

Tailoring strategies according to ever-changing dynamics: the evolving image of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany

Baser, B.

Author post-print (accepted) deposited by Coventry University's Repository

Original citation & hyperlink:

Baser, B 2015, 'Tailoring strategies according to ever-changing dynamics: the evolving image of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany' *Terrorism and Political Violence*, vol 29, no. 4. DOI: 10.1080/09546553.2015.1060226

<https://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2015.1060226>

DOI 10.1080/09546553.2015.1060226

ISSN 0954-6553

ESSN 1556-1836

Publisher: Taylor & Francis

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Terrorism and Political Violence* on 2015, available

online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/10.1080/09546553.2015.1060226>

Copyright © and Moral Rights are retained by the author(s) and/ or other copyright owners. A copy can be downloaded for personal non-commercial research or study, without prior permission or charge. This item cannot be reproduced or quoted extensively from without first obtaining permission in writing from the copyright holder(s). The content must not be changed in any way or sold commercially in any format or medium without the formal permission of the copyright holders.

This document is the author's post-print version, incorporating any revisions agreed during the peer-review process. Some differences between the published version and this version may remain and you are advised to consult the published version if you wish to cite from it.



**Tailoring Strategies According to Ever-Changing Dynamics:
The Altering Image of the Kurdish Diaspora in Germany**

Dr. Bahar Baser

Centre for Trust, Peace and Social Relations

Coventry University

Abstract

Germany might be considered as the European country that has suffered the most from the spatial diffusion of Turkey's internal conflicts. It has received the highest number of Kurdish migrants in Europe and it became the core of Kurdish mobilization in transnational space. Germany's approach to the Kurdish Question on its own soil – combined with the strategies that the Kurdish activists used – determined the scope of opportunity structures for the mobilization of the Kurdish movement. This paper explains how Kurdish activism has become perceptible in Germany, and analyses the German political environment by focusing on the criminalization and stigmatization of the Kurdish movement, especially during the 1990s. It then describes the discursive shift and change in framing strategies that the Kurdish diaspora experienced after the capture of the PKK leader in 1999. Lastly, it touches upon the recent developments in the Middle East, especially in Kobane and their impact on the image of the Kurdish movement. The paper is based on extensive fieldwork in Germany and includes testimonies of Kurdish diaspora activists with a focus on their own perceptions about their situation and how they respond to securitization policies in the host country.

Introduction

During the last months of 2014, there were dozens of protests all around Europe, organized by the Kurdish diaspora members pleading for the international community's help and support for a small town called Kobane in the north of Syria. It is a small Kurdish town which became famous due to the furious battle between the Kurdish guerrillas/peshmerga and the IS (Islamic State) militants. Kurdish diaspora members organized themselves via social media networks and mobilized to raise awareness of this issue. They occupied airports, invaded consulates and parliamentary buildings, organized demonstrations that gathered together thousands of people, took part in sit-ins, marches and hunger strikes. The contentions that are created due to fighting in Kobane also spilled over to the diaspora populations. Clashes were reported between the Salafis/IS supporters and the Kurds who were protesting for Kobane in Hamburg and other German cities. It was a clear sign that either via advocacy or overt conflict, diasporas react to and interact with the political dynamics in the homeland, demonstrating over and over again that the conflicts in today's world are no longer confined to within the homeland's borders.

Diasporas carry their cause to the political scenes of the host countries, which is termed by some scholars as *diffusion of domestic politics*¹ or *conflict import*.² Migrants, refugees, those in exile and expats searched for justice or some kind of closure outside the borders of their homeland. The diffusion of conflicts by migration flows is not a new phenomenon, however scholars agree that it has become much more visible, durable and frequent during the last couple of decades. What makes the issue different today is perhaps the post 9-11 discourse which tended to analyse the activities of diaspora groups

¹ Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, *Diasporas and conflict resolution-part of the problem or part of the solution?* (Copenhagen: DIIS Brief, 2006).

² Elise Feron, "Diaspora politics: from "long distance nationalism" to autonomization" in Dirk Halm and Zeynep Sezgin (eds.), *Migration and Organized Civil Society - Rethinking national policy* (London: Routledge, 2012), 63-78; Päivi Pirkkalainen and Mahdi Abdile, "The diaspora – conflict – peace – nexus: a literature review", *Diaspeace Working Paper* ISSN 1798-1689 No. 1 (2009); Bahar Baser, *Diasporas and Homeland Conflicts: A Comparative Perspective* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishers, 2015).

from a securitization angle³ and to investigate their constructive and destructive contributions and what motivates them to choose one of these ends.⁴ Many scholars, policy makers as well as the media have approached the activism of diaspora groups and their *non-transparent* relations with their homelands as a potential security threat for the country of residence. The common perception in the West was that “diasporas are dangerous insofar as they bring with them the homeland conflict and thereby threaten the social cohesion of those countries where they eventually settle”.⁵ In particular, diasporas which come from conflict zones and are mobilized for homeland politics came under the surveillance of the host states. So little attention has been paid by the host country policy makers to understanding the complexity of diaspora behaviour, especially in the context of conflict-generated migrants who experience statelessness, oppression and structural, symbolic or direct violence in their respective home countries. Why and in what ways do diasporas get involved in homeland politics? How do they strategize their actions and frame their discourses? Why do they sometimes opt for violent protests?

The Kurdish Question in Turkey is an apt case for the diffusion of a conflict situation from a homeland to a host country as it is one of the many conflicts in the world which reveals itself in local, regional and transnational contexts. For a long time, it became the question used to bargain between the European Union and Turkey when Turkey was acting persistently to gain membership to the organization. However, it was also a matter for debate in many European Union member states. Among them, Germany might be considered as the European country that has suffered the most from the spatial diffusion of Turkey’s internal conflicts. Germany has received the highest number of Kurdish and Turkish migrants in Europe and, therefore, contention between them has become highly visible in the German public sphere. It has witnessed the rise of Kurdish nationalism in various forms and perceived the evolution of Kurdish mobilization on its soil as a “*security problem*” as a combination of its general approach to the Kurdish Question as well as due to the confrontational methods utilized by the Kurdish diaspora, especially during the 1990s.

³ Thomas Faist, “The Migration-Security Nexus: International Migration and Security before and after 9/11,” *University of Bielefeld: Centre on Migration, Citizenship and Development (COMCAD) Working Paper No. 9* (2005).

⁴ J. Brinkerhoff, “Diaspora identity and the potential for violence: Toward an identity-mobilization framework,” *International Journal of Theory and Research* 8, No. 1 (2008): 67-88.

⁵ Pirkkalainen and Abdile (see note 2 above), 22.

This paper explores how the Kurdish diaspora⁶ transnationalized the Kurdish cause in the German context. The idea is to show that there is no overhead Kurdish Question that all of the European countries experience invariably and instead each host country has its own authentic puzzle that has to do with the Kurdish Question in Turkey. It is argued that the Kurdish conflict did not just randomly spill-over to Germany, but there is a reason why the Kurdish diaspora has chosen certain strategies from a grand repertoire of actions. The activism of the Kurdish Diaspora, Germany's relations with Turkey, Germany's approach to the Kurdish migrants as well as the course of events back in Turkey got Germany tangled in its own Kurdish Question and compelled it to form its own approach to its own Kurdish Question. As the Kurdish diaspora directly contested the German state in the 1990s and applied confrontational methods in order to pursue its goals, the Kurdish Question in Germany turned into a domestic security concern from "one of Turkey's internal problems." The arguments are based on an analysis of the trajectory of Kurdish diaspora behaviour in Germany since the 1980s and the face-to-face interviews that the author conducted with Kurdish diaspora activists in Germany as well as in other European countries between 2008 and 2014.

Since the 1990s, the Kurdish movement has been criminalized in Germany as well as in Europe and its political opportunities have been significantly limited. After the capture of their leader Öcalan, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and consequently the diaspora went through significant changes in their agenda and opted to challenge the idea that they constitute a security issue for their host states. This new approach of tailoring strategies according to the ever-changing dynamics occurred gradually rather than instantly. During this transition period the diaspora followed the pattern of "a dual strategy to remain relevant in the European context"⁷ and swapped between conventional and unconventional methods. Currently, the diaspora is leaning more and more towards less confrontational methods, framing their plight in a human rights perspective and this time they are choosing repertoires that contest the criminalization

⁶ As the Kurdish diaspora is heterogeneous and there are many actors and individuals involved in diaspora politics, it is necessary to state that this paper solely focuses on the diaspora activities that were in line with the PKK ideology. The PKK has the largest recruitment rate within the Kurdish diaspora and it is the dominant Kurdish movement which has significant mass support. I refer to the PKK supporting groups when I use the Kurdish Diaspora throughout the text unless stated otherwise in a different context.

⁷ Vera Eccarius-Kelly, "Interpreting the PKK's Signals in Europe," *Perspectives on Terrorism* 2, no. 11 (2008): 10-14.

of the movement both within Turkey and Germany. There is also a significant discursive change that demonstrates that the Kurds now perceive themselves as citizens or residents of Germany, and are thus a part of German society and challenging the policy makers in terms of equal citizenship and opportunity frameworks.

There is currently an on-going peace process between the PKK and the Turkish state that reflects positively on both communities at home and abroad. The PKK has modified its agenda over the years and currently opts for regional autonomy. At the end of February 2015, the imprisoned PKK leader made a call to the PKK to lay down arms once the conditions for a peaceful resolution are met. At the same time, the latest developments in the Middle East, especially the fight between the IS and the Kurdish fighters in Kobane highly affected the image of the PKK in Western countries and 2015 could be a pivotal moment for the PKK and the segment of the Kurdish diaspora that is sympathising with it. The diaspora's sympathy for the PKK and YPG showed that there is mass support for these organizations from Kurds all around the world, which cannot be ignored. Despite being criminalized and labelled as 'terrorist' organizations, they have managed to gain significant grounds for support and legitimacy. This will surely be an eye-opener for European politicians and policy makers and may strengthen the hand of Kurdish activists in their appeal to remove the PKK from the terrorism lists. Although Turkey will resist such a decision and European countries are still reluctant to make such a move, this is being discussed more than ever in political circles as well as in the media – in effect the PKK is slowly becoming decriminalized. The diaspora leans its activism towards achieving this aim that will legalize the movement and enhance the scope of Kurdish resistance both at home and abroad.

Opportunities and Limitations for Diaspora Mobilization in the Host Country

Understanding the behaviour of diaspora communities gained increasing importance following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which threw the limelight on migrants and their loyalty to their home/host country. Diasporas as the non-state actors who influence homeland conflicts from afar as external players, by providing political support to insurgent movements, sending remittances and lobbying, have become a subject of

debate for social scientists as well as policy makers.⁸ Many cases of conflict in the Middle East, Caucasus and South Asia have been exposed to diaspora influences. As a result of the better dissemination of information and improved communication, diasporas have greater potential to interact between the homeland and hostland.⁹ They have the authority to change the balance of power in the local and transnational contexts¹⁰ or at least to disturb the traditional state mechanisms to a certain level by acting as a non-state actor.

Surely, how diasporas get organized and act in a certain manner depends on endogenous and exogenous factors. First of all, they operate in a host country that might work both as a constraint or facilitator for their activities.¹¹ It is thus essential to talk about the hostland, its migrant incorporation policies and the opportunity structures that it grants to the diaspora members. However, political opportunity structures in the host countries cannot solely explain the diversity of diaspora mobilization in different contexts and they are not the only factor that determines the repertoires of actions that a diaspora group opts to operationalize. The foreign policy priorities of the host country, as well as its relations with the homeland can cause a significant level of diversity and play an important role when it comes to creating manoeuvre spaces for the diaspora mobilization.¹² Diasporas are also rational actors and they perform cost-benefit calculations while determining their agenda and strategies that will help them to pursue their goals.¹³ They prioritize certain issues over others, while considering the circumstances in the host country as well as those in the home country. Therefore, their

⁸ T. Lyons and P. Mandaville, *Introduction: Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012): 1-25; Brinkerhoff (see note 4 above); J. Demmers, "Diaspora and Conflict: Locality, long-distance nationalism, and delocalisation of conflict dynamics", *The Public* 9, no. 1 (2002): 85-96; F. Adamson, "Constructing the Diaspora: Diaspora Identity Politics and Transnational Social Movements", in T. Lyons and P. Mandaville (eds.), *Politics from Afar: Transnational Diasporas and Networks* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012): 25-45.

⁹ Demmers (see note 9 above); B. Baser and A. Swain, "Diasporas as peacemakers: Third party mediation in homeland conflicts," *International Journal on World Peace* 7, no. 7 (2008): 7-28; F. Cochrane, B. Baser and A. Swain, "Home Thoughts from Abroad: The Variable Impacts of Diasporas on Peace-Building," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 32, no. 8 (2009): 681-704.

¹⁰ M.J.A Wohl et al., "Expressions of Political Practice: Collective angst moderates politicized collective identity to predict support for political protest (peaceful or violent) among diaspora members," *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 3, Part A (2014): 114-125.

¹¹ Østergaard-Nielsen (see note 1 above).

¹² Ibid.; Adamson (see note 9 above).

¹³ M. J. Esmen, "Diasporas and International Relations," in G. Sheffer (ed.), *Modern Diasporas in International Politics* (London and Sydney: Croom Helm., 1986): 333-49; Bahar Baser, "The Awakening of a Latent Diaspora: The Political Mobilization of First and Second Generation Turkish Migrants in Sweden," *Ethnopolitics* 13, no. 4 (2014): 355-376.

actions can also *limit or enhance* the political opportunities that they are given in a specific host country.

The *political opportunity structures (POS)* are of particular importance in terms of mobilization and claims-making in a receiving country. Diasporic activities are affected and shaped by the opportunity structures that it grants to the migrant community and the openness of the system which makes the diaspora members stake holders in certain decision making processes.¹⁴ The POS affects the ability of diasporas to function as interest groups and to target policy change.¹⁵ For the most part, research on opportunity structures has taken “the openness or closure of political institutions and decision making mechanisms as the main variable, and then included the stability of elite alignments supporting a polity, the presence of influential allies, and the state’s capacity and propensity for repression”.¹⁶ The openness of the POS in a host country may enable the transnational migrant communities to form diasporic organisations easily. Since mobilization is a key factor for such organisations, the openness of the system may facilitate the recruitment of members by making it possible to use the political arenas to draw attention to the diaspora’s cause from both the members of the same ethnic/religious/cultural group as well as the policy-makers in the host country. They may easily distribute flyers, organise seminars, hold protests, or use diaspora associations for propaganda. The relationship between the hostland and the diaspora is also crucial in order to understand the conditions under which diasporas develop. On the other hand, if the system is closed in terms of political opportunity structures, it might not facilitate the organisational procedure of diaspora formation but it could offer more incentives to members of immigrant communities to get together and mobilize if they were suppressed in the host country.¹⁷ Giugni and Passy argue that closed POS tend to provoke more disruptive forms of action since the challengers need to raise the

¹⁴ P. Odmalm, “Civil society, migrant organizations, and political parties: Theoretical linkages and applications to the Swedish context,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 30, no. 3 (2004): 475.

¹⁵ Esman (see note 14 above), 338.

¹⁶ S. Wayland, “Ethnonationalist networks and transnational opportunities: The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora,” *Review of International Studies* 30, no. 3 (2004): 416.

¹⁷ Eva Østergaard-Nielsen, *Transnational Politics: Turks and Kurds in Germany* (New York: Routledge, 2003); H. Smith, “Diasporas in International Conflict,” in H. Smith & P. Stares (eds.), *Diasporas in Conflict: Peace-makers or peace-wreckers?* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2007), 3-16; Baser and Swain (see note 10 above).

stakes in order to make their voices heard.¹⁸ As the diaspora groups feel that they cannot express themselves adequately through political channels in the hostland, they might consider more aggressive means of raising their voice. Instead, in hostlands where diasporas believe they have a chance to influence policy-making through collective claims-making, aggressive methods may actually lose their appeal.

Hostland opportunity structures are not static either. They may change over time as the result of shifts in the hostland's approach towards the diaspora group or towards the country they come from. In certain cases, the hostlands may not just act as "midwives but also as gatekeepers as they lay down rules and constraints for the diaspora's political attempts to influence conflicts in their countries of origin".¹⁹ For instance, it is possible that the hostlands may ban certain ethnic organisations which they perceive as a security threat or which have connections to terrorist organisations.²⁰ In different phases of the conflict cycle, the hostland might provide different opportunities; at times it may limit the scope of diaspora activism in order not to jeopardize its relations with the other state, or at other times it might provide a huge range of opportunities at the discursive and political level in order to challenge the other state. The relations between the homeland and the hostland might become difficult when the homeland wants to curb or accelerate the diaspora formation of a certain group in the hostland. The homeland might want to interfere in hostland policies in order to prevent any threat to its interests.

Others contend that the conditions in the homeland may be the determinants of the diasporic strategies of action. For instance, Wohl et al.²¹ developed a theory where they found a strong correlation between the combination of *collective angst* and politicized collective identity and violent protests. According to them, some members of diasporas, in favour of armed groups in their homeland, may prefer the use of political violence because they think it can lead to the desired political change in a more effective way than peaceful protests. They suggest that if the homeland struggle's outcome is perceived to have existential consequences or the situation in the homeland poses a

¹⁸ M. Giugni and F. Passy, "Influencing migration policy from outside: The impact of migrant, extreme-right and solidarity movements," in M. Giugni and F. Passy (eds.), *Dialogues on migration policy* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 3-4.

¹⁹ Østergaard-Nielsen (see note 1 above), 8.

²⁰ Wayland (see note 17 above).

²¹ Wohl et al. (see note 11 above).

threat to the group's future, then it is more likely that diaspora members will tend to use violent means to make their voice heard. They argue that 'collective identities and intergroup emotions (like *collective angst*) need to be considered concurrently, rather than in isolation when studying the collective behaviours that are part and parcel of the making of critical junctures in a group's historical trajectory.'²²

Last but not least, one should also not undermine the fact that diasporas have power and will. They are non-state actors that are trying to open up a field for themselves between different actors that consist of nation states and international organizations. They have their own interests and agendas and they calculate their moves by considering the circumstances within which they have to operate. Diaspora elites may choose different patterns of action at different times in different settings. "There are no predetermined patterns of diasporic activity in conflict"²³ and there are no predetermined strategies that a diaspora follows in each different host country setting. Their decisions might sometimes enhance their sphere of influence and sometimes might work against them and limit their actions. For instance, it is an obvious fact that "diaspora political organizations and activities have to stay on the right side of the law and are not tolerated if they are perceived to constitute a domestic or international security threat"²⁴ but they might still choose to use confrontational methods if they see the need in that specific period. Diaspora mobilization after all is about constant negotiations between the members as well as among outside actors, and contesting the sovereignty of nation states by finding a space to raise concerns about certain issues.

Below, I will explain the conditions of the Kurdish diaspora and analyse the reasons the diaspora opted for unconventional methods and took the risk of being criminalized and rejected in Germany. I argue that in some cases, conditions in the homeland and hostland may be both conducive in terms of determining strategies. As will be shown with the case of Kurds in Germany, both German and Turkish policies towards the accommodation of Kurdish minority rights and political space paved the way for non-conventional methods of protesting by the diaspora Kurds. However, this attitude is

²² Ibid, 122.

²³ Smith (see note 18 above), 11.

²⁴ Østergaard-Nielsen (see note 1 above).

gradually leaving its place to peaceful protest and civic representation and the diaspora's image in Europe is changing simultaneously with the image of the PKK.

Germany's Kurdish Question

The roots of Turkey's Kurdish Question date back to almost a century ago, however currently it is used to define the armed struggle that the PKK started against the Turkish state almost four decades ago. At the core lies the oppression of Kurds as a minority group in Turkey since the Turkish Republic was founded and there was increased pressure on Kurdish political activism over the years where Turkey faced coup d'états and political turmoil. The PKK was founded in 1978 by a number of Kurdish activists in Turkey. It started an armed struggle against the Turkish state in 1984 with the aim of forming a separate Kurdish state.

After the military coup d'état of 1980, and as a result of Kurdish nationalist uprisings, the degree of suppression the Kurds experienced increased significantly. Kurdish parties were banned and the Turkish Army began to take strong measures in southeast Turkey.²⁵ In the following years, Article 26 of the 1982 Constitution prohibited the use of the Kurdish language in public. These measures accelerated Kurdish migration to Europe and countries such as Germany received a significant number of applications from Kurdish asylum seekers. Leaders of various Kurdish political movements came to Europe and formed the basis for a strong Kurdish diaspora that would challenge Turkish domination as they carried the movement beyond the Turkish state's reach and control.

The Kurdish diaspora in Germany comprises labour migrants, students, asylum-seekers, refugees, exiled intellectuals and their families and descendants. Kurdish migration to Germany started with the bilateral labour migration agreements between Turkey and Germany at the beginning of the 1960s but the profile of the migrants changed significantly during the mid-1970s and especially at the end of the 1980s with the arrival of asylum seekers who were leaving Turkey due to political chaos and the coup in 1980. As the military regime harshly crushed any Kurdish movement in Turkey, which it perceived as a threat to the territorial integrity of the Turkish state, many Kurds found

²⁵ A. Blatte, "The Kurdish movement ethnic mobilization and Europeanization," *Paper presented at the European Union Studies Association (EUSA) 8th biennial conference (27-29 March 2003)*: 7.

refuge in Germany as asylum seekers.²⁶ The establishment of ethnic organisations naturally followed the waves of Kurdish migration and started becoming politically active with the escalation of the conflict in Turkey. The PKK became the most dominant Kurdish movement in Europe and the activities of pro-PKK Kurdish organisations in Europe surpassed those of earlier groups.²⁷

After the 1980s, Germany was eventually identified as “*a second front*” by the PKK during its war with the Turkish Army²⁸ as it provided them with a liberal political environment to become mobilized in and allowed them to promote the Kurdish cause. Due to the relatively large size of the Kurdish community in Germany compared to in other European countries, the PKK seized the opportunity to recruit from this group and many Kurdish immigrants supported the PKK both politically and financially. The problems of Kurdish migrant integration, as well as the exclusivist nature of German migrant incorporation policies – among other reasons – made it a fertile ground for the rise of Kurdish nationalism. The PKK managed to secure a considerable number of recruits from among asylum seekers, as well as from second-generation Kurds.²⁹

In the beginning, the German authorities perceived the Kurds as a sub-group of Turkish immigrants and initially paid little attention to their cause. German politicians were hesitant to describe Germany as an immigration country and there was no incentive to invest in an integration policy, which would be tailored according to the needs and diversity of immigrants.³⁰ The Kurdish diaspora found itself in a much more liberal national context than Turkey, where it could disseminate its ideology and recruit members. However, at the same time due to strict citizenship policies in Germany, the lack of accession or partnership with the German society, the lack of official recognition of their identity as a separate ethnic identity from Turks, Persians or Arabs, closed lobby

²⁶ Vera Eccarius-Kelly, “Political Movements and Leverage Points: Kurdish Activism in the European Diaspora,” *The Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 22, no. 1 (2002).

²⁷ Whilst no recent or reliable census of the Kurdish population in Europe has been conducted, the most widely accepted estimates are that there are more than one million Kurds dispersed throughout Western Europe, of which approximately 900,000 live in Germany.

²⁸ C. Leggewie, “How Turks became Kurds not Germans”, *Dissent* 43, no. 3 (1996): 79.

²⁹ Ibid.; Martin Van Bruinessen, “Transnational aspects of the Kurdish question”, *Working Paper* (Florence: European University Institute Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, 2000); Demmers (see note 9 above).

³⁰ Baser (see note 2 above).

channels to influence policy change in Germany placed them under different power relations and hierarchies in a different society: this time new policies were needed that considered their status as migrants or asylum seekers as well as new strategies to moderate between German-Turkish relations.

Contesting Germany and Turkey at the Same Time: Inter-group clashes, Intimidation and Political Violence

The 1990s symbolize the years when the armed clashes between the PKK and the Turkish army reached their peak in Turkey while the Kurdish diaspora was discernibly active. In the 1990s, the PKK established its hegemony over the Kurdish movement both at home and abroad and turned itself into a mass movement. The diaspora members' support for the PKK at the societal level was considerably strong and at the organizational level was very popular at the working-class level. The diaspora, which was close to the PKK line, however, lacked a strong elite that has reach in political circles in Germany. Other Kurdish diaspora groups, such as KOMKAR, which were formed prior to the PKK related organizations built up good relations with a number of politicians, NGOs and public intellectuals and they made a great effort to put the Kurdish situation on the agenda in Germany. However those channels were weak and would not be enough to lobby Germany for a significant policy change with Turkey.

Despite the fact that there were a few politicians from the leftist circles which showed interest in the Kurdish issue, German politicians often opted for a cautious approach towards the migrants from Turkey and their political activism. Even in the early 1980s when there were no signs of violent encounters between the Kurdish and Turkish groups in Germany, there was some discontent regarding the spill-over of the Kurdish question in parliamentary discussions. In 1982, the issue of *Ausländerextremismus* (*Foreigners Extremism*) was discussed in the Bundestag with regards to the danger of these organisations posing a threat to German domestic security.³¹ Therefore, there was already a sceptical environment, which did not welcome transnational political activism. In the following years, each time there was an event in Turkey related to the conflict, Kurdish activism became discernible: blocking highways, invading Turkish

³¹ W. D. Chapin, "The Turkish diaspora in Germany," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 5, no. 2 (1996): 275-301.

consulates and vandalising Turkish properties – which was proof for the German authorities that the conflict had been imported to Germany by the migrants from Turkey. Even before these activities reached their peak, German police arrested many Kurdish activists that sympathised with the PKK in 1988. Their trials lasted until 1994 and they were called the “Dusseldorf Trials.” For many Kurds, this was “the first sign that Germany would ally with Turkey on this matter and they had to struggle with both states on German soil.”³²

In the 1990s in Turkey, the PKK targeted the families of local Kurds who had joined the pro-government militia³³, bureaucrats and state employees, including 170 primary school teachers because they symbolized the assimilation policies of Turkey towards the Kurds. In the meantime, the Turkish state employed legal and illegal means – from the evacuation of villages, human rights abuses, ‘disappearances’, extra-judicial killings and the state of emergency, which naturally made people living in the region feel insecure. Oktem describes the events that unfolded in the early 1990s in the following way: ‘Hundreds of Kurdish intellectuals, activists and PKK sympathizers were tortured and killed allegedly by members of the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter - Terrorism Centre (JITEM). Their bodies were dumped into disused wells of the state-owned Petroleum Corporation, BOTAS, in Batman and stayed there until the remains were exhumed in 2010 as part of judicial probes into JITEM murders’³⁴ (Oktem 2011: 90). During the state of emergency years in the ‘region’, many human rights violations were committed. The regime equated all symbols of ‘Kurdishness’ with terrorism and suppressed the Kurdish population even further. As Oktem³⁵ (2011: 86) further explains, ‘Extrajudicial killings, the wholesale destruction of villages, the burning of forests, and human rights abuses reached a level not seen in Turkey since the atrocities of the early twentieth century.’ Without considering this historical context of the 1990s, which is still strong in the memory of the Kurdish people, it is not possible to understand why the Kurdish diaspora opted for specific strategies in that period in various European countries

³² Interview with a Kurdish journalist who worked for Kurdish TV channel MED-TV and now resides in Berlin, May 2013.

³³ The Turkish strategy to curb Kurdish activism evolved into militarising state-friendly Kurdish groups. The so-called ‘village guards’ started fighting against the PKK in Kurdish populated areas after the mid-1980s. They were paid a salary by the state for protecting their villages from PKK activism and recruitment.

³⁴ K. Oktem, *Angry Nation: Turkey Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2011).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

such as Germany. Remembering Wohl et al.'s (2014)³⁶ argument on *collective angst* here, it can be said that taking a closer look at the situation as a whole by taking into account this political development is the key to understanding the causal mechanism as to why political violence has been perceived as the *only* option to survive for many Kurds who support the PKK, in Turkey as well as in the diaspora.

The Kurdish activists who were interviewed for this research agree that the 1990s in particular were highly crucial for the Kurdish diaspora. That was the time when the Kurds were forcefully deported from their villages due to accusations that they were helping the PKK fighters. There were extrajudicial killings and forced disappearances.³⁷ Many highlighted the strategies that were used by the Kurdish diaspora and they said they were very much dependent on the developments mentioned above. According to the president of a Kurdish organization in Germany, which is close to the PKK line, the diaspora had two important goals at that time: *visibility and media attention* which would bring about recognition of their ethnic identity and awareness of their situation back home.

Drawing from the testimonies of the interviewees, it can be said that the Kurdish activists and the organizations, which were in line with the PKK, had three main strategies during that time. Initially they opted to outbid their rivals during the 1990s. They initially gave first priority to establishing hegemony, making the PKK accepted and legitimized and heightening the Turkish-Kurdish divide in order to increase ethnic awareness among the Kurds who initially did not show any interest in the Kurdish cause. Secondly, they were very much aware of the German-Turkish trade agreements, especially with regards to military equipment. Both of these countries were NATO members and had a very similar approach to international security matters. Therefore, the diaspora elite knew that they would have to *contest both states* in order to open up a sphere of influence for themselves. Thirdly, the diaspora elite opted for more confrontational matters despite the criminalization of the movement, since at that time they wanted international as well as local attention for the Kurdish issue in general as it was a matter of survival, which had more priority on their agenda. According to a PKK supporter in Berlin, at that time the diaspora had to use militant strategies in order to appear *assertive*. Creating awareness

³⁶ Wohl et al. (see note 11 above).

³⁷ See for example related report of the Human Rights Watch, 1993. <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/TURKEY933.PDF>

and being recognized as Kurds despite negative publicity was given priority in times of great atrocities. Many interviewees mentioned that they were aware these tactics would eventually cause the Kurdish movement to be stigmatized but they made a rational choice at the expense of a ‘good reputation’, which was by no means guaranteed, even if they kept their own counsel.

At the beginning of the 1990s, PKK activities became much more visible in Germany, which was also due to clashes between Turkish and Kurdish nationalists and among different fragments of the Kurdish nationalist groups, which were impossible for the German authorities to ignore. In the mid-1990s, PKK sympathisers were charged with around 200 arson attacks against Turkish properties, stores and banks.³⁸ At the same time, the Turkish ultra-nationalist groups were very strong in Germany and they also organised attacks on Kurdish organizations and properties. There were violent clashes between them, especially in Berlin, Cologne, Frankfurt and other cities. There were also fights among rival Kurdish groups in Germany, gradually establishing the basis for the German authorities to perceive the PKK as a criminal organisation. According to Ucarer and Lyon, the hostility that caused trouble for German administrators was also related to the rivalry between the PKK and its rival groups, which claimed the lives of some Kurdish activists and left others injured in Germany and elsewhere. The Bundesverfassungsschutz (Office of the Protection of the German Constitution) began observing the activities of both groups in the late 1980s³⁹ and as a result of rising violent events; the German authorities began to consider outlawing the PKK. They closed down dozens of associations that had links to the PKK⁴⁰, and they expressed their determination to prevent the diffusion of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict to Germany by any means.⁴¹

In addition to violent encounters with Turkish nationalists and other Kurdish groups, in 1992 the PKK declared Germany to be its “*second enemy*” after Turkey, due to its

³⁸ Leggewie (see note 29 above), 79.; J. M. Mushaben, *The changing faces of citizenship: Social integration and political mobilization among ethnic minorities in Germany* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 154.

³⁹ E. M. Ucarer & A. J. Lyon, “Mobilizing ethnic conflict: Kurdish separatism in Germany and the PKK”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, no. 6 (2001): 937.

⁴⁰ N. Abadan-Unat, *Bitmeyen göç: konuk işçilikten ulus-ötesi yurttaşlığa*. (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2002), 269.

⁴¹ Leggewie (see note 29 above), 79.

relations and military cooperation with the Turkish state. That was a statement solely concerning Germany and the PKK's sympathising diaspora actions were not to be found anywhere else in Europe with this much density and dedication. The targeting of German tourists in Turkey, as well as damaging Turkish and German property finally paved the way for the *official* criminalisation of the organisation.⁴² As a result of these threats and the occupation of the Turkish Consulate in Munich⁴³, Germany prohibited the PKK and banned its activities in November 1993. However, this ban was highly ineffectual and only caused further frustration and anger towards the German state. Frequent Kurdish protests against the ban, the use of violence and the German police's intervention at these events appeared to be similar to the situation in Turkey at that time. Rather than stopping the protests and the hostility associated with them, the ban was followed by additional protests and escalated Kurdish activism in Germany.⁴⁴

A diaspora member who supports the PKK and participated in protest events which occasionally turned violent, stated the following on this matter:

There was no other way in Germany. Even if you collect one million signatures, you cannot change Germany's Turkish policy [...] what we did was to tell the Germans and the world: See us! We exist and we are dying everyday.

The president of a Kurdish organization in Paris agreed with this point while he was comparing the situation in France and Germany and added that the German system was closed to lobby activities and for the Kurds it was more important to stop the arms trade between the two countries rather than to create a positive image for the Kurds. When asked if there are any regrets among the elite circles of the Kurdish diaspora about these strategies, he said such strategies were inevitable. Duran Kalkan, who is one of the leading members of the PKK cadre and who was arrested and tried at the Dusseldorf Trials, explains the strategies of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany at that time as the following: "effective, active and radical" however "very well organized and controlled." According to him, the actions of the diaspora were radical because the

⁴² N. Ögelman, J. Money & P. L. Martin, "Immigrant cohesion and political access in influencing host country foreign policy," *SAIS Review* 22, no. 2 (2002): 150.

⁴³ Kurdish activists invaded the Turkish Consulate in Munich and took hostages on 25 June 1993.

⁴⁴ Ucarer & Lyon (see note 40 above), 935.

PKK at that time had started “a total war” and “a counter-movement” towards the states, which collaborate with Turkey in terms of oppression of the Kurdish people. He states that the Kurdish people were “angry” with Germany because they see the Dusseldorf Trials, the lack of rights and recognition as well as arbitrary arrests and criminalization as part of an “international conspiracy” against the Kurds and Germany was considered as the centre of this. Kalkan also adds that the German authorities witnessed that the Kurdish movement was becoming stronger and stronger and they wanted to stultify this “before it is too late.”⁴⁵

Among the interviewees, there were some diaspora members who supported the PKK but still found the use of political violence to be improper. For the other Kurdish diaspora groups, which were not in line with the PKK, the ban still caused dismay and frustration. Interviewees from these organizations argue that the PKK and the diaspora members who supported their actions brought about the criminalization of the movement but it not only badly affected the PKK but also other Kurdish organizations which were outbid by the PKK.⁴⁶ According to them, their lobby channels were also closed with the 1993 decision of the German court and the PKK was also to blame for this result. As Østergaard-Nielsen⁴⁷ points out: “Confrontation and violence does attract the attention of the media, but in the case of the Kurds it has also been a double edged sword, as it has barred them from direct interface with mainstream central policy makers”. The PKK’s activities in Germany, as well as inter-ethnic encounters with Turkish nationalists, also played a part in the rise of xenophobia against “foreigners”. These events were debated by the German parliament and the media. The Kurdish question is thus lumped in with “immigration debates” and has damaged opportunity structures for both Turkish and Kurdish migrants in Germany in general.

Right after the ban in 1993, a number of PKK members were arrested in Germany for securing funds for the PKK. More than 30 Kurdish associations were closed by police raids. The German police had actively hunted the PKK cadre and extradited PKK militants to Turkey – despite being caught on German territory.⁴⁸ The government’s

⁴⁵ “Kalkan: Almanya’daki PKK Yasagi Derin Turk-Alman Iliskilerine Dayaniyor”, <http://www.yeniulkehaber.com/Detay.aspx?gn=2336>

⁴⁶ Interview with KOMKAR Representative in Berlin, May 2013.

⁴⁷ Østergaard-Nielsen (see note 1 above), 6.

⁴⁸ Blatte (see note 26 above), 10.; Chapin (see note 32 above).

frequent declarations about possible deportations and arrests had an impact on Kurdish activists in Germany and the Kurdish population in Germany felt victimised by German domestic and foreign policy.⁴⁹ Diaspora members decided to protest the 1993 ban on the PKK in Germany in several cities; however the protests were banned due to the expectation that there would be clashes with the police. Kurds protested these interdictions and occupied highways in several places in Germany. Two female supporters of the PKK committed self-immolation by burning themselves. There were clashes with the police that ended up with around 1,000 diaspora members being arrested after the protests. After that event, this issue was addressed in Bundestag by the then Foreign Minister Kinkel as the following: “To all the Kurds living in Germany: Do not bring your conflicts to Germany, and do not think that violence is the way to realise legitimate political aims”.⁵⁰ This kind of rhetoric was used many times by several politicians from various political parties to address the Kurds regarding their “inappropriate behaviour” in Germany.

A few years after the ban, the PKK leader Öcalan made a statement to the German authorities saying that Germany has launched a war against the PKK and if it goes on targeting the PKK and its sympathizers, they would return the damage. He also threatened Germany by stating that each Kurd is a suicide bomber.⁵¹ In response, Germany’s then interior minister Manfred Kanther made a declaration stating that this was tantamount to a declaration of war on Germany’s rule of law.⁵² It was obvious that there was not a very welcoming environment for the Kurdish movement in Germany but also the PKK contested the German state and limited its opportunities through its own actions, which were deemed unacceptable in the hostland’s political and social framework.

Inherently, Turkish–German relations have also been shaken from time to time due to Kurdish activism in Germany. Turkey has frequently put pressure on Germany to be more decisive about ending PKK activities. Germany is thus left in the difficult position of maintaining a balance between the German-Turkish state relations and the opportunity structures it provides to the Kurdish diaspora. This is not always easy to

⁴⁹ Leggewie (see note 29 above), 82.

⁵⁰ Østergaard-Nielsen (see note 18 above), 74.

⁵¹ Ucarer & Lyon (see note 40 above), 941.

⁵² Chapin (see note 32 above).

accomplish. Kurdish diaspora were demanding that Germany should take a stance against Turkey and human rights abuses in the Kurdish regions, while Turkey was pushing to curb Kurdish activism completely in Germany. Kurdish diaspora was lobbying for such causes but similar experiences of other diaspora groups in the world show that most of the time it only works if “lobbying fits in with the government’s bilateral and multilateral relations of the country of origin”.⁵³ German authorities calculated every possibility and wanted to act in Germany’s interests, while at the same time retaining good relations with Turkey. The German police and intelligence service still targeted various Kurdish organisations and publishing houses, and many people were arrested for their organisational links to the PKK. Despite efforts to juggle the expectations of both the PKK followers and the Turkish state, in the end Germany could not please both sides.

The most intense events organised by PKK activists happened right after the capture of Öcalan in 1999. Kurdish protesters organised an invasion of the Israeli embassy in Berlin, which was resisted by the Israeli security guards. In the end, three Kurdish protestors were killed and others were injured. After the events, the German authorities made declarations stating that if PKK sympathisers continued to act violently they would be deported. German Chancellor Schröder declared that the demonstrators would face the “force of law”. The German Interior Minister of that time, Otto Schily made a statement about the Kurdish activists’ methods on German soil and warned that the government would take harsh measures including the deportation of those who do not follow the rules of law in Germany and added that the Kurdish conflict does not belong to Germany.⁵⁴ This was a sign that the Kurds who sympathized with the PKK in the diaspora were perceived as terrorists or criminals.⁵⁵ According to an interviewee who participated in this protest and lost a friend to the shootings of the Israeli security guards, what happened was a “desperate act” and it shows the psychological state of mind of the Kurds at that time which is very important for understanding diasporans and their motivations at a certain moment.⁵⁶ He says that there was a feeling of “helplessness” and “uncertainty about the future” and the frustration revealed itself in different forms. He states:

⁵³ Østergaard-Nielsen (see note 1 above), 8.

⁵⁴ Eccarius-Kelly (see note 27 above), 93.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Brinkerhoff (see note 4 above), 85.

How else can you explain burning yourself to death when you are just 15 years old? [...] Nobody tells you ‘go and attack here or there’ but everything happened spontaneously. [...] you go and protest but no one can predict what will happen there. If you feel whacked, you can do anything. [...] The message was ‘don’t ignore us.’

After the capture of Öcalan in 1999, the German authorities kept the PKK under surveillance. PKK followers went underground and organisations that sympathise with the PKK but operate as advocacy groups and civil society organisations started flourishing in the 2000s. According to Eccarius-Kelly⁵⁷, “with the arrest of Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) leader Öcalan in February 1999, Kurdish activists in exile modified their structural, organizational, and strategic operations to adjust to a new political reality. Abandoning the original goal of an independent Kurdistan, activists instead pursued national minority rights in Turkey.” This tactical change undoubtedly reflected itself in the diaspora’s behaviour as well. The diaspora elite started to work on “finding common ground with host-country policy makers”.⁵⁸

Tailoring New Approaches According to the Changing Dynamics

Some say that the PKK went through a transformation from a militant organization to a social movement.⁵⁹ This structural transformation was certainly reflected in the Kurdish diaspora that sympathized with the organization’s ideology and agenda. The transition was not easy. There has been the swapping of different methods, confrontational and non-confrontational strategies and sometimes the use of a dual agenda that uses these methods interchangeably to reach certain aims. The Kurdish diaspora became active at local, national and supranational level by forming various associations that deal with the issues of women, youth and children as well as associations that work as advocacy networks. The mobilization process became less militant and more civil society natured, which used official channels to influence policy makers. Østergaard-Nielsen (2001: 269) alludes that “while an analytical distinction between immigrant and homeland

⁵⁷ Eccarius-Kelly (see note 27 above).

⁵⁸ Østergaard-Nielsen (see note 1 above), 8.

⁵⁹ Eccarius-Kelly (see note 27 above), 92.

political agendas is necessary, it is also important to acknowledge how the two agendas overlap and reinforce each other. An immigrant political agenda may have a ‘hidden’ homeland political agenda or the other way round. Some diaspora activists may be involved in the politics of their country of origin and their host country simultaneously. In the Kurdish case, especially after the early 2000s, it is possible to see such a trend where the agenda of the Kurdish diaspora put homeland and hostland politics in an alloy. This change in strategy demonstrates that diaspora politics are circumstantial and they are not static throughout the diverse conflict cycles.

Currently, the Kurdish Question in Turkey has not been resolved. There is a so-called “peace process” that was initiated by the official negotiations between the imprisoned leader of the PKK, Öcalan and the Turkish Intelligence Service officials. The PKK has declared a cease-fire and there are expectations for substantial reforms, which could be sustained by constitutional change. The Kurdish activists and politicians have more opportunity for their claims-making in Turkey compared to the situation in the 1990s, however there is still no resolution and the Kurds and their rights are still being oppressed in Turkey. Although Turkish politicians state that they have not abandoned the EU goal, it can be said that membership is no longer a top priority for Turkish politicians. Turkey is playing big in the Middle East in order to rise up as a role model for other countries and it is using its soft power to gain a leadership role in the region. Current developments in Iraqi Kurdistan and Syria have also been pushing Turkey to resolve its Kurdish Question as soon as possible. In light of these developments, the need to adapt to changing dynamics in the region is also pushing the diaspora for a policy change.

In the 1990s, where the conflict in Turkey was at its peak between the PKK and the Turkish Army, the aim of the Kurdish diaspora was to sustain visibility and media attention towards the Kurdish situation in Turkey. Currently, the centre of gravity of Kurdish politics has returned to the core, namely Turkish Kurdistan, and the diaspora has changed its priorities accordingly. When one looks at the protest events and activities of the Kurdish diaspora in Germany today, it can be said that two main agendas come to the fore: removing the PKK from the terrorism list and demanding equal citizenship rights in Germany as citizens/residents of Germany.

Firstly, the diaspora elites realized that stateless diasporas linked to legitimized leaders and organizations are more likely to influence policy change than diasporas which are de-legitimized or outlawed in the international arena.⁶⁰ The criminalization of the Kurdish movement in Germany had serious consequences for the members of the Kurdish diaspora. There had been cases where Kurdish activists who joined protest events in support of the PKK were denied German citizenship once they applied on the grounds that they support a terrorist organization.⁶¹ Moreover, some of the interviewees also mentioned that their actions are monitored by the German intelligence, their phone calls and properties are bugged and they are constantly under surveillance, which makes them feel frustrated as they feel like they are treated as potential criminals. The largest Kurdish diaspora organization in Germany called YEKKOM made a declaration about how the Kurdish youth were asked to collaborate with the German intelligence as an exchange for German permanent residency or citizenship.⁶² There have been numerous cases where young people testified that the German police questioned them in order to leak information about the Kurdish organizations and in cases of no collaboration they were threatened with deportation or arrest.⁶³ According to the leader of one of the largest Kurdish organizations in Berlin, criminalization of the movement also prevents many Kurds from joining the organizations, as they believe they will be labelled as “supporters of terrorism.” For the Kurdish diaspora elite in Germany, contesting the dominant German discourse about the PKK - which is highly influenced by the Turkish discourse - is at the top of their agenda. The aim is to show that the Kurdish movement is not a security threat to Germany and it should be treated as an interlocutor while Germany as well as the EU engages in the resolution of the Kurdish Question in the Middle East.

There have been petitions, sit-ins and mass protests to realize this aim. For instance, on 16 November 2013 (20th anniversary of the PKK ban), there was a mass protest which also included representatives of Kurdish diasporas from France and the Netherlands with the aim of protesting the ban on the PKK. Many NGOs, German politicians and other activists joined the protest in support of the Kurdish diaspora. The dominant discourse during the protests was not about the situation in Turkey but about the lack of democracy in how Germany approaches its Kurdish citizens and residents. The claims were framed

⁶⁰ Smith (see note 18 above), 12.

⁶¹ Interview with Metin Incesu at the Kurdische Zentrum NAVEND, Bonn, August 2011.

⁶² <http://www.firatajans.com/news/guncel/ye-kom-ajanlathtyrma-girithimleri-bircok-eyalette-var.htm>

⁶³ <http://aykiridogrular.com/haber-2878-Alman-polisinden-Kurt-gencine-ajanlik-dayatmasi.html>

within the framework of democratic rights and equal citizenship within Germany's borders.

The Kurdish migrants in Germany constitute the largest Kurdish diaspora in Europe and many of them do not plan to return to Turkey at the moment. There are young generations who are born in Germany and the diaspora is multi-layered in many ways. Fifty years since the first migration flows started, the Kurds started to perceive themselves as shareholders in German society. They increasingly started to question their equal citizenship rights. During the interviews, young Kurds no longer compared their situation to that in Turkey but instead compared themselves with other ethnic minorities in Germany and questioned the fact that although they are not born in Germany, they still do not have equal rights with native Germans or other state-linked diasporas. They problematize the non-recognition of their identity and they develop strategies to contest the German political system.⁶⁴ Germany's strict citizenship policies, hardships such as the language test and long bureaucratic procedures and Germany's lukewarm approach to multiculturalism are all questioned in the new Kurdish diaspora discourse more than ever.

The PKK have already been campaigning about recognition of the Kurdish identity as a separate ethnic identity in Germany. YEKKOM has organized a wide-ranging petition campaign and collected more than 70,000 signatures (supported by more than 200 Kurdish organizations) for the official recognition of Kurdish identity by Bundestag. They see this attempt as important because it will give them some fundamental cultural rights in Germany, will enable them to separate their cultural spheres from Turkish, Arabic and Persian influence and it will de-criminalize their ethnic identity. The petition was supported by many NGOs and other ethno-national diaspora groups. The declaration by YEKKOM demanded recognition of Kurds as a separate ethnic migrant group in Germany, removal of the ban on the PKK, Kurdish language rights and mother tongue education as well as the admission of representatives of the main Kurdish organisations in the "Federal advisory board of integration" among many other matters. These are very important demands which clearly show that the Kurds are now questioning their own status in Germany and contesting the German perspective of them as a security threat. They try to communicate that there was a reason the diaspora

⁶⁴ Baser (see note 2 above).

and the PKK acted in a certain way and now they are giving a clear signal that they want to be a legitimate non-state actor in the international arena as well as a legitimate actor in the resolution process in the Middle East.

The PKK image after Kobane: The beginning of an era of decriminalization?

The Kurdish Question is not just Turkey's problem. It went beyond Turkish borders long ago: now it is a concern for Europe and for each European country that has Turkish and Kurdish migrants. This does not by any means suggest that the migrants are responsible for the reproduction of the conflict; on the contrary, it is the opportunities and the constraints in the home and host states that enable or prevent the reproduction of the dynamics that cause tension between ethnic groups as well as between ethnic groups and the states that try to contest their sovereignty. In Germany, the capacity of Kurdish organisations or individual activists to act is very much limited by German policy, which calculates its moves towards its own interests and its relations with Turkey. This is a further reason why the Kurds, until very recently, opted for confrontational participation which was usually organised underground, which ultimately limited their diaspora spaces even more.

Since the capture of Öcalan, the Kurdish diaspora has consistently underlined the fact that they are in favour of dialogue and negotiation. How the Kurdish Question in Germany will take place depends on various factors such as the current peace process in Turkey and Germany's potential to shift its approach towards a more inclusive one. In the meantime, the Kurdish diaspora will tailor an updated agenda according to the ever-changing dynamics and as it has learnt to juggle between the two states and in the international arena, it will ascend as an ever-rising non-state actor in the political arena.

As one of the main groups fighting the IS in Kobane is the PKK, the international community and the media hesitated to give support to Kobane's cause initially. Since the 1990s, the PKK has been criminalized in Europe and its political opportunities were significantly limited, and so a sudden shift of discourse seemed quite unlikely. However it is happening. Once referred to as 'terrorists' in mainstream media, PKK fighters are now called 'heroes.' For instance, a journalist, Franz Josef Wagner from the German Bild newspaper has published a letter addressing the Kurds and asking 'who are you brave

people?’, praising the courage that the Kurdish fighters have against the IS. Female fighters also gained significant attention to the point that prominent women’s magazines have included them on their covers.

The Kurdish diaspora perceives Germany as an ally of Turkey and in this regard another state that is hostile towards the Kurds. German authorities and politicians in return perceive the existence of prolific Kurdish activism on their soil as a threat to the security and welfare of the German society. Germany, throughout the last few decades realized that it has to form its own Kurdish policy as its soil is home to nearly one million Kurds today. It has to sustain a balance between its diplomatic relations with Turkey and its relations with its own citizens/residents within its borders. Even this realization shows that the Kurdish diaspora managed to push a host country to revise its priorities and to link its foreign and domestic policies together. On the other hand, the Kurdish diaspora has become aware that it has to make peace with the German policymakers and public opinion in order to enhance its reach.