. This situation is critical in terms of declaring an independent state, which is the ultimate strategic goal for Kurds. On the other hand, Turkey's providing its increasing energy needs from KRG that it considers as an opportunity in terms of oil and natural gas is also extremely important. Nevertheless, when opportunity-cost balance analysis of the direct oil sales between Turkey and KRG is made, it is seen that this trade is more indispensable for KRG. Therefore, Iraqi Kurds would not put aside these relations they developed with Turkey at the cost of the development in Syria. However, it should not be expected that KDP or KRG would end their initiatives in Syria with the suggestions of Turkey on this issue. It is more likely that KRG would pursue a policy to partially eliminate the concerns of Turkey and a moderation policy.

Despite the fact that the foreign relations of PYD is younger and inadequate compared to the relations of KDP, the role of PKK in the equation of Middle East should not be underestimated. It might be suggested that PKK, which historically developed close relations with Syria and Iran in the Middle East and gained power in 1980s and 1990s with the support of these countries, is a pragmatist organization. The creation of the PJAK after the Iraqi invasion in 2003, and the activities that the organization carried out especially such

as collecting intelligence in Iran for the other states show that PKK applied variable strategies rather than taking part in the constant alliances order within the equation of Middle East. It is obvious that PYD, taking sides with the Assad regime even if not directly in the process of the beginning of crisis in Syria, has also been supporting this pragmatism. According to the common allegations among the Syrian Kurds for more than a year, a change has been observed in the discourse and approach of PYD, which applies pressure on Kurdish parties joining the opposition on behalf of the Assad regime, for a couple of months. The reconciliation of PYD, which "joined the activities of the Transitional Government and mentioned the end of dictatorship", with the other Kurdish parties; and even the fact that PYD started to send warm messages to FSA from time to time might be shown as an example to this situation.<sup>11</sup> However, neither the other Kurdish parties nor the parties and organisations within SNC believe that PYD has changed. The Syrian opponents declared they would not let the Kurdish parties seize power in certain Kurdish cities and towns, whether it is the efforts of Kurds to establish self-governance regions or it is a part of the move that Assad planned. Since the beginning of the uprising in Syria, the relations of PYD with the Assad regime and Iran have been welcomed neither in Syria nor in concerning Middle Eastern countries or in certain western countries, particularly in the U.S. To sum up, it might be suggested that the cooperation between PKK and KDP is an unnamed and delicate subject at least for now, but also a situation which is becoming increasingly important with each passing day.

### 3.1. Understanding the Strategy of PYD

Today, PYD comes to the forefront as the organization which comes out ahead among Syrian Kurds. This situation is not only caused

by the short-term developments which come out as a result of the relationship between PYD and Assad, or by the weakness of the other organizations. The strategy pursued by PYD can roughly be collected under these headings:

1. PYD has gained strength by acting pragmatically. On one hand not driving a wedge with Assad regime, PYD has been supported by the regime or its way has been cleared on certain issues. For instance, PYD assumed the role of opening institutions such as schools, cultural centers etc. where Kurds are in majority, and the party turned it into a factor in favor of itself. The historical relations between PKK and the Syrian regime, and as a result of the Turkey and Syria's growing away from one another, Damascus facilitated PYD's increasing its influence among Kurds in Syria. For example, following the outbreak of uprisings in Syria, 640 PYD militants in Syrian prisons were released.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, PYD did not act in unison with the opposition, which wants to topple the regime, but on the contrary, it became a major actor in suppressing Syrian Kurds explicitly opposing the Assad regime. Today, the Assad regime and PYD has neither grown away from one another nor they are strategic allies. Assad considers PYD as a means to prevent opponents from creating new areas. The good relations between the Syrian administration and PKK might have paved the way for the current relationship. But probably, the reason why the Assad regime chose PYD is the restrictions of this organization. PYD has been getting negative reactions by the other Arab opposition due to its ideology (thus, democratic autonomy or political rights it demanded for Kurds), and it is quite hard for PYD to receive international support because of Turkey. So that, the Assad regime prefers the Kurdish areas, which are currently under the control of PYD and where new attacks are not planned and carried out

against the regime, rather than the areas, which are under the control of the opposition or Barzani and which will cause more trouble to the regime in the future. Right now, the existence of Kurdish rebel zones in Syria is not very important for Assad as long as these areas do not serve the purpose of the opposition.

2. PYD developed its organization. Other Kurdish organizations, on the other hand, have been rivaling and struggling with each other for leadership. In addition to this, PYD has increased its power in the grassroots, while Syrian opposition groups are clashing with each other regarding which group they should belong to. In order to do so, it took advantage of the parties rivaling with each other within KNC. Furthermore, PYD started to gradually become dominant in the regions where it controls. PYD, which undertook various institutions like school etc., and took part in the elections. Armed troops were formed with weapons provided by the regime or they obtained. Also, it became stronger by benefiting from the experience of armed struggles of PKK militants among Syrian Kurds. It is known that some PKK militants in Iraq have gradually arrived in Syria as of September. Their presence, organization, and armed force restricted the area of other parties. Lastly, contrary to the discursive uncertainty of other parties, the fact that PYD "knows what it wants" turned it into a solution center for some Kurds who did not support PYD in the past.

3. PYD took advantage of the weaknesses in the policies followed by the other Kurdish parties. While KNC could not settle its relations with the other Syrian opposition movements, PYD focused on two main discourses. The first one is that "SNC is a means of Turkey" and therefore it does not even want to recognize the presence of Kurds. Not to speak of recognizing the rights of Kurds, it was even

claimed they wanted to suppress them. The fact that KNC's efforts to establish relationship with SNC in this process, and that it failed strengthened PYD's hands. In SNC conferences, the individual failures of KNC or of the parties affiliated with KNC have strengthened PYD. The reaction of Arab opposition against Kurds and even the leader of the Syrian National Council (SNC) Burhan Ghalioun's stating that "there is no such thing as Syrian Kurdistan"<sup>13</sup>, made it easier for PYD, which is distant to KNC and SNC, to find support among Kurds, whose nationalist awareness is on a considerable rise in Syria. According to the second discourse of PYD, the real enemy is Turkey. In this discourse, Assad regime is described as weak and about to collapse, and therefore it is suggested that the regime won't pose a major threat against Kurds anymore. PYD says that the real threat is Turkey due to its policies developed both against Kurds in its own country and also against Kurds in other countries.<sup>14</sup> Using anti-Turkey discourse has been very effective among Kurds in Syria.

4. PYD has tried to include KDP within the process only as much as it wants. For instance, PYD acted quite cautiously on the presence of peshmergas or on the return of Syrian Kurds who were trained in Erbil. Despite the interpretation regarding that there is a joint Kurdish movement and that it is a major cooperation for the Kurdish case, both actors continue to suspect from the intentions and policies of one another as already mentioned above. PYD doesn't want peshmergas to enter in Syria as it would cause the reaction of Arab opposition as well as the reactions of Iran and Syria. Besides, PYD would not want to lose the advantage of being the only armed force in the regions where Kurds live. However, it strictly refuses the arrival of Peshmergas in Syria, and while highlighting a transboundary cooperation among Kurds by saying "Peshmerga will be called into Syria when needed",

PYD also considers them as a means they can resort to only when needed.<sup>15</sup> To sum up, PYD, which regards KDP or KRG as a means of legitimacy among Syrian Kurds or in the international arena, has resorted to KRG only when needed so far.

5. As from the outbreak of the uprisings in Syria, it has strived to put the democratic autonomy, which is a project put forward by PKK in Turkey, into effect both in discourse and in practice. In order to do so, PYD firstly set to strengthen its structuring among Kurds. It increased the social organization, brought social and political problems to the fore and received more support among the people by taking advantage of the insufficiency of other parties on this issue. And in the second stage, PYD laid emphasis on the message that it is the only power that can protect Kurds in Syria. PYD kept the regions, where Kurdish population is in majority, away from the FSA by making a deal with Assad and in due course PYD seized power also with the support of the Syrian administration. During this period, the fact that other parties did not have armed or similar organizations facilitated PYD's work. One of the most important dimensions of PKK's strategy has been its adjusting itself according to the period that Syrian regime would be toppled. It did not rapidly change sides. It cooperated with the regime for a long period of time. But when it saw that the regime was getting weaker, it embarked on a quest of easily changing sides.

6. One of the most important dimensions of PKK's strategy has been to participate in the elections held in Syria not long ago. Today PYD, which was not considered legitimate across the world and which took part in the elections boycotted by the opposition without taking it seriously, maintains its institutions it calls "People's Council of West Kurdistan" through the positions and roles of people in

local administrations who were elected in the aforesaid elections. Thus, to some extent, it took advantage of the elections held by Assad in order to provide itself with a legitimacy area; and now as the former regime leaves, PYD members, who appear as the elected representatives of the people in those regions or who are displayed so, substitutes the former regime.

7. Another most important dimension of PYD's strategy is the armed groups under its control. These armed forces, which operate under the name of "People's Protection Committees", have served two purposes. While serving as "state" instead of the politicians affiliated with Assad who were sent from the Kurdish settlements, they also served as protectors of the acquisitions obtained since 19 July.

### 3.2. Understanding the Strategy of KDP

The first point that should primarily be highlighted about KDP is the fact that KDP has cautiously but also constantly been supporting Syrian Kurdish movements, and they have been on a quest of expanding their area of influence in the region since the beginning of the uprisings in Syria. Actually, it is known that KDP or other Iraqi Kurdish parties have been following policies to affect the developments in Syria since the 2004 al-Qamishli protests. In fact, it was even suggested in certain publications and the 2004 al-Qamishli protests were carried out with the support of KDP.<sup>16</sup> Behind this approach of KDP lies the understanding that Iraqi Kurds cannot stand idle by the other Kurdish movements and struggles in the Middle East, as already mentioned for many times after the formation of KRG. Therefore, KDP, which has been playing an active role in political struggle of Syrian Kurds since 1950s, cannot be expected to keep silent and stand idle by this current

atmosphere in Syria. The strategy of KDP within this period of time can be outlined as follows:

1. KDP has strived to have an influence over the Kurdish parties, and gathered them under a single roof to eliminate their organizational weaknesses. The long-term struggle among Syrian Kurdish parties mentioned above created a strong division among the leaders of these parties or their grassroots. As a matter of fact, most of the Kurdish parties took part in the organizations of the Syrian opponents independently from each others and they could not display a common stance. KDP, which was aware of the weakness of these parties and observed that their areas of influence were getting limited with each passing day, held meeting to gather Syrian Kurdish parties and made a great effort to form a joint institution. KNC, which was formed on October 2011, was created with the efforts of KDP to a large extent.

2. KDP organized Kurds who escaped from Syria to Northern Iraq. It is known that approximately 9000 of Kurds, affected by the uprisings in Syria, currently live in a camp created for them in Duhok city of Northern Iraq. There are both humanitarian aspects and political aspects of the migration from Syria to Northern Iraq. As a matter of fact, the senior authorities announced that KRG has been training Syrian Kurds in military terms in the recent weeks and that they would send them back to Syria.

3. KDP strived to restrict the influence of PYD among Syrian Kurds, and continued this struggle through the parties close to itself for a long time. The historical rivalry between KDP and PKK carried on in Syria for a long time. It might be suggested that this situation explicitly carried on until recently, and that it will probably continue in the future as well.

Nevertheless, it is seen that as of June, KDP has stopped fighting against PKK in Syria and turned towards cooperation. As its causes have already been mentioned above, it will not be repeated here.

4. As KDP thought that what matters is creating a Kurdish area in Syria when convinced that the regime in Syria was coming to an end, KDP supported the last move of Syrian Kurds by knowing that it would probably be under the control of PYD. Furthermore, it made a particular effort to reconcile the Kurdish parties which came into conflict with each other in this process.

5. It can be suggested that there are three reasons why KDP supports the formation of a Kurdish region in Syria which might not be completely under its own area of influence under current circumstances. Above all, when Assad regime is toppled, this kind of region will provide an explicit advantage for Kurds and it will also help them with sitting on the negotiation table with power in the restructuring process in Damascus. Probably KDP assumes that creating this kind of Kurdish region would be more difficult after the Assad regime is toppled. Based on its historical experience in Iraq, KDP might also think that the biggest advantage in the post-Saddam Hussein period was having a Kurdish region in Northern Iraq before the change of regime. On the other hand, many people including KDP believe that the post-Assad Syria will be split or divided into cantons. Besides, even if Kurds' having their own region does not let them create a separate region, Kurds will have a structure, based on which they know what they want in the new Syrian constitution and which they could have explicit demands.

6. Ultimately, KDP has a significant advantage over PYD or PKK. This advantage is both the fact that they have a strong economic re-

source it can support with the oil incomes, and also its legitimacy in the international area. Today, everybody is aware of the severe economic problems, the lack of basic products or the fact that they are too expensive in the areas with Kurdish population, as well as in the rest of Syria. The fact that KDP is the main resource providing basic necessities for the areas controlled by Kurds will be a source of great respect and support among Syrian Kurds for KDP. Therefore, this logistic and economic support which can be provided by KDP is strong enough to turn the views of people to the opposite way in the long term, even though PYD is now in control through various means. Besides, no matter which movement Syrian Kurds support today, they will see in the near future that it is actually KDP which can normalize the region they live in and which can provide a development and help them find a place in new Syria. Therefore, it might be suggested that the visible cooperation between KDP and PYD has already been continuing for years and that it is an extension of its careful and efficient policy, and that it addresses the problem in a longer-term.

### **3.3. Timing of the Agreement between KNC and PYD, and Fruits of Cooperation**

The timing of the agreement signed between PYD and KNC is quite interesting. The meeting, which brought Kurds together, was held after the lack of agreement between KNC and SNC during the meeting KNC participated in Cairo in early July. The Syrian Kurdish parties which could not reach an agreement with SNC in the Cairo meeting carried out following the meeting held in İstanbul in April quit the meeting in Cairo as they did in İstanbul.<sup>17</sup> The reason why Kurds quit the meeting in Cairo is the fact that KNC has demanded written assurances from opposition groups about Kurdish recognition should Assad's regime fall, as well as demanding guarantees

that Syria's Kurds will have a decentralised state that permits them self-determination; and these demands voiced by Syrian Kurds many times before were rejected by Arabs for suspicions that the Kurds' real goal is to create an independent state.<sup>18</sup> Right after these developments, PYD declared its support for a transitional government in Syria, and announced that it ended its implicit support for the Assad administration. In fact, PYD leader Salih Muslim put forward that Kurds should be a part of the transitional government due to the fact that they have been in the opposition front.<sup>19</sup>

In such an atmosphere, a meeting was held in Erbil, on 11 June 2012 under the supervision of KRG. During this meeting, a joint session of the Kurdish National Council and the People's Council of West Kurdistan took place, and they signed a 7-article agreement. The articles of this agreement can be listed as follows:

1. Establish a joint Supreme Committee of both councils to coordinate political and diplomatic work as well as to develop a unified political objective. This objective will be based on the immutable values of the Kurdish people as a nation and ethnicity in Syria and should work towards the overthrow of the dictatorship in Damascus, the construction of a democratic, pluralistic state, and the creation of a new Syria with many ethnicities. This new Syria will satisfy the aspirations of our people by recognizing its existence as an original people in the constitution. The Kurdish question must be solved democratically.
2. Create a mechanism to put the Erbil Agreement into practice.
3. Establish a Supreme Organizational Committee of both councils to coordinate practical work in the field in all regions.

4. Establish subcommittees to coordinate practical work in the field in the individual regions.

5. Cease all propaganda activities.

6. Abolish all forms of armed presence in the Kurdish regions and communities.

7. Establish joint, unarmed protection committees.

8. Establish joint mediation committees to solve social conflicts. These committees should be the highest responsible authority in such matters.<sup>20</sup>

Although an agreement was signed between the two main groups, it is seen that the agreement was not immediately put into practice. The battle of words carried on between the both parties, and PYD's pressure on KNC members also continued. The tension that lasted throughout June between the parties hit the top on 3 July. During the fight that broke out when PYD tried to stop some protestors who wanted to stage a demonstration in Afrin on 29 June, a PYD militant was injured. Right after that, the houses of other Kurds who injured the PYD militant were raided, and Hannan Naasan and Abdülhasan Ali, who were alleged to be related to FSA, and a PYD member Ahmet Cekdar were killed. In addition to this, the houses and cars of the anti-PYD family and relatives were set on fire. As a result of this, while KNC and other accused PYD of attacking against Kurds, PYD accused KNC of leaking information to FSA and to Kurds cooperating with Turkey. In the following days, the attacks carried on and led to a series of acts of violence.<sup>21</sup> Then a group called Salah-ad Din Brigades affiliated with FSA stated that they would target those who are against the Syrian revolution, and that PKK kidnapped Kurdish youth. Stating they have

kept away from the events in order to prevent any internal conflict among Kurds so far, the group announced they would take part in it henceforward.

While KNC suggested that the reason why the agreement that was signed on 11 June could not be put into practice was that PYD did not meet the requirements of the agreement and that PYD carried on its pressure and arrest policy on Kurds who are the members of other parties; PYD argued that the agreement signed on 11 June could not be out into practice due to the fact that all parties did not sign it. In fact, PYD accused Azadi party member Mustafa Juma and Salah Bedreddin of supporting FSA and of cooperating with Turkey.<sup>22</sup>

It is seen that KDP took it in the hand as the consecutive events unveiled the existing conflict among Kurdish groups. As a matter of fact, thereupon, Massoud Barzani invited the representatives of party to Erbil and on 12 July 2012, the Kurdish National Council (KNC) and the People's Assembly of Western Kurdistan (PCWK) signed a new agreement in Erbil, under the auspices of Kurdistan President Massoud Barzani. Actually this agreement is similar to the earlier seven-point treaty signed on June 11 between the parties which had failed to be implemented by both sides.

In a joint statement released on July 12, the KNC and the People's Assembly thanked their "Kurdish brothers" in Iraq and President Barzani for support, adding that "we promise our Kurdish people to do everything with the Syrian people and democratic forces to bring down the system and build a democratic country." During the meeting held on 12 July, the PYD and other Kurdish parties decided to create a security committee to take responsibility of Kurdish areas in Syria, a joint foreign relations committee to deal with the Syrian

opposition and international community and a coordination committee of 10 members. A point of contention that remains is the presence of armed PYD members, while other Kurdish parties have no armed forces.<sup>23</sup>

As also foreseen in this treaty, it was declared that Kurds seized power in Kobani on 19 July, a week after the treaty was signed.<sup>24</sup> According to the treaty of Erbil which was signed by the KNC and PYD, any administrative vacuum in the Kurdish cities of Syria would be occupied evenly -- 50/50 -- by these two signatories, and these two groups would continue ruling the Kurdish regions until an election is carried out. It was seen that after the Assad regime withdrew its forces, the city that was alleged to be seized by Kurdish parties was actually seized by PYD. In fact, the political parties within KNC also revealed that the Syrian regime informed the PYD about their withdrawal in advance, so that the group knew beforehand which cities the forces would be leaving.<sup>25</sup>

It was declared that Kurds seized power in Kobani (Ayn al-Arab), in Afrin city center and Cinderes town on 20 July, Derik (al-Malikiyah) and Amuda (Amudah) on 21 July, in Sancak under the administration of Tirbespî (Kahtaniyah) on 23 July, Til Ziwan and Til Cihan villages and Girke Lege (Maabad) under the administration of al-Hasakah. However, it is seen that the majority of these areas, where PYD already seize power and it does not let other Kurdish parties gain strength. For instance, as it can be seen in the list of demonstrations that you can find in the Appendix, only PYD could stage demonstrations whenever they want in Afrin and Kobani for a long time; and other initiatives have been prevented. In Derik, on the other hand, it is observed that PYD has organized attacks in demonstrations participating on behalf of other groups especially in the recent months.

Although Afrin and Kobani have been seized; al-Qamisli, which has both symbolic and strategic importance for Kurds, is not under the control of Kurds. Even though PYD leader Salih Muslim declared they expected the handover of the city in a short while, this expectation has not been met despite the past 10 days after the first wave.<sup>26</sup> Probably the most important reason is the fact that the Syrian regime did not withdraw its forces from Qamishli, despite the fact that the regime voluntarily withdrew its forces from other regions. Although there is no Kurdish armed groups in Qamishli, they could not take the risk of an armed conflict with the regime forces. There might be two reasons: The first one is that there is no guarantee for their victory in case they fight against Assad's armed forces. And the second is that, Kurds' efforts to create their own region by using a military force might draw more reaction by the Arab opposition. So far, it has been observed that the Syrian regime has voluntarily left all the settlements where Kurds seized power. According to the statements, the city officials withdrew from these cities as it was guaranteed that the administrations of these cities, towns and villages would be handed over to Kurds and that nobody would be hurt in case Kurds are released and officials leave the settlements.

As a matter of fact, after Kurds started to seize power settlements, the only conflict took place in Qamishli. The armed groups, which were formed as a result of the reconciliation between KNC and PYD and which changed their name into People's Protection Force (HPG and YPG in Kurdish) clashed with Syrian security forces. Although two HPG members were injured in the conflict, the conflict was prevented before it further expanded. This situation shows that the Assad administration did not want to leave a strategic point like Qamishli, while it with-

drew from "insignificant" places for the Assad regime. As Kurds knew that conflicting would mean inviting FSA, they did not attempt to seize this region by fighting against the regime at least for now. It might be suggested that there are 4 reasons why the Assad regime has not left Qamishli so far: First of all, Qamishli is more important than other regions because it is close to oil fields. Secondly, PYD already seized power all other regions seized by Kurds, but in Qamishli, there is a relative balance among KNC, PYD and Arabs. When Assad administration withdraws from here, it is highly likely that Qamishli will not be directly controlled by PYD, thus in the long term it is even possible that SNC can infiltrate the region through KNC. Thirdly, in case Assad regime withdraws from Qamishli, this city will be the real influence area of Iraqi Kurds. And this is the last thing the Assad regime would want. The fourth and the last reason is that there are many Arab tribes, which have been placed in the area since 1970s and which consider Kurds as the real threat and thus which cooperate with the regime. It is highly probable that they will take sides with FSA in order to fight against Kurds in case their withdrawal from Qamishli.

All in all, between the dates 19-23 July 2012, certain important cities and smaller settlements in northern Syria, where Kurds are in majority, were seized by the alliance formed in 12 July. Then, it was declared that High Council for Western Kurdistan was created as a result of the meeting carried out between KNC and People's Assembly in Qamishli on 25 July. There are 10 people (5 from KNC, and 5 from PYD) in this council, created in accordance with the Erbil Agreement. The members of the council from KNC can be listed as follows: Ahmet Süleyman (former leader of KNC), Siud Mele, İsmail Hame (current leader of KNC), Nasreddin İbrahim (SKDP leader) and Muhiddin Sheikh Ali (Kurdish Demo-

cratic Union Party in Syria); and the members of the council from PYD can be listed as follows: Aldar Celil (Tev-Dem), Ronahi Delil, Salih Muslim (PYD co-chair), Sinem Mohammad and Abdulsalam Ahmad. However, this unity and solidarity messages among Kurds turned into criticisms in a short period of time. The leaders of KNC's prominent parties explicitly alleged that PYD did not adhere to the Erbil Agreement and that it monopolized all the regions. While the SKDP leader Abdulhakm Bashar and the current leader of KNC Ismail Hame explicitly criticized this issue, they even claimed that Kurdish regions are not totally out of regime's control.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, in current situation, it is seen that the alliance among Kurdish parties soon turned into reciprocal criticisms and that the power struggle among parties have not ended.

### Conclusion

In Syria, there is a Kurdish movement which has been going on for a long time, which has its own internal dynamics and which has been affected by the regional developments. Considering different actors of this movement, it is seen that most of them are not well-organized powerful parties. The parties, almost all of which are leader-oriented, are dissolved in a short period of time because of the conflicts within the parties, and "new" parties are formed with bearing the same names. Most of these parties have different views regarding the future of Syrian regime and the demands of Kurds. Nevertheless, in the recent period, there is an effort to have a joint opinion especially within KNC. But contrary to KNC, PYD

seems much more prepared both in terms of organization and also in terms of its political goals.

Considering the social, political, geographic and demographic structures of the region, it is not possible for Syrian Kurds to establish an independent state even if the Assad regime changes in short and medium term. On the other hand, the developments taking place after 19 July show that a Kurdish region can be created in Syria, and that this region can have an autonomous or federal structure. It is quite normal for Kurds, who have been under pressure for a long time like the other peoples living in Syria, to demand more freedoms and directly participating in political structure in new Syria. Therefore, it is important for other Syrian opposition groups to act in unison with Kurdish movements so far. As long as Syrian Kurds continue to be alienated by the Arab opposition movements, Kurdish parties either have to become radicalized or have to leave the place to PYD. The attitude of Arab opposition organizations is of vital importance both in order to keep Kurds within the system in Syria, and also in order not create an atmosphere that would give damage to Turkey.

Turkey should develop direct and indirect relations with Kurds in Syria. During this process of developing relationship, it is necessary to increase the dialogue. If Turkey wants to prevent further expansion of PKK's influence among Kurds in Syria, it is necessary to integrate Syrian Kurds into the Syrian political system in a proper way.

## APPENDIX : INTERVIEWS WITH THE SYRIAN KURDISH PARTY OFFICIALS

### 1. INTERVIEW WITH ABDULBAKI YOUSSEF, MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO OF THE KURDISH UNION (YEKITI) PARTY

*The Kurdish Union Party, which is one of the most important and active parties among Kurds in Syria, further comes to the fore in the recent period. We talked to Abdulbaki Youssef, member of the politburo of the party which is one of the most important parties of the Kurdish National Council and which is known as Yekiti in short.*

#### **ORSAM: Could you introduce yourself and your party?**

**Abdulbaki Youssef:** My name is Abdulbaki Youssef. I am a member of politburo of the Kurdish Union Party and representative of KRG. Our party was created with the union of three parties in 1992. The end of the Cold War created a need to form a new party. People who made a move with a different struggle method in regard to this need formed this party. We believed we could reach our goal through a civil disturbance. Therefore, we have been struggling for the rights of Kurds in Syria since 1992. Since then, 358 members of our party have been put in prison. We staged a demonstration in front of the Syrian Parliament in 2002. We demanded a new economic and political road map in Syria. We stated that we aimed a peaceful and democratic solution of the Kurdish Problem within the frame of the unity of Syria, and that we demanded the release of our intellectuals. Even during that period, we stated our goal to solve the problems in Syria through peaceful and democratic means. Our party preferred to reach a consensus like a round table. Therefore, our leadership changes depending on the period.

I was the secretary general of the party between 2000 and 2003. The current secretary general of our party is İsmail Hami. Currently, our party is a member of the Kurdish National Council in Syria.

#### **ORSAM: What does your party expect and wish for the future of Kurds?**

**Youssef:** There is an important transition period ahead of Syria. The Syrian government could not successfully manage the central administration. We believe that the future Syria should be democratic. In the future, all the ethnic groups in Syria should be in unity, and a constitutional and decentralized system should be adopted. As for the Kurdish Problem; we ask for the Kurdish identity to be recognized in the constitution, as well as a structure that Kurds and Arabs are recognized equally. We demand the self-governance of Kurdish population in the regions where they are in majority. We do not want the administration of an Arab from Damascus or Dar'aa in the regions with the majority of Kurdish population.

#### **ORSAM: Do you believe that the current protests can topple the Bashar Assad regime?**

**Youssef:** It is not enough on its own, but it might be an important factor. The uprisings would play the most important role in toppling the regime. But the major roles to be assumed by regional powers and powerful states would be quite important. Right now, we are on the verge of a civil war in Syria. As the government use weapon against the people, the people started to defend themselves. The current conflicts seem like a civil war. It is highly likely that this conflict will turn into a sectarian war in the future.

**ORSAM: In such an atmosphere, where would Kurds put themselves?**

**Youssef:** This kind of situation is terrible for all groups in Syria. If such a civil war breaks out, the countries in the region and the external forces further involve in this process. We do not want a civil war and also we believe that it would be good to prepare a structure to protect demonstrators. In order to do so, it would be good if international powers join their forces and create a safe zone. Most probably Turkey would play the major role in creating such a buffer zone. States like Iraq and Jordan are not in a position to assume this role. Turkey, on the other hand, is an important state and also a NATO member.

**ORSAM: We see that many parties have been created among Kurds in Syria. Why?**

**Youssef:** Syria has played a very important role on parties as a security state. A great number of parties have been created due to the lack of democracy and the attitude of authoritarian regime. However, currently the majority of these parties have united within the Kurdish National Council.

**ORSAM: What do you think about the relations between Kurdish and Arab opposition?**

**Youssef:** In Syria, the regime did not let emergence of opposition for many years. The regime let opponents languish in prisons. It did not even let any opposition party have an office. Therefore all the opposition parties only have their names. Their concrete existence is quite weak. Dictatorial policies of the regime suppressed the opposition movements. As Kurds, our situation is a little different. Because the more the government applied pressure on us, the more the people supported us. The structure in Syria has always tried to indoctrinate its mentality to the people by force.

Kurds have been strived to be displayed as the enemy of Arabs from past to present. There has been an effort to cause fear regarding that Kurds want to divide Syria. Therefore, some groups among the people have been imbued with thoughts against us. They expected us to give up our identity and to say that we are Arab. But we never accepted that. Thus, we had difficulty to come to terms with the Arab opposition movements in the past. Nevertheless, some Arabs ö the uprising today even write their banners in Kurdish. Even some groups in Homs and Dar'aa support us.

**ORSAM: How is the relationship between the two different opposition councils?**

**Youssef:** I am a founder of Syrian National Council. We want these two Councils to reach an agreement and create a joint road map.

**ORSAM: Is this going to be a political and diplomatic partnership? Or could there also be a military partnership?**

**Youssef:** A military partnership is not on the agenda.

**ORSAM: What do you think about Turkey's policy on Syria?**

**Youssef:** Turkey is a big power and a neighboring country. First of all, Turkey's Syrian policy had a major impact on the Syrian people. In the uprisings, Turkish flag was kept flying during the uprisings. There as a great support for the statements of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Nevertheless, it might be suggested that Turkey's influence has been on the decline in the recent period. Beforehand, Turkey stated that they considered the Syrian issue as their own internal problem, and that they would not let the people get killed. But despite the fact that a great number of Syrians were killed a couple of days ago, there wasn't a strong reaction. Therefore, it can be suggested that Turkey's influence has decreased.

**ORSAM: Thank you.**

## 2. INTERVIEW WITH BEHCET BASHIR RESOUL, NORTHERN IRAQ REPRESENTATIVE OF KURDISTAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF SYRIA (AL PARTY: “NO-FLY ZONE CAN BE IMPLEMENTED BUT WE DO NOT WANT MILITARY FORCE IN THE REGION”

The Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria, which was established in Iraq in 1957, has witnessed split for a few times. The party, in the leadership of Nasreddin Ibrahim who is one of the prominent figures among the ones leaving the party where leadership struggle has intensified in recent years, still continues its existence under the same name. We made an interview with Behcet Bashir Rasoul, who is the Northern Iraq representative of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria Al Party that is a part of the Kurdish National Council.

**ORSAM: Could you introduce yourself and your party?**

**Behcet Bashir Rasoul:** My name is Behcet Bashir Rasoul. I am the Northern Iraq representative of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria Al Party. Our party was established in 1957. It is the first Kurdish party established in Syria. However, some splits took place within the party later on. Today, the leader of our party is Nasreddin Ibrahim. The main principles of our party is secularism and democracy. Our main goal is to bring democracy to Syria, and to live in peace with religious groups in a democratic atmosphere. Our party is a member of the Syrian Kurdish National Council.

**ORSAM: Where is the Syria’s future heading?**

**Rasoul:** The Syrian forces still continue to use force against the uprising. Currently, the Syrian government is not paying attention to the

suggestions of the officials who already fulfilled their duties or of the neighboring countries. The Syrian regime has been carrying on massacring by using its military force. If it continues so, the Syrian regime will destroy itself. The only fact is that; the Syrian people will not give up on their rights and they will continue to seek their rights up to the end. No matter how much loss takes place among the Syrian people, they will carry on uprising. At the end, the Syrian people will certainly win the victory.

**ORSAM: According to your party, how can the problems of Syrian Kurds be solved?**

**Rasoul:** When KUK (National Liberation of Kurdistan) was in the formation process in Syria, as party, we also had certain demands within the frame of this Council. After the Council was formed, we have been following the decisions taken within the scope of this aforesaid institution. The KUK’s most important demand of all is to give the rights of the Kurdish people within the frame of the integrity of Syria. After the regime is toppled, we believe that, most probably, a new referendum will be held. Here, the demands of the Kurdish people will be determined. However, I can tell that these demands will be within the frame of the territorial integrity of Syria. Therefore, we want other dissident parties to already explicitly determine their demands, and thus, we want to prevent any damage against Syria’s territorial integrity. I want to point out an important issue. We have seen the experiences that Iraqi and Iranian Kurds went through. For instance, during the Khomeini period, Kurds were also among the group uprising against Shah. However, when Khomeini came to power, he left the promises he had given to Kurds aside, and excluded them from the government. Likewise, the Iraqi Kurdish also went through a similar experience. Therefore, what we say to the Syrian opposition is that:

We are also a part of the Syrian opposition, but we want our rights to be already identified as constitutional rights.

**ORSAM: If the Bashar Assad regime is toppled, what kind of regime do you want for the Kurdish?**

**Rasoul:** If the Assad regime is toppled, the Kurdish will either demand for federalism or for autonomous region. This autonomous region might be like the Kurdistan Regional Government. We are in favor of federal district, because as far as we can see, federal district is a more successful experience.

**ORSAM: How are the relations between the Syrian National Council and the Kurdish National Council?**

**Rasoul:** Recently, there has been a significant improvement in our relations. We continue our talks with the Syrian National Council led by Burhan Galyun. Nevertheless, we cannot suggest that we have come to an exact agreement. We have two major problems with them: First of all, they want us to be the members of the Syrian National Council; we, on the other hand, want the continuation of KUK. While carrying on our entity, we hope to come to an agreement with other opposition groups as well. Thus, we want to topple this aforesaid regime and also to stop shedding blood.

We would prefer the Syrian National Council to further care about the rights of the Kurdish, but they have not gotten rid of the Ba'athist mentality yet. We, Syrian Kurds, have struggled with this regime all along, and we have experienced a great number of losses. Nevertheless, we see that there is still a similar mentality with our fight in the past. We want Syria to be a democratic, decentralized, and parliamentary country, other than this mentality.

**ORSAM: Do you believe that the Bashar Assad regime can be toppled through the current demonstrations or through the armed struggle conducted? Or will an international intervention be required to change the regime?**

**Rasoul:** This regime should have changed long time ago. Nevertheless, tortures, oppressions and other maltreatments had prevented people's uprising by the intelligence and security forces. Because of these oppressions, the Kurdish people raise against the regime on 12 March 2004. Through this uprising, the Kurdish keep the regions they live in under control. However, we could keep them under control only for a week, as other nations did not cooperate with us. The regime took the control of these regions again by resorting to force, and we lost 40 of our young people and 450-500 people were injured, while 5000 people were taken into custody. At the same time, the Syrian regime started to place an embargo on us, and because of that, some 600000 Kurds were forced to migrate to Damascus and Aleppo. People had to leave their homes. The same also happened to our Arab fellows living in Hama in 1980. During those years, thousands of people were killed, and tens of thousands of people were arrested. After many years passed and the Arab Spring reached the region, the Syrian could overcome their fear as a result of this situation. Therefore, uprising started almost in every region, and nobody cares about the losses anymore. Uprising turned into a struggle of honor. None of the neighboring countries or other countries has provoked us. However, we thank the neighboring countries as they help us and host our migrants.

**ORSAM: Nowadays, news about the creation of a buffer zone have been published on the international media. What do you think about the creation of this kind of area?**

**Rasoul:** We demand for a protection for the rebels, from the neighboring countries and other countries; but we are against the intervention in Syria's domestic affairs. Because if a military intervention takes place, baby will be thrown out with the bathwater. However, we want neighboring countries to protect the Syrian people, to help them and to apply pressure on Syrian regime. If a safe zone is created as the UN implemented in Iraq in the past, we will also agree with it. Nevertheless, we accept this safe zone on one condition. No-fly zone can be implemented, but we do not want military force in the region.

**ORSAM: How long will the Bashar Assad regime be able to continue?**

**Rasoul:** The reason why the current regime can still resist is because of the aids provided by the external supporters. These supporters are Russia, China, Iran, and Hezbollah. If these military and financials aids had not been provided, the power would not have survived. But we see that except for a few regions, the power has no strength anymore. With each passing day, more and more region is getting out of Syrian regime's control. However, we do not see any realistic support from world public opinion on Syria.

**ORSAM: In Arbil, a meeting gathering the majority of the Kurdish opposition was held. However, some Kurdish parties did not attend in this congress. Thus, we see that all Syrian Kurds do not act in unison either. How do Syrian Kurds think they can solve this problem?**

**Rasoul:** This congress was for the Kurdish living outside Syria. It was not a political congress. Kurdish migrants from Syria living in 25 countries took part in the congress. Our primary objective was to find answers to the questions such as; how this uprising can be

supported, and how the Kurdish opposition can have wider media coverage. Therefore, we invited all parties to this congress. Nevertheless, some parties did not take part in this meeting. The most important of all was PYD (Democratic Union Party). In the congress, parties' taking the decision of joining their policies within the frame of KUK was a very significant gain.

**ORSAM: Thank you.**

\* This interview was carried out in Arbil, on 11 February 2012.

### **3. INTERVIEW WITH ALI SHEMDIN, REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN KURDISH DEMOCRATIC PROGRESSIVE PARTY: "WE WANT SELF-GOVERNANCE OF KURDS IN THEIR AUTONOMOUS ZONES IN SYRIA"**

In Syria, which has entered in the process of a serious change since March 2011, one of the most important dimensions is the attitude, organization and expectations of Syrian Kurds. Therefore, opinions and policies of the Kurdish parties in Syria are of particular importance. One of the most significant parties of Syrian Kurds, with many parties, is the Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party. Therefore, we talked to Shemdin Ali, the Northern Iraq representative of the party led by Abdulhamid Hadji Dervish who is the prominent political figure of Syrian Kurds.

**ORSAM: Could you introduce yourself and your party to us?**

**Ali Shemdin:** My name is Ali Shemdin. I am the senior official of Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria and its representative in Kurdistan Regional Government. Abdulhamid Dervish, leader of our party, is also one of the founders of Kurdistan Democratic Party

of Syria (KDPS) established on 14 June 1957. Since the first day of our party's foundation, we have been fighting for establishing peace and democracy in Syria. What we demand from Syria is that; as the second largest nation in number (approximately more than 3.5 million) in Syria following Arabs, we have been fighting for ending the Ba'athist dictatorship. We want to adopt a parliamentary and democratic system in Syria. In the future constitution of Syria, we ask for autonomy in order to defend the rights of Kurds.

**ORSAM: Does the autonomy you have mentioned include a right as in Iraq?**

**Shemdin:** Federalism is not for us. We do not want a federalism with institutions such as parliament. In order to establish a democratic, pluralist and parliamentary system in Syria, Kurds should be recognized in the new constitution. We want Kurds to govern themselves in their own regions. This should be within the frame of a decentralized political system original to Syria, not within the frame of a federal system like in Iraq. A system close to federalism, but not exactly federalism. We believe that our situation is different from the one in Kurdish Regional Government. As Kurdish parties, we want to govern ourselves in Kurdish regions in Syria. It might be considered as a kind of autonomy. The new government would not accept federalism. To sum up, we aim at a regime that we govern the Kurdish regions ourselves; and in country-wide, a regime that Kurds participate in government in proportion to their populations. Besides, we want Syria's incomes to be transferred to the regions, where Kurds live, as well. We ask for cultural, social and political rights as the second largest nation in Syria. Kurds should be provided with the right to education in their native language. Creating a region is not on our agenda.

**ORSAM: Is that because Kurds live in different regions in Syria?**

**Shemdin:** In Syria, Kurds live in Haseke and Jazira located in Turkey's borderline. In addition to this, they also live in Afrin and Kobani, a part of Aleppo. Thus, there are three Kurdish regions. Haseke-Jazira is a region, Afrin is another, and Kobani is another region. The majority of the Kurdish population live in those regions. Therefore, what you said is partially true. But there are other reasons as well.

**ORSAM: Do you believe that Bashar Assad regime can make reform? Or, is a new system adopted only if the current regime is toppled?**

**Shemdin:** The opportunity that the reform could be achieved was missed 4 months ago. The regime had a chance to make reform, but the opportunity could not be used. The Syrian people, Arab League and international community gave chance to the regime for many times, but the regime could not use it.

**ORSAM: The Assad regime tried to take positive steps towards Kurds. The regime gave identities, but wasn't it sufficient?**

**Shemdin:** The regime promised, but did not take concrete steps. It is true that it made some things right as propaganda, but not in practice. What the regime actually did was to try to cut the relations between the Kurdish and Arab opposition. The reason why the regime gave those identities was not to give Kurds their rights, but to try to cut their relations with Arabs. The Kurdish nation understands the politics in Syria best. They have major experiences. Because they have been living in oppression under a tyrannical regime for a half century. Kurds understand how the regime implements its own plans.

**ORSAM: Do you believe that the Bashar Assad regime can be toppled through current demonstrations?**

**Shemdin:** We have no doubt that Bashar Assad will be toppled. The question is that when it will be toppled. There are various scenarios on how the regime will be toppled. Nevertheless, which scenario is right is not certain yet. Assad has tried to solve the problem through military methods from the very beginning. The Syrian people, on the other hand, have been determined not to give up until they save their honors and gain freedom from the very beginning. I do not know how the uprising will end. But it is for sure that Bashar Assad will not be able to rule the country as he did in the past. Over 7000 people have been blatantly killed. And thousands of people are in prison.

**ORSAM: Do you believe that opponents can topple the regime through demonstrations or by attacking against the Syrian army?**

**Shemdin:** Armed struggle is the biggest threat that will cause Syria to become paralyzed. Bashar Assad has been striving to bring the country to this stage. International silence and the fact that people are killed everyday forces people to be armed and to defend themselves.

**ORSAM: Which one is worse; toppling the regime through international intervention, or through armed conflict?**

**Shemdin:** The best way is that Bashar Assad leaves power voluntarily. We do not want to witness a civil war. The international powers can involve in the process through legal channels and through UN. However, if great powers intervene in the developments in Syria, it won't be a good solution. We want developments to take place under the supervision of UN.

**ORSAM: Do you want a solution like the Arab League Plan?**

**Shemdin:** It should be like Libya and Egypt, Iraq was not successful. The decision of Arab League buys extra time for Bashar Assad. The best solution is to send Syria's file to UN and to create a safe haven. After that, the Syrian army will be divided into two. Thus, what I mean is that the whole Syrian army is not in favor of the regime. However, if safe haven is created, that alters the case. There are major disagreements within the Syrian army. Nevertheless, there is no place they can leave the army and conduct their operations.

**ORSAM: The majority of the Kurdish movements in Syria ask for change of the Assad regime, but the number of demonstrations is less compared to the other regions. What is the reason?**

**Shemdin:** This is not a correct information. It is not right to relate deaths with the number of demonstrations. The number of our demonstrations is not insufficient, but it cannot kill people as it wants, because we are powerful in our region. As Kurds are civilized and can handle controlling their demonstrations, less problem comes out in demonstrations. Besides, Kurds are the biggest opposition. Because the Kurdish movement is more organized in terms of organizing people. The regime wants to keep Kurds out of this game. We had been busy with organizing the voice of Kurds for the last 10 months. I can happily say that we achieved it. The first Kurdish congress was held in Syria, on 26 October 2011. This congress is called the Syrian Kurdish National Congress. 254 people and 11 parties attended this meeting. In addition to this, organizations such as youth union also took part in the meeting.

**ORSAM: Was the conference held in Arbil helpful? Did it reach its goal?**

**Shemdin:** I am one of the organizers of this conference. The objective of the congress was to gather all Kurdish forces outside, to put them in order, and to carry actions to a higher level. It was aimed to bring all different groups together, and generally, to enable them to contribute to the revolution in Syria and then to support the Kurdish opposition likewise. The congress lasted for 2 days between 28-29 January 2011. There were 254 participants from 27 countries. In addition to the political parties, groups such as the representative of Youth and Women's Union also took part in the meeting. Representatives from 27 different countries participated. A declaration was issued after the congress finished. Therefore, I believe the congress was successful. It was the second congress after the congress in Qamishli. The Congress in Qamishli aimed at bringing the forces in Syria together, and the Congress in Arbil aimed at bringing the forces abroad together. As Mr. Massoud Barzani stated in the last meeting, a great Kurdish Congress is planned to be held soon. During this meeting, all Kurdish forces will be brought together and discourses of Kurds will be united. I do not know if it will be successful or not.

**ORSAM: How is the relation between the Kurdish opposition and other Syrian dissident parties?**

**Shemdin:** Our relations are getting better. None of the opposition group in Syria can be successful on its own. Comparing the activities of the Arab opposition and Kurdish opposition since the beginning of the events, it is seen that Arabs have not worked in coordination. Among many different formations, only the Muslim Brotherhood worked in an organized manner. They escaped abroad from Syria

following the big damage they went through in 1980's. The Arab opposition strived to be able to become a coordinated organization within the last 10 months. As a result of these conferences, the Syrian National Council (SNC) was created in the leadership of Burhan Ghalioun. While the Muslim Brotherhood is more powerful within this formation, Arab nationalists are more powerful within the country. And they created the National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change led by Hassan Abdulazim. These two groups pioneered the Arab opposition. On the other hand, we wanted to lead the Kurdish opposition and we achieved. So that, there are 3 major opposition groups: SNC, National Coordination Committee for Democratic Change and Kurdish National Council (KNC). Our opinion became more clear after the Qamishli Congress. This regime should be toppled. We will never reconcile with Bashar Assad. However, if all the dissident parties come together and talk to Assad, then we also take part in this meeting. We have always carried out meetings, but Arabs have not recognized the rights of Kurds yet. As the Kurdish Bloc, we ask for change, but we do not accept all kinds of change. We want a change that will accord rights to Kurds. Our leader, Abdulhamid Dervish, convened with Burhan Ghalioun and Hassan Abdulazim in Cairo and also with Arab League Secretary General Nabil al-Arabi not long ago. All of them stated they do not want a change without Kurds. Basically, the fundamental right given to Kurds is citizenship. SNC indicated that they will support enacting the Article to recognize Kurds as the second nation in the constitution. And Kurds agreed they could play a new role in the new democratic regime. Nevertheless, as Kurds, we demand Syria to recognize the autonomy of Kurds within the frame of the unity of Syria. We have good relations with them, but they have not totally recognized the rights

of Kurds. This is for sure that change cannot take place in Syria without Kurds. Although there are many Kurdish parties, they could be a union. However, it does not go for Arabs.

**ORSAM: Thank you.**

*\* This interview was carried out in Sulaymaniyah, on 5 February 2012.*

#### **4. INTERVIEW WITH MAHMOUD ALI MUHAMMAD, NORTHERN IRAQ REPRESENTATIVE OF KURDISH DEMOCRATIC UNION PARTY: "WE WANT AUTONOMY FOR KURDS IN SYRIA"**

Kurdish opposition movement in Syria is composed of many prominent figures. One of the significant parties among Syrian Kurds that dissidences have created wide range of parties is Kurdish Democratic Union Party. Therefore, we talked to Mahmoud Ali Muhammed, Northern Iraq representative of this party.

**ORSAM: Could you introduce yourself and your party?**

**Mahmoud Ali Muhammed:** My name is Mahmoud Ali Muhammed. I am a member of the politburo of the Kurdish Democratic Union Party and representative in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Our party arose from the Kurdish Democratic Party in Syria created in 1957. Following the congresses held after 1957, some splits took place, and finally, upon the fact that 5 parties came together in 1993, our party took its current form and name. The present leader and secretary-general of our party is Muhiddin Sheikh Ali. Our objective is to bring all Kurds in Syria together. Establishing democracy in Syria and giving rights to Kurds are the two most important agendas in our program.

**ORSAM: How do you evaluate the developments taking place in Syria? Do you believe Bashar Assad regime has any chance to do reform or to stay in power?**

**Muhammed:** Today, there is still a fight for revolution in Syria for freedom and democracy. The regime wants to make the development in Syria look like a sectarian conflict. Thus, the regime tries to give an impression that a civil war will break out in case Syria does not have its own regime. But it is not true. The people in Syria turned towards revolution against one-party and dictatorship period. The only reason lying behind the events currently taking place in Syria is anti-democratic practices of the regime. In Syria Kurd, Arab, Turkmen, Circassian, Sunni, Shia came together and they are trying to topple the regime. The people poured into streets to build a secular, democratic, constitutional and decentralized system.

**ORSAM: Do you believe that the people's pouring into streets will be sufficient to topple the regime? Can the regime be toppled through the current conflicts or demonstrations?**

**Muhammed:** The current events are not sufficient to topple the regime. The power of the people on its own may not be sufficient for this kind of revolution to succeed. However, on the other hand, we are against the intervention of the external powers.

**ORSAM: If the demonstrations are not sufficient to topple the regime, if you are against external intervention, how will the Assad regime be toppled?**

**Muhammed:** As a result of UN, EU and Arab League's oppressing the syrian regime, the regime can be weakened. In case popular uprising carries on as a result of this weakening,

the regime can be toppled. As we know that we will suffer a big loss in case external powers intervene; we are against it. However, we are also aware of the fact that it is quite difficult to topple the regime through the current means.

**ORSAM: After Bashar Assad is toppled, does a conflict environment emerge in Syria? Does a civil war break out as in Iraq?**

**Muhammed:** Syria's situation is different from the countries in the region. Syria carried on living with nations such as Arab, Kurd, Turkmen, Circassian and Armenian in fraternity. This situation brings an original feature to Syria. There might be divergence between political groups, but there is no such conflict among the people. Today, the biggest conflict takes place between the pro-regime supporters and their opponents. Nevertheless, the state of group fed by the regime might be different after the toppling of the current regime. However, the idea that a civil war can break out after the toppling of the regime is largely as a result of the propaganda that the country can drift into a disaster in case the regime does not exist itself.

**ORSAM: What do you demand about the future of Kurds in Syria?**

**Muhammed:** As party, we have been asking for autonomy for Kurds since 1993. We took such a decision in the Conference in Qamishli on 26 October 2011. In the future, we ask for a democratic, secular, decentralized political structure in Syria. These demands do not only belong to our party, we see that other parties defend the same points as well. Kurds should solve their problems in the countries they live in. Kurds live in Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria. Kurds living in each country should solve the problems they go through within the borders of these countries. We also want to solve our problems in Syria.

**ORSAM: Qamishli events in 2004 proved how strongly Kurds can oppose in Syria when they want. Could it be suggested that current demonstrations are as strong as in the past?**

**Muhammed:** Most of the people uprising so far have been threatened with death. However, Kurds poured into the streets as much as the other groups. Since 1953, the Ba'ath regime has wanted conflict between Kurds and the other nations, as well as split. Even today, Kurds have been strived to be pictured as separatist and pro-Israeli by the regime. When Kurds rose up in 2004, the regime tried to provoke Arabs living in the region against us. Nevertheless, during the recent uprisings, right after Arabs' uprising, Kurds rose up as well. This situation contributed to change of Arabs' views on Kurds. Even on the first day the uprising emerged in Daraa, Kurds sent aids here. If the Kurdish population and the number of people taking part in the uprising are proportioned, it is seen that rather Kurds poured into streets compared to the others. As Kurds, we have had demands both related to overall situation of the country and also related to the state of the Kurdish from the Bashar Assad regime. Our demands at national level was to enact law for the removal of state of emergency in the country, the release of political prisoners, the withdrawal of army from the streets and for the people to freely go out in the street. And our demands for Kurds were: giving up racist approaches adopted against the Kurdish, according rights to the Kurdish, and adding a statement in the constitution indicating that Syria is composed of two nations as Arabs and Kurds, and minorities. The Syrian regime has not resorted to weapon in Kurdish regions so far: because they try to show the people that it is a different situation. The regime strives to give the impression to the people in Syria that there is an agreement with Kurds and the regime.

The people in Aleppo and Damascus have not taken part in the demonstrations so far. What the regime is afraid of is that there are 600.000 Kurds in total living in Aleppo and Syria. If weapon is used against the people in the regions with Kurdish population, then Kurds living in these metropolitans will rise up as well. Thus, problems will take place in these cities as well. The regime does not use weapon in the Kurdish region in order to prevent this situation, and it is trying to make the importance and dosage of uprisings in the Kurdish region look like small-scaled.

**ORSAM: Why is there this many Kurdish parties in Syria?**

**Muhammed:** We formed a Congress upon the coalition of 11 parties. Thus, we achieved to gather 60% of the Kurdish in Syria. Diversity is a good thing, but the existence of this many parties is not a positive development. The underlying reasons of this situation are factors such as underdevelopment of Kurds, practices carried out by the Syrian regime to set Kurds back, and oppressive regime. Nevertheless, today, Kurds have started to come together. Other than 11 parties, invitations will be sent to include Rekeftin and Reform Movements in KUK (National Liberation of Kurdistan).

**ORSAM: Are you content with the results come up with during the meeting held in Arbil?**

**Muhammed:** Despite some deficiencies, we are extremely content with the fact that the Conference was held. We believe that this meeting especially aiming at gathering Kurds who live abroad together was successful. All these developments should be considered as a major step in achievement of the Kurdish uprising in Syria.

**ORSAM: How are the relations between the Arab opposition and KUK?**

**Muhammed:** Currently, the Arab opposition could not unite. As much as different Arab dissident parties, there are also divergences among the the Kurdish. Our desire is that all dissident parties join together and create a joint power and carry on their opposition together.

**ORSAM: Thank you.**

*\* This interview was carried out in Sulaymaniyah, on 6 February 2012*

## 5. INTERVIEW WITH ABDULHAKIM BASHAR, SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE KURDISH DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN SYRIA: “WE WANT SYRIA TO HAVE A DECENTRALIZED STRUCTURE”

Despite changes the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria (Al Party), which is the first Kurdish party established in Syria, has gone through and organizational problems the party has encountered since 1957; today, it is considered as one of the most powerful parties of Syrian Kurds. Therefore, ORSAM, which has published interviews with various Syrian opposition groups, talked to Abdulhakim Bashar, leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria, in Arbil.

**ORSAM: First of all, could you introduce yourself and your party?**

**Abdulkhakim Bashar:** My name is Abdulhakim Bashar. I am secretary-general of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria which is one of the most significant and most supported parties among Syrian Kurds.

**ORSAM: Could you tell us about the history of your party and the phases your party has gone through?**

**Bashar:** Our party was established on 14 June 1957. We have carried out 10 congresses, one of which held in North Iraq in 1972, so far. Our fight against practices of the regime in Syria have been going on for many years. Throughout this running battle, many of our fellows have been arrested and condemned to various sentences. Most of our leaders were held under arrest for a long time in 1970's. The last congress we held following the problems we went through was carried out in 2007. In this congress I was elected as the secretary-general. The most important part of the congress held in 2007 was the fact that it witnessed a serious self-criticism. With the self-criticism made in this congress, the underlying reasons why we could not reach our goals were discussed. The idea that the underlying reason why we could not succeed as a result of this congress was the enemies was left aside. We decided that the main reason why Kurds cannot have their rights stemmed from us and that the most basic fault stemmed from the lack of sufficient preparation. Besides, we also reached the conclusion that Kurds could not reach the point they desired because of reasons such as tribal bonds.

**ORSAM: Can you inform us about the social structure of Kurds in Syria?**

**Bashar:** There is not any certain study conducted on this subject, but it is seen that Syria is a mosaic both in religious and ethnical terms. Nowadays, the population of Syria is some 21-23 million. The number of Kurdish population among them can be suggested as approximately 3.5 – 4 million. In Syria, Kurds basically live in three provinces. The largest of these three provinces is Haseke. The other two regions other than that are Kobani and

Afrin regions, also known as Ayn al-Arab. The majority of the population in these settlements is also composed of Kurds. Other than this, there are Kurds living in the center of Damascus and Aleppo, and in the rural regions of provinces such as Latakia, Idlib and Hama.

**ORSAM: It is seen that the number of anti-regime demonstrations are increasing in Syria with each passing day. Do you believe that the Bashar Assad regime can be toppled through these demonstrations or through the struggle of certain armed groups against the regime?**

**Bashar:** We believe that it is not possible for the regime to survive. After all these massacres and violence, the regime cannot survive. As it is already seen, the regime has not achieved suppressing the uprising despite this much use of force. However, it cannot be suggested either that the opposition could make use of the process since the beginning of the uprising. In the meantime, especially the Syrian National Council made certain mistakes. Christians and Druses have not taken part in the "revolution" so far. Because the Ba'ath regime assured them for years that an Islamic regime would be established in case this regime was toppled. As an Islamic regime's coming to power would create a major problem for them, these groups do not still support the protests. It is mainly because of the opposition movement. Because they do not have an open program.

I personally do not think that Islamists will rule Syria after Bashar Assad's regime is toppled. I believe that all Syrians will rule the country. However, the aforesaid propaganda of the regime can be effective in certain circles in Syria. It is quite important for the opposition to work in three ways in order to overcome the impacts of this propaganda.

First of all, it is necessary to put forward a very clear and explicit program, to directly establish dialogues with all parties, and to tell that Syria will be a much better country in the future. Second of all, clergymen should announce everyone by giving fetwas that Christians, Muslims and others will be all equal in new Syria. And thirdly, it is necessary to directly get in touch with those people in the field, and to directly emphasize it. Protesting against the regime only in streets is not enough, it would be better to create a political front against the regime. If all these are accomplished, we will see the end of regime. Sunni Arabs and Kurds have participated in the uprising so far. Only intellectual circles or prominents of the other groups support the uprising, but it is seen that the grassroots of these groups do not support the protest demonstrations.

**ORSAM:** A disunity in the Syrian opposition was observed for about a year. While there were some divisions among the Arab opposition and the Kurdish opposition; there were certain problems in the relations between these two major opposition groups as well. Could this problem be solved?

**Bashar:** This kind of disunities are quite normal in dictatorial systems. Establishing democracy will create much better political results. In a democratic system, small parties will melt in bigger parties. Because these parties will not be necessary anymore. On the other hand, it works different in the regimes ruled by dictatorship. As Kurds, we are striving to come to an agreement both among ourselves and also with the other parties in the most correct way possible. During the conference held in Qamishli on 26 October 2011, 11 Kurdish parties came together and created the Kurdish National Council (KNC). This institution's center of activity is in Qamishli, Syria. I was elected as the first head of

KNC. Tomorrow, my chairmanship term will end. I recommended the leader of Yekiti Party Ismail Hami for the next Chairmanship.

**ORSAM:** There were problems between the Arab Opposition and the Kurdish opposition in Syria. Could they make any progress on making opposition together.

**Bashar:** I talked to most of the parties which are members of the Syrian National Council. The leader of Syrian National Council Burhan Ghaliun was also in Arbil some time ago. I talked to him, we made a progress; but I cannot say that we reached a certain agreement.

**ORSAM:** What are the expectations of KNC from the Syrian National Council?

**Bashar:** In case these two council join together, more than half of the Syrian population will gather under a single roof. However, there are certain disagreements. We want Syria to have a decentralized structure in the future. Because Syria is composed of different ethnical groups. In a decentralized system, each group is provided with their rights, and the use of these rights is not under the control of a certain party. This situation will make it easier for the other dissident parties to gather under this roof as well. Our second expectation is a secular state. What we mean by secularism is two things: Keeping state and religion institutionally separate, and thus enabling each person to reach a level they desire in Syria. In addition to this, this secular system prevents outdated thoughts from taking roots in state institutions.

A major disagreement between SNC and KNC is related to methods regarding how the Kurdish problem will be solved. At this point, what comes to forefront most is self-determination. SNC states that the Kurdish problem should be solved in a democratic way, but the

democratic solution they offer is not explicit. We do not know what it means. Methods such as providing support to open TV channels, schools, or to publish periodicals are offered as a solution; but we do not agree. We ask for Kurds' rights to be written in the constitution and to be turned into constitutional rights. Other opponent organizations should understand that: Syria does not only belong to the opposition, but to all of us. The opposition cannot give what it wants and refuse what it does not want. This kind of thoughts stem from the education given by the Ba'ath regime. We want to be recognized and treated as equal. But we also want the protection of Syria's territorial integrity.

As SNC believes that self-determination will probably result in the establishment of a new state, it opposes to this. Nevertheless, we do not ask for a Kurdish state, besides, it is not quite possible considering the geography. Because the regions, where Kurds currently live, in Syria are split into three parts. The most important of all is that creation of a Kurdish state will come to mean that the political map will change. It is a matter that exceeds the countries in the region and requires the involvement of great powers. Super powers will decide it.

**ORSAM: Do you believe that the current demonstrations or events will be sufficient to topple the Bashar Assad's regime?**

**Bashar:** It is certainly not sufficient on its own. It is necessary to start from the demonstrations and join all forces within the country, then what is required to do is that: these uprisings should spread into all cities and provinces. If we can achieve this, the Syrian administration will not have a chance to control these uprisings, and economic and political pressures on the regime from outside will increase. If the Syrian opposition can join

their forces, an external intervention will not be necessary; because two most important institutions which are the basis of the regime in Syria are about to collapse: Military and economics. These two factors' joining their forces is enough to topple the regime. Other than that, the direct intervention of the external powers is dangerous. Because especially Iran would oppose to the foreign intervention.

**ORSAM: Recently, the international media has been discussing about the idea that a buffer zone can be created within Syria. What do you think about that?**

**Bashar:** Creating a buffer zone would be good. But what is important is that where and how it will be created. Thinking reasonably; the buffer needs to be created over Turkey. Well, does Turkey assume such a role? The neighborhood of Iran and Turkey loads the dice against it. At first, the Syrian people leaned towards the role to be assumed by Turkey. Especially Sunni Arabs thought Turkey would rapidly intervene. However, this expectation was not fulfilled. One of the underlying reasons is Turkey's worries about Kurds in Syria. Therefore, there is an instability in Turkey's attitude. It is high time that Turkey should change this attitude.

**ORSAM: Do you expect a decision that will put a spoke in Bashar Assad regime's wheel to be taken by UNSC?**

**Bashar:** I believe that Russia will change her attitude soon. There are some issues before Russia. For example, the elections to be held soon: Putin tries to gain time to take a decision. Besides, the future of the new regime which is planned to be created in Syria is not certain either. And thirdly, all the weapons of Syria is provided by Russia. Russia is worried that the secrets of these weapons can be heard by the West, in case the regime

changes. Thus, Russia's not giving a support is because the bargains with the West still continues and because of the effort to gain time. However, we will be pleased if a decision is issued by UN. We consent to every decision to be issued by UN.

**ORSAM: Is there any message you would like to give to Turkey?**

**Bashar:** This is a message for the Turkish people. The Turkish people and the Syrian people are fellows and friends. This friendship should be confirmed on the constitution. They should live as a family from different countries.

**ORSAM: Thank you.**

*\* This interview was carried out in Arbil, on 10 February 2012.*

## 6. INTERVIEW WITH SHELAL GEDO, NORTHERN IRAQ REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYRIAN KURDISH LEFT PARTY: "SYRIA SHOULD BE A DEMOCRATIC, FEDERAL, SECULAR, AND PARLIAMENTARY STATE"

During our presence in Iraq, we tried to make interviews with Syrian Kurdish opponents. Even if we could not reach all representatives of the parties which are members of Kurdish National Council, we could reach some of them. One of the most prominent figures among them was Shelal Gedo. We carried out an interview with Gedo on current situation of Syria and Syrian Kurds.

**ORSAM: Could you introduce yourself and your party?**

**Shelal Gedo:** My name is Shelal Gedo. I am a member of the Kurdish National Council of Syria, and northern Iraqi representative of the Syrian Kurdish Left Party.

**ORSAM: Can you tell us about your party in brief?**

**Gedo:** Our party is a secular and leftist party established in 1965, and believes that equality should be provided in Syria through a revolution. Our party was one of the biggest parties of Syrian Kurds. However, it was split into several parts because of disagreements within the party. Muhammad Mousa Muhammad is the head of our party. As all the parties, we are trying to bring the interests of our nation to the forefront by leaving the interests of our party aside. We are working for the success of KNC created by 11 different parties' union. In Syria, parties which act alone remain weak. However, in case parties come together, the people support them. The most important example for this situation is 2004 Qamishli Riots. During this uprising, the people supported parties, as they acted together.

**ORSAM: What do you think about the future of Syria? Do you believe that Bashar Assad's Regime will be able to survive?**

**Gedo:** The situation is getting worse in Syria with each passing day, and it appears that it will get much worse in the forthcoming days. The most important reason is that the regime is trying to suppress demands of the people by using force. The regime has been massacring the people. I believe that massacres will increase and we can encounter much bloodier events, in case those events carry on like this. The Bashar Assad regime resembles the Saddam Hussein regime. Just like Saddam Hussein tyrannized the people under his regime for many years, Bashar Assad has been doing the same. The Ba'ath party prevailed in both states, there is no any difference between the Ba'ath parties in two countries. This situation makes us think that massacres will increase in the forthcoming days. If Aleppo, which is the capital of economics, and Da-

ascus, which is the capital of politics, join the uprising; then much more blood will be shed across the country. The future of Syria is drifting into an ambiguity. The Bashar Assad regime is not willing to leave before completely draining the people. The uncertainty in the approach of international powers enable him to carry on this attitude. Unwillingness of the international powers necessitates the change in Syria to be provided by internal factors. And as a result, it means that conflicts will be much bloodier.

**ORSAM: We see that there are less demonstrations taking place in the regions with Kurdish population in Syria compared to rest of the country. What is the reason?**

**Gedo:** Although it seems so, it is not true. The most important reason is that Bashar Assad's regime avoids directly facing Kurds. Even in the early days of demonstrations which was launched in Daraa on March 15th, tens of people had been killed; on the other hand, despite the fact that uprising emerged also in Qamishli during the same days, not even a drop of blood was shed there. The fact that the regime does not want to conflict with Kurds does not come to mean that Kurds want the continuance of this system. Kurds have participated in the uprising from the very beginning. For instance, in Amouda, demonstrations are staged almost every day. During these demonstrations, protestors always chant slogans calling for the execution of Bashar Assad and for toppling the Ba'ath regime. Nevertheless, the Syrian regime has not sent even a single tank over there so far.

**ORSAM: Do you believe that the Bashar Assad regime can be toppled through these demonstrations?**

**Gedo:** I believe the regime can be toppled through demonstrations. As far as I know,

similar uprisings across the world achieved their goals in history. In the recent years, we have seen that regimes have changed upon similar events. In this respect, I think that the uprising in Syria will be successful and the regime will change. Thus, the whole Syrian people will have achieved their goals.

**ORSAM: How do you assess the outlook of international community and great powers on Syria?**

**Gedo:** The Syrian people will never forget the approach of the West in general, and of France in specific. Generally the West stands by the Syrian people, but we ask for more support. The fact that Russia and China vetoed the decision of UN is sad for us. Russia adopts a different approach in this kind of crises in order to derive temporary benefits. Nevertheless, it is for sure that the Syrian people will not forget this approach and will remember the approach of western countries. There are some changes in Turkey's approach. Turkey and Syria have social bonds with one another. There are social bonds between Kurds living in Syria and Turkey. The stability in Syria is for the benefit of Turkey. The tension over here worries Turkey. And I understand Turkey's worry. It is normal that Turkey protects her interests in Syria. The Syrian people expect Turkey to maintain an attitude without any discrimination and to consider all Syrians equal.

**ORSAM: Turkey has been pursuing a much more rigid Syria policy compared to the European countries. What do you think about it?**

**Gedo:** I think it is an inward-oriented appeasement policy. The Turkish people urge their government to be more rigid, otherwise the Turkish government is not in favor of following such a rigid policy. After all, we under-

stand Turkey's policy. As Syrian Kurds, we do not beg for help from Turkey, but we ask for her friendship.

**ORSAM: Could the Arbil conference attain its objectives?**

**Gedo:** The most important of all is the fact that the Syrian Kurdish parties decided to join their forces, and the movements started to be united. That the demands were united. The most important is the self-determination. Currently, Kurds gathered under the roof of KNC. At the same time, it was decided to unite all the opposition parties. In its relations with other dissident parties, we brought the self-determination to the forefront. Our objective is to stay under the roof of Syria. However, this objective will hold, in case democracy, decentralization, secular parliamentary system and pluralism prevail in Syria.

**ORSAM: What kind of organization is KNC? Who are found within KNC?**

**Gedo:** The KNC is composed of 256 members. The 60 per cent of these members are independent, and others are affiliated to various parties. 11 Kurdish parties took part in the conference. Besides, youth and women's movements and NGO's also participated in this conference. Many independent persons and scientists participated as well. Many people perceive it as Kurdish parliament. One of the institutions created as a result of it is the Executive Board. This board is composed of 45 people. 22 of them are party members, and others are independent.

**ORSAM: Who are those organizations you called independent? Is there any independent NGO in Syria?**

**Gedo:** Those are the ones who do not join political parties. They do not work within the frame of party. Therefore, we call them independents.

**ORSAM: Does the leadership of KNC change? Will the leader of KNC continue to be the same person?**

**Gedo:** The chairmanship system will change among the party leaders every other month.

**ORSAM: Did the conference held in Arbil attain its objective? Will other conferences be carried out?**

**Gedo:** The conference is planned to be held semi-annually. The 256-person council composing the KNC is a kind of assembly. It is entitled to take decision.

**ORSAM: Do all the parties composing this council agree on the future of Kurds in Syria? Federalism, autonomy or democratic autonomy; what is the view they defend?**

**Gedo:** What is important for us is to join the views of Kurdish parties. The most significant point agreed on is self-determination. All parties highlight this demand.

**ORSAM: What does your party want on behalf of Kurds in Syria?**

**Gedo:** According to our party, Syria should be a democratic, federal, secular, parliamentary state, and a Syria that all groups will be provided with their rights should be established. We want parties and everyone at individual basis to have their rights. Federal system would be the truest solution for Syria. In addition to this, we believe that it is the solution for the problems throughout the history. If we want a well-built future for Syria, new Syria should be a democratic, federal and secular Syria. There is no need to worry about this federal system.

**ORSAM: What do you think the federal system should look like? Should it be in a way to create a federal district as in KRG and in a way that Kurds govern themselves here?**

**Gedo:** It is not the same as here, we do not ask for the same. But our people do not want less than KRG has.

**ORSAM: It is suggested that PYD cooperates with the Syrian regime and applies**

**pressure on other parties. Is that true, or not?**

**Gedo:** It is a fact that there are other parties outside the assembly. We are trying to include them in our group as well.

**ORSAM: Thank you for your answers.**

*\* This interview was carried out in Arbil, on 9 February 2012.*



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