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*A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TWO MINORITY POLITICAL
PARTIES: THE KURDISH POLITICAL MOVEMENT OF HDP & THE
TURKISH MINORITY MOVEMENT OF DPS IN BULGARIA –
CAN HDP EMBRACE THE TURKISH LEFT?*

Supervisor:

Assoc. Prof. Dimitri A. Sotiropoulos

Student:

Cansu Nihal Kalender

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Table of Contents

◆ Abstract.....	3
◆ List of Abbreviations.....	4
◆ Acknowledgement.....	5
◆ List of Tables.....	6
◆ Introduction.....	7
◆ Chapter I: The Kurdish Question and the Political Representation of the Kurdish Minority in Turkey prior to HDP.....	10
◆ Chapter II: The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms.....	21
◆ Chapter III: HDP’s Emergence and Success in Embracing the Turkish Left: 2014 Presidential and 2015 Parliamentary Elections.....	29
◆ Chapter IV: Comparative Analysis of the Two Minority Political Parties.....	37
◆ Chapter V: Future Challenges for HDP and Democracy in Turkey.....	41
◆ Conclusions.....	46
◆ Bibliography.....	49

Abstract

The Kurdish question has been a paramount issue in the Turkish political history. Underrepresented and mistreated for decades, the Kurdish minority's situation started to improve in the last ten years under the AK Party rule. Prior to HDP, the Kurdish minority has been represented by a regional/ethnic party (BDP) from southeastern districts, however HDP was formed strategically as a more mainstream, left-wing political party and aimed to represent all disadvantaged groups of Turkey. From 2013 onwards, HDP worked to present itself as a democratic, left-libertarian political party and as a result, in the June elections of 2015, HDP showed a historically significant performance receiving votes from all over the country. This thesis analyzes the shift in the Kurdish political movement by the HDP to become more mainstream and for the purpose of this analysis, this paper looks at the DPS of Bulgaria - which has completed its transformation from an ethnic party to an all-national, mainstream political actor. It is concluded that even though the situation in Turkey is chaotic and there is no government at the moment, in the long-term, HDP party tradition can embrace the Turkish left, and follow the transformation of DPS to become a permanent actor in Turkish politics.

List of Abbreviations

AK Party: Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or Justice and Development Party

BDP: Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, or Peace and Democracy Party

BSP: Bulgarska Sotsialisticheska Partiya, or Bulgarian Socialist Party

CHP: Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, or Republican People's Party

DEHAP: Demokratik Halkın Partisi, or Democratic People's Party

DEP: Demokrasi Partisi, or Democracy Party, or Democratic People's Party

DGM: Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemesi, or State Security Court

DPS: Hak ve Özgürlükler Hareketi, or Dvizenie za Prava i Svobodi, or Movement for Rights and Freedoms

DTP: Demokratik Toplum Partisi, or Democratic Society Party

EU: European Union

HADEP: Halkın Demokrasi Partisi, or People's Democracy Party

HEP: Halkın Emek Partisi, or People's Labor Party

HDP: Halkların Demokratik Partisi, or People's Democratic Party

MHP: Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi, or Nationalist Movement Party

PKK: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, or Kurdistan Workers' Party

ÖZDEP: Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi, or Freedom and Democracy Party

ÖZEP: Özgürlük ve Eşitlik Partisi, or Freedom and Equality Party

SDS: Sayuz Na Demokratichnite Sili, or Union of Democratic Forces

TBMM: Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi, or The Grand National Assembly of Turkey

TİP: Türkiye İşçi Partisi, or Turkish Workers' Party

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List of Tables

Table 1.1.....	18
Table 2.1.....	27
Table 2.2.....	36

Introduction

For a consolidated democracy and a peaceful coexistence, the integration and parliamentary representation of ethnic minorities are of utmost importance. Along with the quality of democratic institutions, openness of the party system, and fairness of representation; minority representation is a major criteria that allows us to determine the quality of democracies¹. According to Chandra, for a political party to be categorized as an ethnic party, there can be several indicators. Indicators may vary from the party's main electorate – whether they ethnically define themselves, to its explicit appeals or it is defined as an ethnic party when it carries the name of a minority group in its name or party constitution as well as when the main electorate consists of a minority group. Applying this definition to People's Democratic Party (HDP) and Movement for Rights and Freedoms (DPS), we can easily regard both of them as ethnic parties². Whereas both of them do not use minority group's name in the name of the party, there can be no doubt that both DPS and HDP are ethnic parties that have majority of their electorate from their minority groups. However, a standard definition of an ethnic party does not apply to these parties.

As part of an electoral strategy to increase their share of votes, for different reasons in different settings which we will touch upon later, both parties performed and received votes that exceeded their own electorate. Kurdish party's share in the Turkish parliament have been about 25 to 29³(out of 550) prior to HDP, but the party managed to attract 13.4 percent of the votes in 2015 elections whereas the Kurdish minority accounted for about 18 percent of the population⁴. Likewise, DPS was continuously the third largest party in Bulgaria starting with the 1991

¹ Bimir, Johanna. *Ethnicity and Electoral Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007. Print.

²Chandra, K. "What Is an Ethnic Party?" *Party Politics*, 2011, 151-69. Accessed August 12, 2015. <http://politics.as.nyu.edu/docs/IO/2587/WhatisEthnicParty2011.pdf>.

³ "24. DÖNEM MİLLETVEKİLLERİ." TBMM 24.Dönem Milletvekili Listesi. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://secimanketi.tv/milletvekilleri/24-donem>.

⁴ "CIA - The World Factbook - Turkey." Central Intelligence Agency. Accessed August 24, 2015. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tu.html>.

elections, but still received votes between 5.5% to 7.7%, below the share of the ethnic Turkish minority in the Bulgarian population which was about 9%⁵. In the post-2000 period, it became a crucial player for forming coalition governments several times and is now an active political actor in the parliamentary opposition.

It is accepted that ethnic parties can be flexible and they are able to mobilize their electoral support by becoming more moderate and inclusive⁶, however it is expected that this shift would make the party less attractive to the ethnic minority who would eventually withdraw their electoral support for these once-ethnic parties. Though this has not been the case for DPS. DPS was established as a minority party to defend the rights of Muslim populations, but it became more moderate in time and successfully embraced a higher share in votes which exceeded the number of its core electorate's population. This is very interesting due to the fact that a moderate political agenda does no longer prioritize the minority interests, which leads to withdrawal of their core electoral support⁷. According to Boyka (2011);

“As a result of political interaction, ethnic parties are susceptible to change. Although minority voters remain their core electorate, ethnic parties are increasingly subsumed under the ideological ordering of the major parties, their coalition-building strategies, and their preferences for government formation. In essence, the participation of ethnic parties in political competition represents a process of mainstreaming. Having gained legitimacy as the political representative of distinct societal interests, the party system increasingly treats ethnic parties as national-level competitors.”

The objective of this paper is to examine and compare the two minority ethnic parties which shifted their policies to become more mainstream and went beyond only addressing the

⁵ National Statistical Institute (2001). The 2001 census determined the ethnic composition of the Bulgarian population as 83.94% Bulgarians, 9.41% Turks, 4.68% Roma, and 1.97% other minority groups.

⁶ Moser, Robert. “Ethnicity, Elections, and Party Systems in Postcommunist States.” *Ethnic Politics after Communism*. Ed. Zoltan Barany and Robert Moser. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2005. 138–139. Print.

⁷ Boyka, Stefanova. Between ethnopolitics and liberal centrism: the Movement for Rights and Freedoms in the mainstream of Bulgarian party politics, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 40:5, 767-782. July 30, 2012.

minority groups. The paper begins by explaining the Kurdish political movement throughout its history as well as Turkish minority's past endeavours and DPS's political history to give an understanding of whether these two minority groups are actually comparable. Furthermore, it proceeds to explain HDP's shift in the recent years to embrace the Turkish left and to explain the circumstances in the Turkish political setting that allowed HDP to be successful to an extent that the party achieved 13.1 percent of votes in 2015 general elections⁸, becoming the first pro-Kurdish party that passed the ten percent electoral threshold. After a comparison between the two minority political parties, this paper will aim to answer two questions: First one is whether the Kurdish party of HDP can substantially follow the evolution of DPS that repositioned itself from a minority party to a more moderate party of Bulgarian people as a whole, and second, whether HDP's active presence as a defender of democracy and peace will or can be permanent under the present conditions and challenges awaiting Turkey. In other words, the question of whether HDP can embrace the Turkish left in the near future will try to be answered.

Methodologically, this paper will utilize both qualitative and quantitative analysis to test its hypotheses. An interview with Dr. Zeki Gül - HDP's parliamentary candidate from Izmir's second region in 2015 elections – will be conducted. Furthermore, a number of demographics, electoral results will be analysed to see what percentage of votes come from the minority groups for both parties. Additionally, content analysis from newspapers as well as journals will be made to give an understanding of the necessary conjuncture and to provide an in-depth grasp of the political setting in both countries, focusing especially on the case of Turkey.

⁸ "2015 Genel Seçim Sonuçları." SEÇİM SONUÇLARI. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://secim.haberler.com/2015/>.

Chapter I: The Kurdish Question and the Political Representation of the Kurdish Minority in Turkey prior to HDP

The Kurdish question dates back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, at the end of World War I, Treaty of Sevres was signed breaking Ottoman Empire into different regions as well as a Kurdish autonomous region.⁹ Since the Treaty of Sevres was never executed, the short-lived idea of an autonomous Kurdistan was put on the shelf. Kurds paid their allegiance to Turks and fought with Kemal Ataturk in the Turkish War of Independence following the World War I¹⁰. With 1921 Constitution which remained valid until such time as 1924, the parliamentary representatives of the newly-founded Turkish parliament agreed to give Kurds a regional autonomy naming the region ‘Kurdistan’¹¹.

Under the Republic of Turkey and modernist Kemalist ideology, a nation-state and nation building process began. The most prominent policy was named as the ‘Turkification’ policy which meant the creation of “Turks” or a Turkish nation. This new nation-building met strong resistance among the Kurdish minority and caused several outbreaks of unrest, violently suppressed, in the Kurdish areas in the east and south east¹².

Perhaps the most prominent massacres against Kurds is known as the Dersim Massacre, in the Kurdish district of Dersim (presently called Tunceli) in 1937 and 1938. The events represent one of the blackest pages in the history of Republican Turkey¹³, passed over in silence or deliberately misrepresented and legitimized by most historians by naming it officially as the

⁹ "Treaty of Sevres | Allies-Turkey [1920]." Encyclopedia Britannica Online. Accessed May 27, 2015.

¹⁰ "Gunter, Michael. "The Kurdish Question in Perspective." World Affairs, 2004, 197-205.

¹¹ Işık, Çimen. "1921 Anayasası, Kürtler Ve Demokratik Özerklik - Gerçekler Karanlıkta Kalmayacak - Özgür Gündem." Özgür Gündem. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://www.ozgur-gundem.com/haber/952/1921-anayasasi-kurtler-ve-demokratik-ozerklik>.

¹² Larrabee, F. Stephen, and Gonul Tol. "Turkey's Kurdish Challenge." Survival: 143-52. Accessed May 27, 2015.

¹³ Van Bruinessen, Martin. "Dersim Rebellion." in Genocide in Kurdistan? The Suppression of the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937-38) and the Chemical War against the Iraqi Kurds (1988), 141-170. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994.

“Dersim Rebellion”. This massacre, which was celebrated with a huge success by the Kemalist republic, and many other smaller-sized massacres were conducted on the Kurds by the Turkish authorities. Even though the accounts are not very clear whether the cause of the massacre was an inter-tribal conflict between Kurds, Dersim was known as the only place where the central government could not practice authority over. According to Martin van Bruinessen, once the army had the legitimate reason for military intervention, they did not stop until they have made all the regional tribes give up on their arms in 1938.

Even though some Kurdish tribes were supporting the state or were neutral in the conflicts, Turkish authorities decided to eliminate all sorts of rebel threats and anything that would suggest Kurds as a separate nation forbidding the use of the language, traditional clothing and other cultural peculiarities of the Kurdish people. Turkish nationalist assimilation policies were developed and Kurds were called as “Mountain Turks” and their language was regarded as a ‘forgotten version’ of the Turkish language itself¹⁴.

A political Kurdish movement within Turkey appeared for the first time toward the end of Adnan Menderes’ term. With socialists gaining more strength and public becoming more free under the 1961 constitution, the ‘Eastern’ issue became one of the most debated topics in Turkey throughout 1960’s¹⁵. With the migration movements from the Eastern regions to the Western parts of Turkey, more Kurdish people had gained access to higher education, some of them studied political science, were organized politically and had the opportunity to publish their thoughts. Intellectuals¹⁶ like Musa Anter, Tarık Ziya Ekinci, Faik Bucak built the foundation of

¹⁴ Gunter, Michael. "The Kurdish Question in Perspective." World Affairs, 2004, 200.

¹⁵ "PKK Nasıl Kuruldu Ve Güçlendi?" Al Jazeera Turk. Accessed May 27, 2015.

<http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/dosya/pkk-nasil-kuruldu-ve-guclendi>.

¹⁶ Gellner, Ernest. *Nations and Nationalism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983.

Kurdish movement both theoretically and practically. Kurdish intellectuals began taking active part in Turkish Workers Party (TİP)¹⁷ within the socialist movement.

In 1965 general elections, TİP managed to attract 3% of the votes and acquired fifteen seats in the Grand National Assembly¹⁸ in which Süleyman Demirel's right-wing Justice Party (AP) acquired 240 having achieved 52.9% of the votes in Turkey¹⁹. Despite the existence of a very strong one-party government, TİP parliamentary representatives could actively participate in the parliamentary sessions, thus this had its effects on the people as by 1967-68 the militant left-wing student and labour organizations were formed. Rising of the Turkish left within the public was visible. There were also mass demonstrations emerging in the eastern parts of Turkey in 1967, which mostly were against the low socio-economic conditions, however this could also be seen as an evidence that the Kurds somewhat started to achieve their self-consciousness and called themselves a nation. Under the leadership of TİP, Kurds, for the first time, acted together to demand their democratic rights²⁰.

Indeed, all these was possible due to a freer and more liberal environment created with the 1961 constitution, which is still considered as the most liberal constitution ever drafted in Turkey in terms of individual rights and freedoms²¹. Therefore, during 1960s, it is very plausible to say that not only the Kurdish political movement but also in general all other ideologies in Turkey lived through a very liberal decade, of course in parallel with the worldwide trend of the 1960s. The state and the Western camp feared the rising communist threat and did their best to

¹⁷ Alış, Ahmet. "Üç Devrin Tanığı: Modern Kürt Siyasi Tarihinin İçinden Musa Anter'i Okumak." Birikim. Accessed May 27, 2015.

¹⁸"Sosyalistler TBMM'ye Nasıl Girdi?" NTV. April 24, 2011. Accessed August 10, 2015.

<http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/sosyalistler-tbmm-ye-nasil-girdi,QNOemlq3CEWEhGaWPe6UeQ>.

¹⁹Tuncer, Erol. "Çok Partili Dönemde Seçimler Ve Seçim Sistemleri." TESAV - Toplumsal Ekonomik Siyasi Araştırmalar Vakfı. April 1, 2014. Accessed August 12, 2015.

<http://www.tesav.org.tr/docs/makale/CokPartiliDönemdeSecimlerveSecimSistemleri.pdf>.

²⁰Hür, Ayşe. "Kürt Meselesi'nin 90 Yıllık İcmali: Tamam Mı, Devam Mı?" Radikal. Accessed August 10, 2015.

http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/ayse_hur/kurt_meselesinin_90_yillik_icmali_tamam_mi_devam_mi-1403794.

²¹Biröl, Sinem. "1961 ANAYASASINDA İFADE ÖZGÜRLÜĞÜ." *İstanbul Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Dergisi* 2012/2, no. 43, 39-54. Accessed August 7, 2015. www.journals.istanbul.edu.tr.

fight these threats. The strategy to end the communist threat was the 1971 military coup d'état which tried to destroy the socialist movements in Turkey, banned TİP and many other political parties²². The military officials arrested or executed many young leftists within these movements. Therefore it is important to underline the fact that the 1971 coup was not targeted solely at the Kurds, but instead, it was a coup d'état carried out to annihilate the communists and the war between the left and right-wing extremists.

As an indirect consequence of the military coup, having faced tremendous pressure or served prison sentence, the Kurdish socialists became self-aware that they had to pursue an alternative way and chose the radical path. A few years later in 1978, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) was officially founded. Abdullah Öcalan was the party leader and he founded the party under Marxist-Leninist principles with the purpose of uniting and organizing Kurdish nation demanding self-determination and resistance movement for its achievement. Although it was founded to pursue armed resistance, Öcalan also led a cultural revolution for the Kurds as he has written numerous works on culture and the general situation of his people, as well as books on matters of faith, gender and environmental issues²³.

The 1980 military coup is known for once again having crushed the leftist and socialist movements in Turkey and its harsh effects were felt relatively more in the East by the Kurdish-populated areas²⁴. 1982 constitution was adopted with a vast majority ending the military rule and a 10% electoral threshold came into practice²⁵. The civilian rule following the junta years also had an influence in shaping the administrative positions as it was made sure that extreme right-wing nationalists would be rewarded with promotions. One of the many examples was the

²² For a detailed analysis of the political parties that were banned in Turkey, see Friedman, Ross J. "The Banning of Political Parties by Constitutional Courts: A Turkish Perspective." 2010. <http://pid.emory.edu/ark:/25593/7tb5m>.

²³ "Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan - PKK Official Site." Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan - PKK Official Site. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://www.pkkonline.com/en/index.php?sys=article&artID=175>.

²⁴ Hür, Ayşe. "Kürt Meselesi'nin 90 Yıllık İcmali: Tamam Mı, Devam Mı?" Radikal. Accessed August 10, 2015.

²⁵ "Yüzde 10 Barajının öyküsü." NTV. March 30, 2011. Accessed August 12, 2015.

<http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/yuzde-10-barajinin-oykusu.3xMZ-FVFNkWjU9mAPgxf9g>.

future Minister of Justice and Minister of Interior Mehmet Ağar, who was then assigned as the assistant director to the counter-terrorism section in Istanbul, thanks to his efforts in fighting the communists, as the national police chief he would be later leading one of the forces fighting the PKK in rural areas²⁶.

In response to the continuing persecution, the PKK launched an armed struggle against the Turkish central government and in 1984 the issue took on a new dimension on the occasion of the newly founded Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) began conducting terrorist attacks and transformed into a paramilitary group launching attacks on the Turkish territory from safe havens in the Kandil Mountains of northern Iraq and since then, it is estimated that around 40,000 people have lost their lives including more than 5,000 civilian people²⁷ in the armed struggles between PKK and the Turkish state.

During the 1990's Turkey witnessed the rising consciousness and politicization of the Kurdish identity²⁸, the PKK began a series of suicide bombing attacks with the support of Iran and Syria. From 1979 to 1999, Syria openly provided support to PKK in the Beq'a Valley region. The reason of support for PKK by the Syrian and Iranian states, despite the fact that they have their own Kurdish minority populations, could be explained under the Cold War and the Middle East contexts. Bilateral relations with Syria have been hostile, if not in state of war, since the founding years of Turkey over Hatay and water conflicts²⁹. Iran, Iraq and Syria aimed at extending their influence over the region by giving support to PKK and indeed the Russian influence over the policies of these states cannot be denied. However, Syria placed restrictions

²⁶"Radikal-çevrimiçi / Türkiye / Bu Halk Sizi Affeder Mi?" April 26, 2002. Accessed August 12, 2015. <http://www.radikal.com.tr/haber.php?haberno=35905>.

²⁷ Larrabee, F. Stephen, and Gonul Tol. "Turkey's Kurdish Challenge." *Survival*: 143-52. Accessed May 27, 2015. http://www.mideasti.org/sites/default/files/publications/53-4_11_Larrabee_and_Tol_Survival.pdf.

²⁸ Somer, Murat. "Turkey's Kurdish Conflict: Changing Context, and Domestic and Regional Implications." *MIDDLE EAST JOURNAL* 58, no. 2 (2004): 235.

²⁹"From Rep. of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs." Republic of Turkey Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Accessed August 12, 2015. <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey-syria.en.mfa>.

on PKK activity within its territory when the relationship between Turkey and Syria worsened to an extent that Turkey threatened in regards to invade Syria if it continued keeping Öcalan. Damascus quickly expelled him³⁰.

Since the Cold War had come to an end and the Soviet Union had dissolved, it could be understood in a way that there was no country that was ready to enter war with a NATO ally in those blurry years. Also the attacks to end the first Gulf War allowed a Kurdish administrative region in Iraq for the first time in early 1990s which also led PKK to become a regional power in the area³¹. Meanwhile, Turkey's accession to EU became crucial and the agreement to create a Customs Union between Turkey and the EU was signed³². Although the agreement placed emphasis mostly on economic reforms, Turkey's democratization process and solving the Kurdish question were also put down and they were to be re-emphasized as in the future steps.

After the expulsion, Öcalan looked for a place to flee in Asia and Europe, but none of the countries were willing to take the risk in fear of having tensions with Turkey. In the end, he made an arrangement with the Greek government for a temporary shelter in Nairobi, Kenya where CIA captured him and the Turkish commando team in February 1999³³. Abdullah Öcalan was sentenced to death under the Article 125 of Turkish penal code according to which he would be found guilty of founding a terrorist organization against the state and for treason. However, together with Turkey's accession process and with legal reforms, Turkey abolished the death

³⁰ Unver, Aylin. "THE ARAB SPRING, ITS EFFECTS ON THE KURDS, AND THE APPROACHES OF TURKEY, IRAN, SYRIA, AND IRAQ ON THE KURDISH ISSUE." *Middle East Review of International Affairs* 16, no. 2 (2012): 16. Accessed May 27, 2015. <http://www.rubincenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/Noi-revised-YA-au1-PDF.pdf>.

³¹ Önen, Yavuz. "90'LARIN HAK MÜCADELELERİ: "Kürt Sorunu"nda Son 25 Yıl." *Bianet*. December 1, 2014. Accessed August 10, 2015. <http://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/160718-kurt-sorunu-nda-son-25-yil>.

³² "EU-Turkey Relations." European Commission. Accessed August 10, 2015. http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/candidate-countries/turkey/eu_turkey_relations_en.htm.

³³ Weiner, Tim. "U.S. Helped Turkey Find and Capture Kurd Rebel." *The New York Times*. February 19, 1999. Accessed June 1, 2015.

sentence in 2002, which transferred Öcalan's death sentence to life-long imprisonment³⁴. Öcalan is still serving his sentence and is kept at the Island of İmralı, in the Sea of Marmara and he is still a political figure, a 'leader'³⁵ indeed and has a wide, if not complete, influence over the Kurdish public and politicians.

According to official statements made by PKK, they do not demand an independent state but they want a solution to the Kurdish question within the borders of Turkey³⁶. After the death sentence was lifted, on 4 April 2002, at its 8th Party Congress, PKK announced that the process of transformation and change would reach a climax with a new program and statutes.

It was not the first time Kurdish politicians tried entering the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (TBMM) under the umbrella of different political parties. In 1990, People's Labour Party (Halkın Emek Partisi, HEP) was founded for the first time as a pro-Kurdish party³⁷. The Turkish authorities allowed this party's foundation simply because; first they did not fear the threat, second, according to the constitution, the procedure in order to found a political party was done via single letter of application and the application's context was not in violation with the laws. In 1991 elections, HEP came together and campaigned with SHP, which was the post-1980 military coup name for CHP under the leadership of Erdal İnönü. Hence, 18 members of HEP among which there were significant names as Leyla Zana, Ahmet Türk, Hatip Dicle and Mehmet Sincar could become representatives in the parliament from SHP lists. This was a historically symbolic moment for the Kurdish movement, but things did not go as expected. In the oath-taking ceremony, HEP members wished to take their oaths in Kurdish, and immediately this was

³⁴ "Öcalan'ın Cezası, Müebbet'e çevrildi." Öcalan'ın Cezası, Müebbet'e çevrildi. Accessed June 1, 2015. <http://arsiv.ntv.com.tr/news/179858.asp>.

³⁵ Leader (Önder in Turkish) is actually his nickname among his supporters.

³⁶ "Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan - PKK Official Site." Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan - PKK Official Site. Accessed June 1, 2015. <http://www.pkkonline.com/en/index.php?sys=article&artID=175>.

³⁷ Güney, Aylin (2002). "The People's Democracy Party". *Turkish Studies*: 122–137

escalated into a crisis between SHP and HEP members and it was only the beginning of more problems between SHP and HEP³⁸.

In July 1991, Vedat Aydın - the president of HEP in Diyarbakır - was taken from his house by the local authorities and was found dead two days later in July 7th. Public instantly tagged this 'unidentified' murder as conducted by the state officials and tens of thousands flooded to his funeral³⁹ during which authorities opened fire and ended up killing 3 people and wounding hundreds⁴⁰. This was the first 'unidentified murder case' of the 1990's and had its effects on the parliament as well. A year later in spring, 'Bloody Newroz' incident of 1992 in which 57⁴¹ Kurdish civilians or separatists were killed by the Turkish authorities, HEP members finally resigned from their duties in the parliament as a reaction⁴². In 1993, Mehmet Sincar, the parliamentary representative from the province of Mardin, was found dead and his case took its place among the 'unidentified murder cases' in Turkey back then⁴³.

Concurrently, in Ankara, State Security Court (Devlet Güvenlik Mahkemesi or DGM) Prosecutor initiated the process to ban HEP as a political party and many party members joined the Democracy Party (DEP) as a continuation of HEP. However, it was not late until there was a state investigation on DEP as well. DGM Chief Prosecutor sent the summary to TBMM in order to lift the immunity of the Kurdish member of the parliaments. Thus on March 2nd, 1994, the

³⁸ Özdal, Hakkı. "HEP'ten HDP'ye, 'Meclis Kapısında Gözaltı'dan 80 Kişilik Gruba - #Politika." Radikal. June 23, 2015. Accessed June 30, 2015.

http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/hepten_hdpye_meclis_kapisinda_gozaltidan_80_kisilik_gruba-1384180.

³⁹ Kale, Bülent. "[BIAMAG] : KATLEDİLİŞİNİN 20. YILINDA: Vedat Aydın Cinayeti." Bianet. Accessed June 30, 2015.

⁴⁰ Bozan, İrfan. "90'ların İlk Faili Meçhulü: Vedat Aydın Cinayeti." Al Jazeera Turk. January 21, 2014. Accessed June 30, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/imzali-haberler/90larin-ilk-faili-mechulu-vedat-aydin>.

⁴¹ Some sources indicate less (around 27-30), some indicate around 100.

⁴² "21 Mart 1992: Cizre'de Newroz Kutlamalarında Kontrgerilla Katliam Yaptı." Marksist.org. March 20, 2011. Accessed June 30, 2015.

⁴³ The assassination's responsibility was taken by the Turkish Revenge Brigade however the court decision in 2013 held Hizbullah member Cihan Yıldız responsible for the murder: "Mehmet Sincar'ın Katiline Müebbet Hapis - #Türkiye." Radikal. Accessed June 30, 2015.

http://www.radikal.com.tr/turkiye/mehmet_sincarin_katiline_muebbet_hapis-1135604.

immunities of Hatip Dicle, Leyla Zana, Ahmet Türk, Orhan Doğan, Sırrı Sakık, Selim Sadak and Mahmut Alnak were lifted. On the same day, Hatip Dicle and Orhan Doğan were taken into custody directly from the parliament building. They were to be charged with treason and would be in prison for the next ten years⁴⁴.

Abbr.	Party Title (in English)	Date opened	Date closed
HEP	People's Labor Party	June 7, 1990	July 14, 1993
ÖZEP	Freedom and Equality Party	June 25, 1992	Dissolved itself to merge HEP
ÖZDEP	Freedom and Democracy Party	October 19, 1992	November 23, 1993
DEP	Democracy Party	June 21, 1991	June 16, 1994
HADEP	People's Democracy Party	May 11, 1994	March 13, 2003
DEHAP	Democratic People's Party	October 24, 1997	November 19, 2005*
DTP	Democratic Society Party	November 9, 2005	December 11, 2009
BDP	Peace and Democracy Party	May 2, 2008	April 22, 2014*
HDP	People's Democratic Party	October, 15, 2012	Present

* These political parties have dissolved themselves, BDP dissolved itself to merge with HDP.

The prohibition of the Kurdish politicians from politics would continue with the closure of successor Kurdish parties such as DEP, ÖZDEP and HADEP by the Constitutional Court whereas more assassinations, unidentified murders and disappearances under custody were taking place in the Southeast region of Turkey. Until 2007 elections, Kurdish politicians did not have seats in TBMM. Only in 2007 Democratic Society Party (DTP), by applying the independent candidate strategy, managed to enter the parliament as independent candidates achieving in total of 22 seats⁴⁶.

DTP's presence in the parliament lasted only for two years, the Constitutional Court decided to dissolve DTP and ban 37 party members from taking part in politics for five years in

⁴⁴ Özdal, Hakkı. "HEP'ten HDP'ye, 'Meclis Kapısında Gözaltı'dan 80 Kişilik Gruba - #Politika." Radikal. June 23, 2015. Accessed June 30, 2015.

http://www.radikal.com.tr/politika/hepten_hdp_ye_meclis_kapisinda_gozaltidan_80_kisilik_gruba-1384180.

⁴⁵ Table taken from Celep, Ödül. "Can the Kurdish Left Contribute to Turkey's Democratization?" Insight Turkey Vol. 16 No.3. (2014) pp 165-180.

⁴⁶ Gürsel, Kadri. "Kürtler Her Durumda Kazanıyor - Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East." Al-Monitor. January 23, 2015. Accessed June 30, 2015.

2009 for having relations with a terrorist organization and aiming to divide the unitary state of Turkey⁴⁷. DTP became the twenty-fourth political party that was banned by the Constitutional Court⁴⁸.

After DTP was prosecuted and a threat to ban the party was imminent, Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) was founded in 2008. Once DTP was abolished, apart from the four banned mayors of DTP, the rest of the political figures within DTP decided to continue their political struggle with BDP as of December 2009⁴⁹. BDP ran in the 2011 general elections with the strategy of the independent candidates and the Kurdish candidates raised their seat number to 35. BDP also applied the co-presidency system, meaning there would be one male, one female position within the party from any county mayorship to the general presidency of the party to promote women's rights⁵⁰. This way, it can be argued that BDP proved that they were a politically liberal, social democrat party⁵¹ which takes pluralism and deliberative democracy as its ground principles and would be promoting equal rights and freedoms for all as stated in the party's constitution⁵².

In addition, the party constitution recognizes that BDP, by definition, is a “mass party of the left”. On one hand, this statement clarifies the fact that since its foundation, BDP's stance has always been on the left of the political spectrum. It mentions all the democratic principles as its top priority, placing itself even before the Kurdish identity issue and the peace objective. The democratic principles are followed by the objective in which European Union membership prospect is mentioned. Only listed as the third objective, it is emphasized that the Republic of

⁴⁷"DTP Kapatıldı." NTV. December 11, 2009. Accessed August 10, 2015. <http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/dtp-kapatildi.YhLjOTBid0WRxwHM0lumSA>.

⁴⁸"Türkiye'de Kapatılan Partiler Listesi." Yeni A. November 16, 2007. Accessed August 10, 2015. <http://www.yenisafak.com/politika/turkiyede-kapatilan-partiler-listesi-82207>.

⁴⁹"Barış Ve Demokrasi Partisi (BDP)." Al Jazeera Turk. October 28, 2013. Accessed August 10, 2015. <http://www.aljazeera.com.tr/haber-analiz/baris-ve-demokrasi-partisi-bdp>.

⁵⁰Seibert, Thomas. The Daily Beast. October 4, 2014. Accessed August 10, 2015. <http://www.thedailybeast.com/witw/articles/2014/04/10/former-child-bride-is-elected-mayor-in-turkey.html>.

⁵¹Gül, Zeki. "On HDP." Interview by author. July 28, 2015.

⁵²BDP Party Constitution in Turkish: <http://www.yargitayeb.gov.tr/Partiler/kimlik/bvdp.pdf>

Turkey is founded by Turks, Kurds and other ethnic groups and BDP acknowledges that. Thus, it aims to achieve peace in the whole of the country, so that all these people can remain in one joint motherland to be governed by democratic principles for all that will provide certain autonomies to some regions. Therefore, looking at its constitution, it is logical to state that the emphasis put on democracy and being a mass party of the left is not of any less importance to BDP. The party and its members concurrently assert that they intend to achieve greater freedoms for everyone and not just the Kurds.

However, on the other hand, it is again plausible to asseverate that it could not become a mass party in the whole of Turkey, at least for 2011. Bearing in mind that half of the Kurdish population would support and vote for the ruling AK Party (Justice and Development Party) in 2011 parliamentary elections due to the successful conduct of the peace process and so-called Kurdish opening⁵³, BDP was correctly aware that it would remain under the ten percent electoral threshold for parliamentary participation, hence they decided to follow the strategy of electing independent candidates from the eastern regions, and then uniting these seats in the parliament. Though this strategy was brilliant and brought almost thirty seats to BDP, it also meant that the party only had candidates from certain cities - which are located in the south east of Turkey. The electorate outside of these cities were not able to vote for BDP candidates and BDP also did not conduct the electoral campaign beyond these areas. Thus, the policies and the stance of BDP in many aspects were not communicated in non-Kurdish provinces. This induced BDP to be publicly perceived as a regional pro-Kurdish power rather than as a party of the left.

Therefore, it is important to underline that the Kurdish political movement had always stood at the left of the Turkish political setting, and all pro-Kurdish parties have been defending

women's and workers' rights as well as addressing socio-economic problems, however these

⁵³"Erdogan's Presidential Dreams Hang by Thread - Al-Monitor: The Pulse of the Middle East." Al-Monitor. May 27, 2015. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/05/turkey-elections-AK-Party-erdogan-presidential-dreams-hang.html>.

parties have either been banned due to their identity politics or communist lenient policies, including the last ban being DTP in 2009. Thus, being a vanguard of the left was an initial characteristic of BDP and this has been initiated preceding HDP's foundation. However, the difference HDP made and the pre-election campaign the Party conducted more distinct than BDP will further be discussed in Chapter III of this paper.

Chapter II: The Turkish Minority in Bulgaria and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms

Bulgarian Turks who account for more than nine percent of the population have existed in Bulgaria since the days of the Ottoman Empire. Though it is not certain whether the contemporary Turks in Bulgaria are the successors of the Christian Bulgarians who have been converted to Islam during the Ottoman times, or whether they have migrated from the East and are related to ethnically Turks, it is certain that they identify themselves as Muslim Turks for more than a century⁵⁴.

Since the founding years of the Bulgarian nation-state, similar to the Kurdish minority's case, the Turkish minority's place within the Bulgarian society has been problematic from the Bulgarian nationalist perspective. As Mary Neuburger has said:

“All of the primary political turning points in Bulgarian history—quasi-independence from the Ottoman Empire in 1878, the dawning of the communist era in 1944, and the post communist period beginning in 1989—have required a re-positioning of Bulgarian national, cultural and political postures on the so called “Turkish question”⁵⁵.

Bulgarian nation-building process has oppressed the Turkish minority and included some anti-Turkish and anti-Ottoman sentiments, just like some other Balkan nationalisms as the Bulgarians saw the Turks as the remnants of the Ottoman Empire who has dominated their

⁵⁴"Bulgarian Turks: From Imperial Rulers To Marginalized Minority." International Business Times. January 21, 2013. Accessed August 12, 2015. <http://www.ibtimes.com/bulgarian-turks-imperial-rulers-marginalized-minority-1028200>.

⁵⁵ Neuburger, Mary. “ Bulgaro-Turkish Encounters and the Re-imagining of the Bulgarian Nation (1878-1995)”, *East European Quarterly*, Vol:XXXI, No:1, March, 1997, p.1

country for about five hundred years⁵⁶. Hence, the citizenship concept in Bulgaria was never inclusive of the Turkish identity. However, pre-communism years would only be a drop in the bucket in comparison with the mid-1980s. The Bulgarian Turks faced the harshest treatment under the communist Todor Zhivkov regime.

According to Dimitrov (2000), these repressive assimilationist policies were instituted by the state and the decision was taken by “the close circle of the politburo members led by Zhivkov” and the communist machinery had perceived a false “window of opportunity” to solve this undergoing “problem of the Turkish minority” which could not have been solved by any other means⁵⁷.

The mid-1980 communism policies included unequal treatment and assimilationist policies which forced the ethnic Turks to change their Turkish names to Slavic names. The cultural Turkish identity was suppressed and during the “revival process” between 1984-1989 the communist regime implemented its heaviest policies on Turks. Many who refused to give up on their identities were tortured and expelled from Bulgaria from the border with Turkey⁵⁸. Perhaps brainwashed by the communist propoganda, common Bulgarians perhaps showed support for these assimilationist policies, however, the Bulgarian intellectuals protested this violent fashion of implementing these policies and the relations with Turkey have deteriorated along with other Western democracies⁵⁹.

According to Zhelyazkova (2001), about 350,000 ethnic Turks were forced to flee to Turkey during the summer of 1989 alone, and although 120,000 of them later returned, this

⁵⁶ Çelik, Nihat. “The Political Participation of Turkish Minority in Bulgaria and the Public Reaction: The Case of Movement for Rights and Freedoms (1990-1994)”, *Karadeniz Araştırmaları*, Cilt: 6, Sayı: 22, Yaz 2009, s.1-19. Print.

⁵⁷ Dimitrov, Vesselin. “*In Search of a Homogeneous Nation: The Assimilation of Bulgaria’s Turkish Minority, 1984-1985*,” *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, 2000.

⁵⁸ Boyka, Stefanova. Between ethnopolitics and liberal centrism: the Movement for Rights and Freedoms in the mainstream of Bulgarian party politics, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 40:5, 767-782. July 30, 2012. Accessed August 5, 2015.

⁵⁹ Dimitrov, Vesselin. “*In Search of a Homogeneous Nation: The Assimilation of Bulgaria’s Turkish Minority, 1984-1985*,” *Journal of Ethnopolitics and Minority Issues in Europe*, 2000.

exodus has been acknowledged as the largest group migration after the World War II leaving a legacy for ethnic politics in Bulgaria in the post-communist period⁶⁰. With the collapse of the communist regime, during the uncertain nature of the transition period, a potential danger of secession and/or an ethnic conflict surfaced, and this threat was more imminent due to the traumatic memories of the Turkish population which were still very recent. In addition to the uncertainty of transitional politics, the impact of an economic crises in the 1990s were felt on all ethnic groups, especially on the minorities including the Turks who suffered a serious blow due to the closure of state enterprises and unequal access to land restitution and employment⁶¹.

In the aftermath of the communist regime, the Movement for Rights and Freedoms Party or the so-called “Turkish party” was established during these burdensome conditions. DPS was founded in January 1990 and its objectives were to provide a correction to the legacies of oppression, discrimination and assimilation of the ethnic Turkish minority under the communist rule and provide assistance to the unity of the Bulgarian people in accordance with the European Court of Human Rights and international norms and principles of equality and non-discrimination. In 1991 elections, DPS became the third largest party and received 24 seats in the Great National Assembly, hence acquired legitimacy in the Bulgarian party politics⁶², even though there was a constitutional ban on forming political parties based on ethnicity, race and religion in Bulgaria⁶³.

The elections and the absence of violence proved that Bulgaria successfully avoided a potential ethnic clash and secession. This achievement was due to the fact that the post-Zhivkov communist government started an inclusive political process reversing the effects of the previous

⁶⁰ Zhelyazkova, Antonina. “The Bulgarian Ethnic Model.” *East European Constitutional Review* 10.4 (2001): 62–66. Print.

⁶¹ Erdinç, Didar. “The Bulgarian Model of Ethnic Peace During Transition to Democracy.” 1-34. Accessed August 7, 2015. <http://home.comcast.net/~rossen47/savingbulgarianjews/BulgarianEthnicModel.doc>.

⁶² Boyka, Stefanova. *Between ethnopolitics ...* 40:5, 767-782.

⁶³ Erdinç, Didar. “The Bulgarian Model” 1-34.

repressive policies directed at the Turkish minority and the post-communist government should be given credit for achieving peaceful coexistence in the country with the help of the other political parties and public organizations⁶⁴. According to Erdiñç, what should be applauded in this transition period is that the Bulgarian elite restored the political and social rights of the Turkish minority, drafted the 1991 constitution, recognized and allowed the active participation of the DPS in Bulgarian politics. Bulgaria was also successful in creating democratic institutions in order to hear the demands of the Turks and this led to a fair representation of the Bulgarian Turks, which helped containing the demands of the Turkish minority. Furthermore, DPS managed to distance itself from extremism and had a moderate political stance. Unlike the Kurdish minority in Turkey, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria has never demanded federalism nor showed separatist tendency despite having large numbers and living through the difficulties of economic recession in mid-1990s.

It is also important to note that even though the DPS was a crucial actor which helped improving ethnic relations in Bulgaria, its interests were not purely ethnic. The transition years from communism meant a heavy blow to the Turks, Pomaks, and the Roma, consequently socio-political concerns dominated the DPS's policies and discourse in the parliament⁶⁵. DPS showed an economic stance which was in favour of economic liberalization and gradual integration to the world market, hence this was appealing to "the overwhelmingly poor and rural constituents of the DPS such as the Pomaks" and to the "Roma which constituted the urban poor"⁶⁶. Sometimes the economic policies were prioritized. For instance, in 1992, the DPS switched sides from Union of Democratic Forces (SDS), with which DPS was then in a coalition, to Bulgarian

⁶⁴ Vassilev, Rossen. "Post-Communist Bulgaria's Ethnopolitics," *The Global Review of Ethnopolitics*, Vol. 1, no. 2, December 2001, pp. 37-53.

⁶⁵ Erdiñç, Didar. "The Bulgarian Model" 1-34.

⁶⁶ Erdiñç, Didar. "Bulgaristan'daki Değişim Sürecinde Türk Azınlığın Ekonomik Durumu [Economic Situation of Turks and Pomaks during Bulgarian Transition]." In *Türk Dünyası*, 394-400. Vol. 20. Ankara: Yeni Türkiye Yayınları, 2002.

Socialist Party (BSP) which preferred a more moderate and gradual economic transition. This switch happened despite the BSP's constitutional attempts to close down the DPS in 1991⁶⁷.

Therefore from its early years, we can observe DPS following a pragmatic approach in its policies which include different variables. DPS started as an agent of confidence building by overcoming concerns over separation during the fall of communism. After it gained legitimacy, DPS worked together with several governments, even formed a coalition with its former enemy. First, it succeeded in reintroducing the Turkish language classes (January 1991), then brought the Dogan Act (1992) to the parliament which was to restore housing, property and employment for all ethnic Turks who fled to Turkey in 1989 because of the repressive assimilation. DPS's presence also ensured an absence of an ethnic clash and outburst of Turkish nationalism⁶⁸.

After certain socio-political rights were achieved, with the economic crisis in mid-1990s, DPS had to reflect its electorate's economic difficulties by adopting economic policies. For example, when the Turkish tobacco producers were in a conflict with the Bulgartabac over the low prices on tobacco, the DPS intervened and negotiated higher prices with Philip Morris and Reemstma⁶⁹. The DPS representatives maintained that, ethnic Turks as well as Roma population were underrepresented significantly in state administration, police agencies and the military. This problem was even acknowledged by the ruling SDS in 1998. All these strategies helped successfully mobilize electoral support for the Party in the 1990s⁷⁰.

Once the economic and socio-political conditions started to improve, those who have previously migrated to Turkey in the early years of transition due to financial hardships began to come back to Bulgaria. In the meantime, Turkey has adopted a cautious policy about separatism due to her own problems with the Kurdish minority and pushed for peace and integration in the

⁶⁷ Erdinç, Didar. "The Bulgarian Model of .. 1-34.

⁶⁸ Erdinç, Didar. "The Bulgarian Model of .. 1-34.

⁶⁹ Erdinç, Didar. "The Bulgarian Model of .. 1-34.

⁷⁰ Erdinç, Didar. "The Bulgarian Model of .. 1-34.

Balkans, condemning separatism in the case of former Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Bulgaria. The bilateral relations between Turkey and Bulgaria also began to improve and in 1999, “Turkey recognized the Bulgarian progress in its treatment of the Turkish minority by extending official thanks to the Bulgarian government for its good treatment”⁷¹.

In the early elections of 1997, DPS made a decision to take part in the upcoming elections having formed an alliance with the Green Party of Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union "Nikola Petkov", the Union of Democratic Forces-Centre, New Choice and the Federation "Kingdom of Bulgaria"⁷². The Union for National Salvation (ANS) led by DPS obtained 7.6 % of the votes in 1997(see Table 1.1). Despite the fact that this was an outcome of a successful electoral strategy and there was a 2% increase in the vote share vis a vis 5.4% of the votes obtained in 1994, this achievement was rather insignificant in comparison with the crushing victory of the electoral alliance led by Ivan Kostov's Union of Democratic Forces (SDS) which managed to win 49.15% of the votes and 137 seats in the parliament⁷³. Following this electoral success which was regarded⁷⁴ as the largest margin of victory since 1990, Kostov's cabinet was first to serve for four years without any interruption.

However, what could be regarded as crucial here was that by participating in an alliance with other right-wing liberal parties in Bulgaria, DPS proved that it was determined to take concrete steps to become an all-national party of Bulgaria, as in its party constitution, it was declared that it would aim to “embrace all issues of civil rights in Bulgaria”, “contribute to the unity of the Bulgarian people” and promote the rights of “all religious and cultural communities in Bulgaria” at the national-level⁷⁵.

⁷¹ Erdinç, Didar. "The Bulgarian Model of .. 1-34.

⁷² Nohlen, D. and Stöver, P. *Elections in Europe: A data handbook*, Baden-Baden, Germany: Nomos, 2010. 372

⁷³ Nohlen, D. and Stöver, P. *Elections in Europe: A data handbook ...* 372

⁷⁴ Crampton, R. J. *A Concise History of Bulgaria*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 236-7.

⁷⁵ “Movement for Rights and Freedoms - History." History. Accessed August 19, 2015.

<http://www.dps.bg/en/History.aspx>.

Parliamentary Elect. of	1991	1994	1997	2001	2005	2009	2013***	2014
% of votes obtained by DPS	7.6	5.44	7.6 (ANS*)	7.45	12.8	14.4	11.31	14.84
# of seats won in the parliament	24	15	19	21	34	38	36	38
Government formed by	SDS**	BSP	SDS	NDSV* *	BSP- NDSV**	GERB	BSP**	GERB
Voter turnout rate	83.87	75.23	58.87	66.63	55.76	60.64	51.33	51.05

*The Union for National Salvation was an alliance between DPS, the Green Party of Bulgaria, the Bulgarian Agrarian People's Union "Nikola Petkov", the Union of Democratic Forces-Centre, New Choice and the Federation "Kingdom of Bulgaria"⁷⁷

**Coalition government was established with the partnership of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms in these years following the elections.

***Government decided to hold early elections in 2013 due to mass protests sparked by the terrific rise in the electricity bills and executive's mafia style in ruling the country⁷⁸. Voter turnout was 51.33% and was the lowest on record since the fall of communism⁷⁹. The Oresharski government that was formed after the 2013 elections would be dissolved in 2014⁸⁰.

The first time that DPS had a real chance to participate in the government was in 2001. Prior to that, DPS was rather a party that had a balancing power and an actor forming coalitions without actually taking part in active governance. As off 2001, DPS had a vital role in resolving disputes between the SDS and BSP⁸¹. According to the chairman of DPS Lyutvi Mestan⁸²:

“If DPS enters into the power it will never be a factor threatening the national interests of Bulgaria, on the contrary, the DPS will be the guarantee that the Macedonian scenario will not be

⁷⁶Table created by author using the statistics in “Bulgaria Parliamentary Chamber: Narodno Sobranie” website archives. Accessed August 19, 2015. http://www.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2045_97.htm and <http://www.electionresources.org/bg/> and Nohlen, D. and Stöver, P. (2010)

⁷⁷Nohlen, D. and Stöver, P. (2010) Elections in Europe: A data handbook, pp. 372

⁷⁸"2013: The Year of Bulgarian Protest | World Policy Institute." World Policy Institute. Accessed August 19, 2015. <http://www.worldpolicy.org/blog/2013/12/17/2013-year-bulgarian-protest>.

⁷⁹"International IDEA." Voter Turnout Data for Bulgaria (Parliamentary, Presidential, EU Parliament). Accessed August 20, 2015. <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=23>.

⁸⁰"Bulgarian Gov't to Resign between July 23, 25 - PM Oresharski - Novinite.com - Sofia News Agency." Novinite.com - Sofia News Agency. Accessed August 20, 2015. <http://www.novinite.com/articles/161825/Bulgarian-Gov't-to-Resign-between-July-23,-25-PM-Oresharski>.

⁸¹Erdoğan, Didar. "The Bulgarian Model of .. 1-34.

⁸²"Mestan Succeeds Dogan as Bulgarian Ethnic Turkish Party Leader after Assassination Attempt - Novinite.com - Sofia News Agency." Novinite.com - Sofia News Agency. Accessed August 20, 2015. http://www.novinite.com/view_news.php?id=147022.

repeated. The challenge in front of DPS is to find its due place in the power. (...) DPS deserves place in the new government: during the last 11 years we paid the highest price of the transition - this is the low social status of our electorate. The unemployment in the regions with minority population is 3 to 4 times higher than the average for the country. (...) Our priority will be to bring the social and economic status of these regions to the levels of the other regions.”

In the post-2000 contemporary Bulgaria, the Turkish minority has obtained social and political rights and is represented at the parliament level by DPS which in 2001, under the coalition formed with the Simeon II's (NDSV) government, DPS occupied the positions of Minister of Agriculture and Forests and the Minister of the Permanent Commission for the Protection of the Population. DPS members are also municipal governors and hold a great number of vice ministerial posts⁸³.

In time, DPS as a party, became more moderate as well as autonomous within the party system by building electoral alliances between 1997-2001. In the period between 2001–2005, DPS participated as a small partner in a liberal-centrist coalition. In 2005, DPS had a sharp increase in its votes and it took part in a three partite coalition. After the 2009 elections, the DPS secured its place in the parliamentary opposition⁸⁴ after having reached 14.4% of votes in 2009 elections.

This achievement clearly proved the electorate was no longer only Turks, Pomaks and the Roma population, but also ethnic Bulgarians who saw DPS as a defender of human rights, liberal policies and programs that would favour the people from lower social stratas. Despite the shift to become more moderate, less ethnic-oriented and an all-national Bulgarian party, DPS did not

⁸³ Erdinç, Didar. "The Bulgarian Model of .. 1-34.

⁸⁴ Boyka, Stefanova. Between ethnopolitics and liberal centrism: the Movement for Rights and Freedoms in the mainstream of Bulgarian party politics, *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, 40:5, 767-782. July 30, 2012. Accessed August 5, 2015.

lose support from the ethnic Turks. Today, under the administration of the current Boyko Borisov government, DPS continues its stable parliamentary presence as a party in opposition.

Chapter III: HDP's Emergence and Success in Embracing the Turkish Left: 2014 Presidential and 2015 Parliamentary Elections

For a profound understanding of the formation and the evolution of HDP, it is important to comprehend the general political events and setting in Turkey. The Kurds as a group have given support to AK Party since the beginning of 2000s as they saw AK Party's political liberalization policy as a chance to bring more freedom for themselves and this was signalled by then Prime Minister Erdoğan with his 2005 speech in Diyarbakır, there he called for peace, however the official peace process did not begin until 2011⁸⁵. It should also be kept in mind that AK Party's popularity stemmed from their conservative stance and this was a major attraction for the religious Kurds. Overall, half of the Kurdish population have shown support for AK Party over the last decade and BDP only remained a local party which sometimes acted jointly with AK Party in the parliament until recent years.

In the last decade, the Erdoğan government initiated several legal reforms that acknowledged the Kurdish identity and culture. In the summer of 2009, the AK Party government started a process called 'democratic opening' for the purpose of normalizing and desecuritizing the Kurdish issue and providing a resolution through democratic and civilian means. In October 2012, HDP was formed and unified many Kurdish splinter groups with the purpose of forming an umbrella party that would not give the image of a regional or ethnic Kurdish party and it hoped to get a better deal during the peace negotiation process⁸⁶. From the

⁸⁵Blaser, Noah. "Who Represents Turkey's Kurds?" PLATFORM FOR INDEPENDENT JOURNALISM - BAĞIMSIZ GAZETECİLİK PLATFORMU. June 3, 2015. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://platform24.org/en/articles/289/who-represents-turkeys-kurds>.

⁸⁶ Akkoc, Raziye. "How Turkey's Pro-Kurdish Party Could Stop the President's Push for More Power." The Telegraph. Accessed June 30, 2015.

very first objective, HDP had a more western and left-lenient profile and it was one of the main actors in the peace process along with PKK and the government. The possibility of achieving long-lasting peace and the disarmament of PKK were things that were seen as improbable since the 1990s, therefore, the peace talks were regarded as an extraordinary achievement by many scholars⁸⁷. However HDP's role in the peace process and their representation of the Kurdish side made them seen, by many still, as a representative of the Kurdish people to this process even though the BDP-HDP line represented a progressive, left-wing party tradition⁸⁸. According to Celep;

“On the one hand, the Kurdish left party tradition started out as a regional movement and concentrated in the Kurdish-populated east and southeast regions of Turkey. On the other hand, it has recently embraced a wider spectrum of issues including equal citizenship, democratization, freedom of expression, social justice, gender equality, ecology and labor rights. Furthermore, the BDP-HDP is the only parliamentary actor to have actively defended LGBT rights in Turkey.”

The growing oppression, legal vioalitions against human rights and the autocratic personality of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were the main cause of the June Gezi Park movement in 2013. Protestors came from different groups and classes such as liberals, Alevis, LGBT people, old-school Kemalists, middle-class secularists, nationalists as well as the Kurdish minority⁸⁹. Perhaps, one of the most memorable moments was when one of BDP-HDP parliamentary representatives, Sırrı Süreyya Önder, stood in front of the police forces and earth movers to protect the protestors using his parliamentary immunity⁹⁰. Overall, the protests showed huge reaction was present among the people against the governing party, that the police applied

⁸⁷ Larrabee, F. Stephen. "Turkey's New Kurdish Opening." *Survival*: 133-46.

⁸⁸ Celep, Ödül. "Can the Kurdish Left Contribute to Turkey's Democratization?" *Insight Turkey* Vol. 16 No.3. (2014) pp 165-180.

⁸⁹ Tisdall, Simon. "Turkey Protests Expose Anxiety over Erdogan's Growing Autocratic Ambitions." *The Guardian*. June 3, 2013. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/03/turkey-protests-erdogan-autocratic-ambitions>.

⁹⁰"Taksim Parkı'nda Surpriz Gelisme... Sırrı Süreyya Önder Makinelerinin önüne Geçti." *Milliyet Gazetesi*. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/taksim-parki-nda-surpriz-siyaset/detay/1716103/default.htm>.

excessive violence on protestors which ended up killing seven people⁹¹ during Gezi and Berkin Elvan who was hospitalised in Gezi lost his life nine months later at the age of fifteen⁹², and that the media was tremendously under the control of Erdoğan as it was fully silenced.

Reactions against Erdoğan's AK Party increased even more at the end of 2013, when the tapes in which Erdoğan phoned his son Bilal to ask him to hide huge amounts of illicit money were released by the police forces from the Gülen movement (Cemaat⁹³ or so-called Hizmet movement) and thus the split between Cemaat and AK Party occurred. Cemaat is considered to be the biggest Muslim network in the world⁹⁴ and it has been the main partner, or rather the “father”, of AK Party and this split, along with the Gezi Park movement, perhaps marked the beginning of the isolation of Erdoğan's AK Party.

March 2014 local elections were going to be the milestone which would either prove or disprove the weakening of Erdoğan. Despite the electoral fraud coverages⁹⁵, AK Party had faced only a 4-percent drop in comparison with the previous 2011 parliamentary elections and managed to attract for about 45⁹⁶ percent of the votes in 2014 March elections. This proved that AK Party continued to receive immense support despite the recent predicaments.

After the local elections of March 2014, the BDP dissolved itself and joined the HDP, while a group within BDP decided to carry on the old party by renaming its official title to Democratic Regions Party (DBP) as a regional ethnic party with the objective of achieving

⁹¹"Gezi'de ölen 7 Kişi İçin 7 ülkede, 7 Kişi, 7 Dakika #duranadam Oldu." T24.com.tr. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://t24.com.tr/haber/gezide-olen-7-kisi-icin-7-sehirde-7-kisi-7-dakika-duranadam-oldu,235521>.

⁹²Berkin Elvan: Turkish PM Accuses Dead Boy of Terror Links - BBC News." BBC News. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26594922>.

⁹³ Cemaat means community/assembly in Turkish.

⁹⁴"Profile: Fethullah Gulen's Hizmet Movement - BBC News." BBC News. December 18, 2013. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-13503361>.

⁹⁵"Turkey-Record Fraud Rate in Local Elections: 1418 Cases." SendikaOrg RSS. Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://sendika1.org/2014/03/turkey-local-elections-a-peoples-mobilisation-against-cheating-and-fraud-in-ballot-boxes/>.

⁹⁶ "SEÇİM SONUÇLARI - 2014 Yerel Seçim Sonuçları." SEÇİM SONUÇLARI - 2014 Yerel Seçim Sonuçları. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://secim.haberler.com/2014/>.

‘democratic autonomy’ of Turkey’s Kurdish-populated regions⁹⁷. Moreover, the first test ahead of the newly merged HDP and BDP was the 2014 presidential elections which were to be held for the first time in Turkey within the next few months. There were three presidential candidates: Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, CHP and MHP (Nationalist Movement Party)'s joint candidate Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu and the co-president of HDP Selahattin Demirtaş. The results were impressive. Even though Erdoğan was elected the the President of Turkey by getting more than 50 percent of votes in the first round, HDP's nominee and human rights lawyer Demirtaş raised the party’s traditional 6-7 percent votes to 9.76 percent, which was considered to be a breakthrough in the electoral history of the Kurdish left-wing party tradition⁹⁸. During the presidential race, Demirtaş adopted a western, more left-lenient, anti-AK Party and democratic rhetoric – and focused less on the rights of the Kurds⁹⁹. With this strategy, HDP saw that there would be a noteworthy increase in their votes and they could be the new voice of an effective opposition against Erdoğan.

There were several reasons behind this rewarding performance. First of them was that, under the ongoing oppressive policies of the Erdoğan government, Demirtaş was perhaps the only leader who spoke bluntly against him despite the continuing peace process. The HDP leader said that the peace was the obvious priority, however this would not mean that they would not criticize the government on the policies implemented in the Middle East, halting the accession process with the European Union as well as on human rights violations such as ban on social media websites and arrests of journalists¹⁰⁰. The second reason behind Demirtaş's success was

⁹⁷ Celep, Ödül. “Can the Kurdish Left Contribute to Turkey's Democratization?” Insight Turkey Vol. 16 No.3. (2014) pp 165-180.

⁹⁸ “HDP: Election message taken, more inclusive policies to be embraced.” Hürriyet Daily News – Haber Detaş. August 13, 2014. Accessed August 25, 2015. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/hdp-election-message-taken-more-inclusive-policies-to-be-embraced.aspx?pageID=238&nid=70397&NewsCatID=338>

⁹⁹ Gül, Zeki. "On HDP." Interview by author. July 28, 2015.

¹⁰⁰ Yinanç, Barçın. "Presidential Candidate Demirtaş: ‘Turkey Fanning the Flames of the Middle East’." Hürriyet Daily News | Haber Detaş. July 21, 2014. Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/presidential-candidate-demirtas-turkey-fanning-the-flames-of-the-middle-east.aspx?pageID=238&nid=69383>.

also due to CHP's impotent policies. CHP chose MHP as its ally in the presidential elections and both went for a conservative and nationalist candidate named Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu. İhsanoğlu was a disappointment for the left-wing electorate of CHP and not even a strong candidate that could compete with Erdoğan according to the rest¹⁰¹. As a result, Demirtaş emerged as the only candidate who could contest Erdoğan and achieve this under uneven opportunities as the media channels and the majority of newspapers were in Erdoğan's command and did not mention much on Demirtaş¹⁰².

Following the presidential elections of 2014, a series of events that would challenge the Kurdish support to AK Party were to happen. September 2014 marked the beginning of the battle for Kobane and the AK Party was accused of giving unofficial support for the fighting forces for ISIS against the Kurds¹⁰³. Erdoğan publicly showed his sympathy for ISIS when he cheerfully said that Kobane is about to fall¹⁰⁴ and that PKK was “the same for Turkey as ISIS”¹⁰⁵, a month later. These statements were met with huge disappointment by the Kurds and this was to be the main driver for the religious Kurds to retreat their support for AK Party and turn to HDP in the 2015 parliamentary elections¹⁰⁶.

Preceding the 2015 parliamentary elections, there was not any doubt that Erdoğan set his heart on the Turkish nationalists' votes. He repeatedly declared that “there is no Kurdish question” and claimed that sufficient rights have already been given to the Kurds¹⁰⁷. These

¹⁰¹“Tale of Two Campaigns as Turkish Opposition Struggles to Be Heard - FT.com.” Financial Times. July 16, 2014. Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/a3f416ca-0c03-11e4-a096-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3jua1AXfx>.

¹⁰²Gül, Zeki. "On HDP." Interview by author. July 28, 2015.

¹⁰³"Battle for Kobane: Key Events - BBC News." BBC News. Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29688108>.

¹⁰⁴Erdoğan: Kobani Düştü Düşecek! | Gündem Haberleri." Www.haberturk.com. Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/997321-erdogan-kobani-dustu-dusecek>.

¹⁰⁵Genç, Derviş. "Cumhurbaşkanı: Bizim İçin IŞİD Neyse PKK Da Odur." ZAMAN. Accessed August 26, 2015. http://www.zaman.com.tr/politika_cumhurbaşkanı-bizim-icin-isis-neyse-pkk-da-odur_2248663.html.

¹⁰⁶"Who Represents Turkey's Kurds?" P24 -. Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://platform24.org/en/articles/289/who-represents-turkeys-kurds>.

¹⁰⁷"Who Represents Turkey's Kurds?" P24 -. Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://platform24.org/en/articles/289/who-represents-turkeys-kurds>.

developments had their impact on the peace process and it was again more and more obvious that the government did not have any intention to move forward with the talks, at least before the June elections. Despite being against the constitutional separation of powers and the duties of the post of the president, Erdoğan started his pre-election campaign for AK party and rallied all around Turkey. In the south eastern provinces, he continuously attacked Demirtaş and HDP for being a defender for trans-genders and infidels as well as labeling Demirtaş as a “Zoroastrian”¹⁰⁸ and a hater of Islam. Obviously, these rallies had some impact overall, however, the majority of the pre-election polls expected that HDP would be easily over the 10 percent threshold¹⁰⁹.

Indeed, the election polls proved to be right in 2015 June elections as the results were remarkably high for HDP. Surprising for the many, HDP obtained 13 percent of the votes and expanded their ethnic/regional electorate beyond the Kurds, without any doubt, as it managed to attain over 12 percent of votes in Istanbul and 10 percent in İzmir¹¹⁰, in the most western provinces of Turkey. This proved that the principles based on democracy and human rights and anti-AK Party rhetoric advocated by HDP managed to attract non-Kurdish voters. Hence, it is plausible to say that HDP showed partial success in embracing the Turkish left and gained their support.

In spite of the increase of votes to HDP in the western cities, still the main electorate of the Party is the Kurds, who were offended by the President Erdoğan's statements denying the Kurdish question, as well as the identity, and by his attitude which put ISIS and PKK in the same equation. To give more statistical data, it is estimated by KONDA Research Institute¹¹¹ that HDP (or BDP)'s increase in votes stemmed from the fact that HDP decided to run in the elections as a political party and about 53 percent of HDP's votes came from people who voted for AK Party in

¹⁰⁸ Zerdüşt in Turkish, to watch the video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_PyEkjvDnq8

¹⁰⁹"HDP Barajı Geçiyor Mu? Anketler Ne Diyor?" HDP Barajı Geçiyor Mu? Anketler Ne Diyor? Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://www.genelsecimler2015.com/hdp-baraji-geciyor-mu-anketler-ne-diyor>.

¹¹⁰"SEÇİM SONUÇLARI - 2015 Genel Seçim Sonuçları." SEÇİM SONUÇLARI. Accessed August 26, 2015.

¹¹¹ For more information please check: <http://www.konda.com.tr/en/>

the 2011 elections. What is interesting to note is that about 33 percent of votes came from the electorate who did not cast a ballot in 2011 elections, suggesting that these people are younger voters who did not go to the polls four years ago¹¹².

Consequently, it would be wrong to assume a major shift in the electorate from CHP to HDP since HDP's advancement cannot be reflected as a direct consequence of the shift in Turkish left, but rather it should be linked to the Kurdish electorate among whom for about 40 percent chose HDP over AK Party, whereas 49 percent of the Kurds continued to cast their ballots to AK Party¹¹³.

Year	2007*	2009	2011	2014**	2014	2015
Type of election	Parliament	Local	Parliament	Local	Presidentia l	Parliament
% of votes won by BDP/HDP	5.2	5.7	6.6	6.1	9.76	13.1
# of seats won in the parliament	26	N/A	35	N/A	N/A	80
Govt. formed by	AK Party	N/A	AK Party	N/A	N/A	None***

* Kurdish independent candidates and several left-wing parties participated in 2007 elections under the alliance of “Thousand Hope Candidates” (Bin Umut Adayları)¹¹⁵.

** After the 2014 local elections, BDP dissolved and merged with HDP.

*** The result will most likely be that there will be another election in November 2015 since the attempts to form a coalition government have failed.

The seat number of HDP is now 80, equal to Turkey’s third largest party MHP's seats.

Due to the lack of a coalition government, war in Syria and a new decision to hold early

¹¹²"KONDA'dan Sürpriz Rapor: Emanet Oyu İddiası Temelsiz, CHP HDP'nin İki Katı Oyu MHP'ye Kaybetti!" T24 - Özel Haber. June 18, 2015. Accessed August 27, 2015. <http://t24.com.tr/haber/kondadan-surpriz-rapor-emanet-oyu-iddiasi-temelsiz-chp-hdpnin-iki-kati-oyu-mhpye-kaybetti.300105>.

¹¹³"Who Represents Turkey's Kurds?" P24 -. Accessed August 26, 2015. <http://platform24.org/en/articles/289/who-represents-turkeys-kurds>.

¹¹⁴Table created by author using the statistics in <http://www.electionresources.org/tr/> and <http://secim.haberler.com/> websites. Accessed August 24, 2015.

¹¹⁵"Secime Bagimsiz Girecek “Bin Umut Adayları” Tanıtıldı." SendikaOrg RSS. Accessed August 24, 2015. <http://sendika1.org/2007/06/secime-bagimsiz-girecek-bin-umut-adaylari-tanitildi/>.

elections in November¹¹⁶, Turkey has not really experienced what HDP would have done effectively after having been elected, however it is certain that there is a left-lenient, secular spirit in the Kurdish political movement and even though it has not attracted all of the liberals and left-lenient people in Turkey, this can be possible in the future if Turkey gets used to the presence of Kurds in political sphere, that is the Kurdish political movement is normalized more in the eyes of the public. This way HDP can become a permanent player in Turkish politics which can obtain 15 to 18 percent of votes in the future. This is also conceivable considering that the Kurdish nationalism is based on civic nationalism. According to Celep:

“The emphasis on the Kurdish identity is balanced by sound language that is distant from both ethno-nationalism and religious fundamentalism ... The concept ‘Kurds’ is constructed on the grounds of civic/equal citizenship, peoplehood and historically socially disadvantaged status rather than ethnic bonds or any reference to a Kurdish ‘superiority. The DTP-BDP party tradition conceptualizes Kurds as an oppressed, disadvantaged people in Turkey, together with several minorities in similar conditions (i.e., Arabs, Circassians, Syrians)”¹¹⁷

Moreover, HDP holds the potential to turn from an ethnic/regional party to a more mainstream party which embraces all of the disadvantaged peoples of Turkey in terms of class, social or socio-economic statuses. It is at the moment conducting politics against Erdoğan and fills the vacuum of the left-libertarian policy space which cannot be filled by the rest of the actors: CHP and MHP¹¹⁸. From feminism to socialist tradition and from ecologist to welfarist policies, HDP holds the potential to become the party embracing the Turkish left. Subsequently, HDP's presence as a component in Turkish politics can lead not only to the resolving of the Kurdish question, but also to Turkey's democratization as a whole.

¹¹⁶“Erken Seçim 1 Kasım'da - BBC Türkçe." BBC Türkçe. Accessed September 8, 2015. http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/08/150825_davutoglu_basbakan_atandi.

¹¹⁷Celep, Ödül. “Can the Kurdish Left Contribute to Turkey's Democratization?” *Insight Turkey* Vol. 16 No.3. (2014) pp 165-180.

¹¹⁸Celep, Ödül. “Can the Kurdish Left Contribute to Turkey's Democratization?” *Insight Turkey* Vol. 16 No.3. (2014) pp 165-180.

Chapter IV: Comparative Analysis of the Two Minority Political Parties

In order to make a comparison between the DPS and HDP, an comparative analysis of the two minority groups would be a prerequisite. The Turkish minority of Bulgaria and Kurdish minority of Turkey can be compared in several categories such as their demographic structure, their demands as minority groups, activities, the treatment they faced from their own nation states as well as the future challenges that are ahead for both of them.

On one hand, the Turkish minority in Bulgaria accounts for up to ten percent of the population in Bulgaria and like the Kurdish minority, they had faced maltreatment and forced expulsion during the 1980s under the communist regime and had been oppressed due to their minority statuses. However, this situation had been quickly reversed in the post-communist period since a new state was born and DPS has been one of the key players in normalizing the relations and preventing an ethnic clash (See Erdinç). In its early years, the DPS was an ethnicity based organization which later on transformed itself to a defender of human rights. DPS was initially a party of the Turkish minority and clearly was an ethnic party. It successfully gained cultural and political rights for the group it represents. Additionally, DPS also supported economic liberalism during the transition and crisis period, and gradually the Party turned itself into a more mainstream right-wing, liberal party which raised its electorate to over 14 percent in the last elections. After years of experience in taking part in coalitions, DPS's complexion has changed and it was transformed into a all-national party which was ready to take responsibility in the governance of the whole Bulgaria.¹¹⁹

What is interesting with DPS is that as it gradually became more flexible, moderate and inclusive, it did not become less attractive to the ethnic minority group and continued to receive their support as well as it added Bulgarian nationals to its electorate. DPS owed its success to its

¹¹⁹ Erdinç, Didar. "The Bulgarian Model of .. 1-34.

capability in adapting to different settings in politics as well as being able to take part in the governance of the country. Indeed, these achievements and vote differences by year in elections should be regarded in the broader context of Bulgarian politics including other political parties who also managed to attract the votes of the Turkish, Roma and Pomak minorities time to time and this needs further detailed analysis. Though, what is most certain is that DPS managed to become a permanent player in the Bulgarian party system and this is due to the fact that it managed to pursue fortunate policies as well as formed coalition governments and was pragmatic as it can be argued that it made the best use out of the electoral outcomes.

On the other hand, the Kurdish minority in Turkey account for about fifteen to eighteen percent of the population in Turkey, and with the rest of the Kurds who live in Iraq, Iran and Syria, they make up in total 25 to 35 million people who are considered to be the largest minority group in the world without a nation state¹²⁰.

Although the Kurdish political movement of BDP-HDP in Turkey differentiates itself from the rest of the Kurds in the region outside of Turkey, the impact of YPG forces in Syria who have been fighting against the Islamic State and the siege of Kobane has been vivid on the choices of the Kurds and politics in Turkey. Without a doubt, the Kurdish political movement had a greater number of different components and it cannot be considered as homogeneous. Among them, our focus, BDP-HDP has always followed a left-wing tradition and, like DPS, has been the advocate of greater cultural and social rights for the Kurdish minority in Turkey. Bearing in mind that the Kurdish political movement sparked out within the leftist ideological movement and the reaction shown by the Turkish state - both to the leftists and the Kurds - has been much harsher and longer in contrast with the Bulgarian state. Additionally, it is important to mention that the formation of a terrorist organization (PKK) and its secessionist, terrorist

¹²⁰"Who Are the Kurds? - BBC News." BBC News. Accessed August 31, 2015. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29702440>.

activities which began in 1984 show that the reaction shown to the state also has been much harsher in the Kurdish case.

Despite the improvements made by the governing AK Party in the late 2000s toward recognizing the rights of Turkey's Kurdish minority and moving toward a peace process with the separatist Kurds, these improvements have slowly been reversed since the President Erdoğan saw that the peace would not bring him the popularity he expected to have. Of course, prior to that he had seen the Kurds as the partner who would help him achieve the parliamentary supermajority in the June elections that would have allowed the constitutional change for his presidential system. Since the outcome deprived the AK Party of a governing majority, Erdoğan decided that he would create chaos in the country and opt for the national Turks' votes who support the war against the PKK.

The more autocratic Erdoğan became, there remained no political party to defend the rights of the Kurdish minority. Thus, this left the area for HDP to fill and make efforts to embrace what can be considered as the "left" in Turkey. Since then, the Party has clearly shown that it drew itself away from being an ethnic party and has put emphasis on the oppressed, disadvantageous groups in Turkey in terms of ethnicity, class, sex, status or religion. This policy of becoming more mainstream was successful as it had the potential to fill the gap of a left-wing rhetoric which has been absent in the Turkish political setting for a long while.

HDP successfully rallied over almost every city in Turkey and advocated for human rights for all assuming a left-wing rhetoric that talked about women's, workers', LGBTI, Alevi rights and proved that it was a party of Turkey. But unlike the DPS, HDP's becoming mainstream has not occurred fully as the rights for the Kurdish minority as well as the peace which has been long dreamed have not been achieved, yet. HDP or any other Kurdish party has not taken part in coalition governments, as DPS did, and the presence of HDP in the Turkish

politics is not perceived to be a normal phenomena, at least not yet. Therefore, in contrast with the DPS, HDP still has a long way to go and in the current setting of democracy in Turkey, the future does not seem to be very bright.

Although the HDP's presence is not accepted by some parts of the society, HDP managed to unite the Kurdish minority under its umbrella, more than its predecessors. Before HDP, the Alevi Kurds would vote for CHP and Sunni Kurds would vote for AK Party. In the last elections, for the first time, we see that majority of them were united under HDP's umbrella. This suggests that HDP, in its electorate, still is an ethnic party. It is also important to note that still, the main electorate of HDP consists of the Kurds who withdrew their support from AK Party, and not from CHP, and seems like there will be more Kurdish voters who will turn their backs to Erdoğan after the recent developments.

It is also important to note that HDP successfully promoted and re-branded itself in the Western cities. This successful branding of the Party worked to an extent that HDP achieved more than 10 percent of the votes in Izmir¹²¹, where it is usually considered as the “Castle of Kemalists” and more than 12 percent of votes in Istanbul, becoming the third largest party¹²² in the most crowded city in Turkey. Albeit the gains in the west which mostly came from the younger generations, the Party's success in passing the electoral threshold came from the Kurdish voters. Therefore it is plausible to state that what happened was in majority thanks to the Kurdish voters, though the impact of the West and the left-lenient, non-Kurdish votes cannot be underestimated either.

Consequently, even though HDP has a long way to go to become a permanent player in the Turkish politics (in comparison with DPS), if the Party follows successful policies and shows

¹²¹"İZMİR 2015 GENEL SEÇİM SONUÇLARI." İZMİR SEÇİM SONUÇLARI. Accessed September 5, 2015. <http://secim.haberler.com/2015/izmir-secim-sonuclari/>.

¹²²"İSTANBUL 2015 GENEL SEÇİM SONUÇLARI." İSTANBUL SEÇİM SONUÇLARI. Accessed September 5, 2015. <http://secim.haberler.com/2015/istanbul-secim-sonuclari/>.

maturity and evidence that it can actually take part in governing the whole of the country, HDP's becoming a mainstream party can be achieved easily in the next decade. Of course, this is not solely up to HDP but the circumstances in Turkish politics should also be convenient meaning that, at least, there is somewhat ceasefire between PKK and the Turkish army, and the perception on the people that HDP is not an extension of PKK in politics but a true defender of peace and mediation. If that is achieved, there is no doubt that HDP can follow DPS's footsteps and become a left-wing, all-national party of Turkey, without any trouble and perhaps it can continue to contain both votes of the ethnic/regional electorate as well as the votes of the non-ethnic Kurdish people in the future, just like DPS does.

Chapter V: Future Challenges for HDP and Democracy in Turkey

In a country in the state of war, it is not very easy to make any predictions, though if we are optimistic that there will be peace in Turkey and the demands of the Kurdish minority in terms of greater cultural and political autonomy are to be met in the future, we could also foresee HDP becoming more mainstream and perhaps turning into a permanent player in the politics of Turkey if it can manage to keep the votes of the Kurds, as DPS did formerly. Still, almost half of the Kurdish voters are known to be voting for AK Party, but the increase in traditional 6-7 percent votes to 13 percent in a few years seems to prove that more Kurdish voters are distancing themselves from AK Party, hence it would not be entirely wrong to assume that HDP will have higher votes in the upcoming elections.

Though, the same challenge that DPS faced would also be evident in this case. HDP would face the threat of losing its main ethnically defined electorate perhaps or there could be new pro-Kurdish parties which could embrace the religious and conservative Kurds for example. The Kurdish base is to be known as the most conservative and uneducated segment in Turkey and during the interview conducted with Dr. Zeki Gül, I have posed the question on whether this

is a major dilemma for HDP to talk about LGBTI and women's rights, for example, to this very conservative group. The HDP representative's answer to this was that they planned to create a Turkey celebrated with its differences and this was exactly what they called as *Türkiyelileşmek*¹²³. They had carried the motive to transform and educate their own electorate and plant them with the idea of empathy and understanding towards everybody in the society. And the Party itself would be a prototype of what they idealized for achieving in Turkey, therefore it would not be a controversy to have LGBTI members, ecologists, feminists, conservatives, Alevis, Kurds and so on in one party. They claimed that they were the voice of all the underrepresented, oppressed and disadvantaged groups and they wanted to bring social emancipation to all of these groups, thus this would be the path they were to follow in uniting and changing the society as well as healing the wounds of the whole country.

This idea of 'becoming a citizen of Turkey' can be regarded as it had been successfully achieved within the Party structure as well as on the Party constitution, candidates and ideology. For instance among the HDP candidates in the June elections, especially in İzmir, people like Ertuğrul Kürkçü (an ex-socialist), Müslüm Doğan (the leader of Pir Sultan Abdal – Alevi association), Dr. Zeki Gül (President of İzmir Chamber of Doctors and a voluntary doctor of human rights associations) were selected to be candidates. Thus, HDP promoted and re-branded itself, at least in the west, and was prominent in the western cities as the Party of Left and not as a Kurdish party only.

What HDP has achieved in the June elections is regarded as a good start on the road to 'becoming a citizen of Turkey' and achieving peace. However, in the post-election period, without the absence of an elected cabinet as well as in the presence of war, we have actively seen

¹²³ Becoming a citizen of Turkey, rather than a Turk.

that HDP leaders continued to criticize President Erdoğan who is becoming more dominant and powerful in the absence of the executive governmental body.

Most recently, the Turkish army started its operations on PKK camps and the peace process de facto halted, and now the Turkish warplanes have resumed bombing targets in northern Iraq. The reason for the renewed fighting was the killing of two Turkish police officers¹²⁴. But even if the attack was carried out by PKK, as the government claimed, an imminent armed response on PKK was a decision that was taken too quickly and there could have been other ways that could be found than to start a war, indeed. This quick response starting a war between the Army and PKK seems to be due to the fact that President Erdoğan's AK Party lost the parliamentary majority in the June elections and by taking the country to war and chaos, the President Erdoğan aims at creating the image that without AK Party's governance, there will be no peace and calm in the country.

Almost every day, we hear news on losses by the military, or by the guerilla forces, in any case losses of the civilian casualties in the east due to the attacks carried out by the Turkish military on PKK members. While the people in the west are enjoying their summer holidays, the people of the east, in towns such as Cizre, Dersim, Yüksekova, have no access to electricity or internet and suffering from attacks onto their own villages or towns¹²⁵. People from different regions cry for their own martyrs, and adhere themselves to their own ethnicities, forgetting the fact that we are the people's of one country.

Only in this atmosphere, HDP's actions and post-election policies can be examined. Ever since the end of the ceasefire, HDP distanced itself from PKK, and its leaders have called for a ceasefire between PKK and the Turkish state, condemning all kinds of violence and losses. HDP

¹²⁴"Mr. Erdogan's War Against the Kurds." The New York Times. August 30, 2015. Accessed August 31, 2015. http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/31/opinion/turkeys-war-of-distraction-on-kurds.html?_r=0.

¹²⁵"Yüksekova Ve Cizre'de Yüksek Tansiyon: 4 ölü, 17 Yaralı!" Taraf Gazetesi. August 27, 2015. Accessed September 5, 2015. <http://www.taraf.com.tr/guncel-haber/yuksekovave-cizrede-yuksektansiyon-4-olu-17-yarali/>.

also took part in the temporary cabinet in order to be able to stop AK Party from acting on its own by having a say in the governmental decisions, though it is too early to talk about its effects, so far.

Along with statements condemning the violence, HDP also was separated with the PKK headquarters in Kandil due to the reason that Kandil criticised HDP for taking part in the coalition meetings and trying to build dialogue on the parliamentary level, whereas the state has been acting aggressively on PKK¹²⁶. HDP representatives replied on this stating that a new parliamentary order has been achieved after the June elections and they should be fulfilling their duties as they have been elected to do so. This differentiation on the topic has been interpreted as a separation between PKK and HDP, and according to Assoc. Prof. Ayşen Candaş¹²⁷, whether this is a planned move to increase the popularity of HDP or its for real, it will be an important factor which will help to increase the votes that will be cast for HDP in the early elections that will be held in November. The public who suspected from HDP to be in cooperation with AK Party in the post-election period, or that they were just an extension of PKK in Turkish politics (some claimed they had organic ties with PKK) started to realize that HDP was none of them. People also saw that they have been the only party to organize “Peace Walks” all over Turkey¹²⁸ and asked for the disarmament of PKK¹²⁹. All steps that were taken by HDP clearly showed that they were a strict defender of peace in Turkey and in contrast with the fear and chaos created by AK Party, HDP's stance and emphasis on dialogue are expected to show very positive effects in the future.

¹²⁶"Kandil'den şok Açıklama: HDP Hükümete Girerse... Haberi, Haberleri." Rota Haber. Accessed September 5, 2015. <http://www.rotahaber.com/gundem/kandil-den-sok-aciklama-hdp-hukumete-girerse-h536383.html>.

¹²⁷"Asıl Bölünme Eşitlik Ve Dayanışma Duygusunun Yok Olmasıdır" - Evrensel.net." Evrensel.net. August 31, 2015. Accessed September 5, 2015. <http://www.evrensel.net/haber/259469/asil-bolunme-esitlik-ve-dayanisma-duygusunun-yok-olmasidir>.

¹²⁸"İstanbul'da IŞİD'e Karşı 'Büyük Barış Yürüyüşü' Pazar Günü 4'te." Diken. July 22, 2015. Accessed September 5, 2015. <http://www.diken.com.tr/istanbulda-iside-karsi-buyuk-baris-yuruyusu-pazar-gunu-4te/>.

¹²⁹"Selahattin Demirtas'tan Ders Gibi Açıklama: Silahları Susturun!" YouTube. September 7, 2015. Accessed September 8, 2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFPnvtvmwCY&feature=youtu.be>.

Conceding that HDP continues this positive language and being a defender of achieving the long-wanted peace in Turkey, the future can only bring more support to a party like HDP as the big proportion of the society craves for the presence of peace. However, the number of right-wing nationalists who organize attacks on HDP buildings all over Turkey or people who identify HDP with PKK should not also be underestimated. The future of Turkey, from the point where we stand at the moment, does not seem very bright and the number of casualties both from the military and the guerilla forces as well as the civilian deaths are constantly rising. Most recently in Dağlıca, the PKK killed 16 soldiers and in its aftermath¹³⁰, with the rise of nationalist feelings, there have been vandal attacks on HDP building in Balıkesir¹³¹, and physical assaults on Kurds in numerous places all over Turkey¹³². This is deeply concerning and the peaceful language of Demirtaş and HDP should continue to call for PKK to end its attacks. People can only understand that HDP is a defender of peace and thus differentiate HDP from PKK on the political level.

Under these circumstances, it is also crucial to remember that the first and foremost move to achieve peace and calm in the country is the removal of President Erdoğan and the AK Party from power or to convince them to restart the negotiations with the PKK. Whether achieving a ceasefire or perpetual peace is possible or not can only be seen in several years, if not after the forthcoming elections. Confidently, one day, the existence of pro-Kurdish parties in TBMM will be fully accepted by the public and hopefully the arms will be gone forever.

¹³⁰"Turkey Bids Farewell to 16 Soldiers Killed in Dağlıca Terrorist Attack." TodaysZaman. Accessed September 9, 2015. http://www.todayszaman.com/national_turkey-bids-farewell-to-16-soldiers-killed-in-daglica-terrorist-attack_398601.html.

¹³¹"Balıkesir'de HDP Binasına Saldırı." HÜRRIYET. Accessed September 9, 2015. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/30009720.asp>.

¹³²"Antalya'da HDP Binasına Saldıran Bir Grup, Kürt Sandıkları MHP'liyi Dövdü!" T24.com.tr. Accessed September 9, 2015. <http://t24.com.tr/haber/burdurda-hdp-binasina-saldiran-bir-grup-kurt-sandiklari-mhpli-yi-dovdu,309029>.

Conclusions

Apart from the contemporary situation in Turkey and HDP's most recent moves, when we take the Kurdish political movement as a whole, we can easily argue that their left-lenient stance has been there for decades, but we need to accept that prior to June 2015 elections, pro-Kurdish parties have only been regional parties which received votes from certain cities in the east and could have independent candidates. Hence, HDP showed its left-wing profile to the whole of the country only after making the decision to enter the elections as a political party – and not as independent candidates – they could perhaps become a party of an all-national party of Turkey.

Obviously, HDP's electoral success is said to have also come from the mistakes of other parties: mainly AK Party and Erdoğan's autocratic and oppressive policies and its stance on ISIS and Kobane, as well as CHP's lack of voicing an effective opposition. Nevertheless, the victory of HDP in the June elections has also been as a result of its noteworthy commitments which filled the vacuum of the left-libertarian policy space, rallies all over Turkey that successfully criticised the President Erdoğan and his party, as well as of the selection of appropriate candidates in every region which certainly helped them to attract votes in the western cities, simultaneously with the east. Therefore it is plausible to say that the Kurdish political movement had always had a stance to embrace the left in Turkey, but this was made more visible with HDP due to AK Party's authoritarian moves, and HDP's decision to enter the June elections as a party after the presidential elections of 2014 since it had seen that it had the potential that could embrace the left in Turkey.

This apparent transformation of the Kurdish political movement has been in many ways similar to that of the Movement for Rights and Freedoms in Bulgaria. Although started off as an ethnic party, DPS managed to become a party of whole of Bulgaria and raised its electoral potential beyond its initial minority electorate. This was possible due to Bulgarian ruling elite's

and DPS's mediation on the cultural and social rights that were to be given to the Turkish minority, and DPS's taking part in the coalitions and proving that they could actually address not only the troubles of a minority, but of all citizens of Bulgaria. This required a normalization process, during which the Bulgarian people have accepted the presence of DPS in Bulgarian politics and DPS's policies and decisions were fortunate to an extent that, while adding new people to its electorate, DPS did not lose its main electorate who were the Muslim minority in Bulgaria. DPS's transformation into a mainstream party was exceptional in that sense. Even though it is too early to comment on the success of HDP's transformation into a mainstream left-wing party and there are many other variables in both countries that are diverse, if things go as planned, DPS could be a strong model for HDP eventually and HDP can substantially follow the evolution of DPS.

Despite the similarities between the two, there is something peculiar to the Kurdish case. It is that HDP's ultimate presence in the Turkish politics holds the historical potential to resolve the Kurdish question, which had been present since the days of the WWI and is not the problem of Kurds alone, but actually the number one problem of Turkey as a whole. As stated in the very first paragraph of the paper, for Turkey to become a consolidated democracy, the parliamentary representation of the Kurdish minority as well as the peaceful coexistence of the society with its minorities are of utmost importance. In order to achieve the requirements of a consolidated democracy, and not remain just a procedural democracy, Turkey has a long list of things to achieve, and these are not provisions only on the Kurdish issue, but more general concerns. However, the role of achieving peace is preliminary for Turkey to become a consolidated democracy and HDP's current role in this process can not be underestimated.

HDP has showed patience and continuous emphasis on the language of the peace despite the provocative attacks, so far, and if continues to do so, HDP will be able to become a

mainstream party and will gain the full confidence of the Turkish society henceforward. Hopefully, the only challenge ahead of HDP will remain as its capability to keep its main electorate as well as to embrace the Turkish left, a future analysis might be done to focus on that. For now, I would like to conclude with these words which emphasize the priority on the peace and HDP's insistence on keeping the peaceful language;

“The only way to render such acts of provocation void is to look at them with love when you see members of the AK Party, CHP or MHP. Only feelings of fraternity will render such acts of provocation void. None of these political parties are our enemies. That’s how they want it to be. We will not let that happen. Our greatest achievement will be peace. Peace in this country is more valuable than the election ballot, a seat in office, or in parliament, and my own life.”¹³³

¹³³ These words were said following the bomb attacks on HDP rally in Diyarbakır. "Demirtaş: Our One and Only Answer to Provocations Is Peace | Agos." Agos. May 18, 2015. Accessed September 5, 2015. <http://www.agos.com.tr/en/article/11620/demirtas-our-one-and-only-answer-to-provocations-is-peace>.

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