

**DIALOGUE AND  
SUSTAINABLE  
CONFLICT RESOLUTION  
IN THE KURDISH  
QUESTION AND  
POLARIZATION IN  
TURKEY**

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### **About Istanbul Policy Center**

Istanbul Policy Center (IPC) is a global policy research institution that specializes in key social and political issues ranging from democratization to climate change, transatlantic relations to conflict resolution and mediation. IPC organizes and conducts its research under three main clusters: The Istanbul Policy Center-Sabancı University-Stiftung Mercator Initiative, Democratization and Institutional Reform, and Conflict Resolution and Mediation. For over a decade, IPC has provided decision makers, opinion leaders, and other major stakeholders with objective analyses and innovative policy recommendations. As an essential part of Sabancı University, IPC strives to foster academic research. The Center extends intellectual and substantive support to young academics and policy researchers through its various programs.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Turkish democracy has faced significant challenges in recent years. The failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016 has resulted in the restriction of civilian space and the securitization of a number of issues. Coupled with Turkey's response to developments within its region, particularly the ongoing Syrian crisis, a process of securitization and militarization has marked Turkish politics over the last few years. Consequently, the state of emergency, which was declared shortly after the failed coup attempt in July 2016, has been extended for the seventh time in a row amid both Turkey's military intervention in Syria and preparations to head to the polls for the sixth time in the last five years.

Measures to restrict the civil space that have been justified through the state's counter-terrorism efforts contradict the critical role civil society plays in counter-terrorism. According to several studies, "civil society plays an integral role in countering violent extremism and terrorism through delegitimizing terrorist narratives."<sup>1</sup> In the Turkish experience, one could argue that as a result of a historical lack of sufficient state support for civic participation—or support for only a selected group of civil society organizations (CSOs)—the civic space in Turkey has been dominated by groups in line with state/government interests. The Fethullah Terror Organization (FETÖ) could indeed be seen as an outcome of this selective promotion of CSOs in Turkey. As such, it could well be argued that if the government equally supports the enlargement of the civic space and public participation by all groups in society, there could be a more vibrant and more heterogeneous civil society, which eventually could prevent the dominance of certain groups like FETÖ.

It is, therefore, a timely endeavour to create platforms and opportunities for objective and inclusive debates. Such goals have thus constituted the basis for the Dialogue and Sustainable Conflict Resolution in the Kurdish Question and Polarization in Turkey Project. The project aimed to support enhanced political dialogue and conflict resolution through research and transformative mediation techniques in order

to be able to help contain the Kurdish question and polarization as the two main hurdles for stability and democracy in Turkey.

The project was designed to utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods through conducting workshops in Istanbul, focus group meetings in Van, interviews, and a quantitative survey on social cohesion in Turkey conducted in partnership with the Human Development Foundation (İNGEV). This survey was conducted in 26 cities across Turkey in which 1,514 adults (age 18+) were interviewed. The project facilitated various levels of dialogue among elites representing the main cleavages begetting polarization in Turkey, including the Turkish-Kurdish, pro-government vs. anti-government, religious-secular, and gender-related divides.

The report, therefore, investigated polarization and social cohesion in Turkey with a focus on crosscutting issues such as the domestic and regional dimensions of the Kurdish issue, inclusive economic growth, the role of women in building societal consensus, and the role of arts and sports in overcoming polarization in Turkey. Against this background, the study offers the following policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders in exploration of means and ways to overcome polarization and increase social cohesion in Turkey.

On polarization in Turkey:

- The media is a significant instrument for influencing people's perceptions and therefore should be utilized prudently to overcome polarization and increase social cohesion.
- The media should not be censored, and it should be allowed to operate freely to ensure democracy.
- Similar to the conventional media, social media and the internet should not be censored and should instead be utilized to promote peace and stability. As such, social media and communication technologies should not be banned arbitrarily.
- While, according to the survey, there is high level of public trust in the armed forces, this is also indicative of a high level of threat perception and fear among Turkish citizens, which is a setback for social cohesion. As such, measures to increase public serenity should be taken to decrease the level of tension.

<sup>1</sup> Lauren Mooney, "Introduction," in *Counterterrorism Measures and Civil Society: Changing the Will, Finding the Way*, ed. Lana Baydas and Shannon N. Green (Washington, DC: CSIS, March 2018), 1, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180322\\_CounterterrorismMeasures.pdf?EeEWbuPwsYhliE7HpnS2nPyMhev21qpw](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180322_CounterterrorismMeasures.pdf?EeEWbuPwsYhliE7HpnS2nPyMhev21qpw). For more information, see Shannon N. Green and Keith Proctor, *Turning Point: A New Comprehensive Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism* (Washington, DC: CSIS, November 2016), <https://www.csis.org/features/turning-point>.

- A balance should be struck between civilian control over the military and the military's autonomy.
- In Turkey, people tend to demonstrate unity and solidarity in times of crisis. On the optimistic side, this could be utilized to overcome polarization and enhance social cohesion.

On the importance of unrestricted civil space:

- Since civic participation in Turkey gained the lowest score among all sub-fields in the survey, special attention should be given to unrestricted the civil space and open more room for civil society to maneuver.
- The authorities should equally support the enlargement of the civic space and public participation by all groups in society in order to promote a vibrant and heterogenous civil society, which eventually could prevent the dominance of the public space by certain groups like FETÖ.
- Counter-terrorism measures should not be misused to restrict the civil space, and it should be kept in mind that an open civil society plays a constructive role in countering violent extremism.
- The EU process should be accentuated as an anchor to promote democracy and the expansion of the civil space.

On the importance of political culture:

- Political culture plays a vital role in fuelling polarization. Therefore, the use of harsh rhetoric and loud, negative campaigns should be avoided in politics.
- Public trust in political parties should be enhanced, and trustbuilding measures such as targeting corruption should be implemented.
- Politicians should be more involved at the grassroots level and respect societal demands.
- The political party act and the election law should be revised through societal consensus with the incorporation of universities, law schools, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary citizens into the process.
- The presidential system is not a catch-all remedy. It will not solve Turkey's problems without

sincere willingness on the part of the politicians. Problems will remain without a change in the political culture.

- Inclusiveness and participation should be promoted in the new system through a strong legislature and a strong civil society to ensure democracy.

On social cohesion in Turkey:

- The survey outcomes indicate mid-level social cohesion in Turkey, which is way below the OECD average. Therefore, the authorities and relevant stakeholders should work to urgently improve the level of social cohesion in Turkey.
- The survey revealed a low level of respect for social rules and trust between people in Turkey. As such, measures should be taken to improve these norms through social projects, the use of the media, and education, among other relevant tools. Projects that would enable people to get to know the "other" should be promoted by the state and civil society.

On the Kurdish issue and social cohesion in Turkey:

- The Kurdish issue is a major setback for social cohesion and therefore should be resolved. In case of the resumption of the peace process, a more inclusive and transparent process should be followed. Local people should be well informed.
- The domestic-regional balance should be stabilized vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue to ensure a sustainable resolution.
- Security is a prerequisite to ensure stability in the eastern regions of Turkey and must be established through state authority. However, while establishing security policies, the state should avoid excessive surveillance measures, which prevent the flow of investments to the region.

On economic welfare and social cohesion:

- There is a positive correlation between economic welfare and social cohesion. However, economic progress cannot bring happiness unless it is used to enhance the feelings of unity and solidarity. As such, inclusive growth should be promoted to enhance social cohesion in Turkey.
- Unemployed youth are a major human resource for illegal groups. Jobs should be created, par-

ticularly in Eastern Turkey, to include these groups in the economy.

- Tourism, agriculture, and husbandary should be promoted to improve the regional economy.
- Providing security without resolving economic problems would be counterproductive. In order to enable sustainable development, inclusive growth should be promoted.

On the role of women in societal consensus:

- Being the fundamental victims of conflict, women can play vital roles in conflict resolution. As such, their roles should be promoted through their inclusion in political and social processes.
- There is a lack of sufficient cooperation and collaboration among women's groups in Turkey. It was underlined in the workshop that there was a missed opportunity with respect to creating a common discourse among women's groups during the peace process. Therefore, collaboration should be promoted among women's groups.
- The equal participation of women and men in the workforce and politics should be promoted. Such initiatives would be welcomed, since a majority of the people surveyed contended that women should play an active role in the workforce and in politics.

On the role of arts and sports in overcoming polarization:

- The space for arts and sports should be liberated from political pressure, and arts and sports should be utilized as effective tools in overcoming polarization.
- Arts and sports should be used to bring together people from different socio-cultural backgrounds in order to embrace differences instead of sources of conflict.
- Measures should be taken during sports games in order to prevent discriminatory narratives and discourses. Otherwise, sports activities might widen the already existing gaps among society rather than bring different cultures and people together.

## YÖNETİCİ ÖZETİ

Türkiye demokrasisi son yıllarda ciddi meselelerle karşı karşıya kalmıştır. 15 Temmuz başarısız darbe girişimi sivil alanın daralmasına ve pekçok sorunun güvenlik alanına hapsolmesine neden olmuştur. Suriye krizi başta olmak üzere Türkiye'nin bölgesinde yer alan gelişmelere verdiği tepkiler de gözönüne alındığında, Türkiye siyasetine son yıllarda bir güvenikleşme ve militarizasyon süreci damgasını vurmuştur. Bu süreci müteakip, Türkiye Suriye'ye askeri müdahalede bulunmuş, 15 Temmuz'dan kısa süre sonra ilan edilen olağanüstü hal geçtiğimiz günlerde yedinci kez uzatılmış, ve Türkiye beş yıl içinde altıncı kez sandığa gitme kararı almıştır.

Sivil alanın daraltılması sürecinde sınımlan terörle mücadele tedbirleri bahanesi altında sivil toplumun terörle mücadelede oynadığı kritik rolle çelişmektedir. Zira çalışmalar, "sivil toplumun şiddet içeren aşırılıkla ve terörle mücadelede terrorist söylemlerin meşruiyetini bozarak bütünleyici bir rol oynadığı" nı göstermektedir.\* Türkiye örneğinde, tarihsel olarak sivil katılıma yeterli devlet desteğinin verilmemiş olması veya bu desteğin genellikle seçili belli başlı gruplara verilmiş olması sonucunda sivil alan çıkarları devlet/hükümet çizgisiyle örtüşen belli gruplar tarafından domine edilmiştir. Aslında, Fetullahçı Terör Örgütü (FETÖ)'nün palazlanması Türkiye'de belli sivil toplum örgütlerinin teşvik edilmesinin bir sonucu olarak da görülebilir. Yani, devlet ve hükümet sivil alanın genişlemesini ve tüm sivil toplum gruplarını eşit olarak desteklerse çok daha çoğulcu ve dinamik bir sivil toplumun oluşması sağlanabilir ve bu durum FETÖ gibi belli başlı grupların bu alanı domine etmesini engelleyebilir.

Bu arkaplandan yola çıkarak, sivil alanın genişletilmesine yönelik tarafsız ve kapsayıcı tartışmaların yapılabileceği platformlar yaratmak yerinde bir arayış olacaktır. Türkiye'de Kürt Meselesi ve Kutuplaşmada Diyalog ve Sürdürülebilir Çatışma Çözümü Projesi bu amaçla yapılmış bir projedir. Proje, Türkiye'de demokrasiinin önündeki en büyük engeller olan Kürt meselesi ve kutuplaşmayı aşmada araştırma ve dönüştürücü

arabuluculuk tekniklerini kullanarak siyasi diyalog ve çatışma çözümünü desteklemeyi amaçlamıştır.

Proje bulguları niteliksel ve nicel yöntemlerin bir arada kullanıldığı bir araştırmaya dayanmaktadır. Proje kapsamında İstanbul'da iki çalıştay, Van'da iki odak grup toplantısı, 26 yüzyüze mülakat ve Türkiye'de sosyal uyumu ölçme amacıyla İnsani Gelişme Vakfı (İNGEV) ile ortak yürütülmüş olan bir anket çalışması yapılmıştır.\*\* Anket sonuçları Türkiye çapında 26 ilde, 18 yaş üstü toplam 1514 kişiyle yüzyüze yapılan görüşmelere dayanmaktadır. Projenin niteliksel boyutu ise, Türkiye'de belli başlı kutuplaşma eksenleri olan Türk-Kürt, İktidar taraftarları-iktidar karşıtları ve dindar-laik gruplar içindeki elitler arasında diyalog platformları yaratmış ve bu katılımcıların verdiği bilgiler ışığında veri toplamayı amaçlamıştır.

Bu rapor, Kürt meselesinin iç ve dış boyutları, kapsayıcı ekonomik büyüme, toplumsal mütabakatta kadınların rolü ve kutuplaşmayı aşmada sanat ve sporun rolü gibi içiçe geçmiş konular ışığında Türkiye'de kutuplaşma ve sosyal uyuma dair very analizlerini içermektedir. Çalışma, Türkiye'de kutuplaşmanın aşılması ve sosyal uyumun artırılması için ilgili paydaşlara aşağıdaki politika önerilerini sunar.

Türkiye'de kutuplaşmaya dair:

- Medya insanların algılarını şekillendirmekte çok önemli bir araç olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu yüzden kutuplaşmayı aşmak ve sosyal uyumu arttırmak için sağgörümlü bir şekilde kullanılmalıdır.
- Medyanın sansürlenmesi ve ifade özgürlüğünün kısıtlanması demokrasiinin önündeki en büyük engellerdendir ve bu anlamda medyanın üzerindeki kısıtlamalar bir an önce kaldırılmalıdır.
- Konvansiyonel medya gibi sosyal medya ve internet de sansürlenmemeli ve barış ve istikrarı teşvik etmede kullanılmalıdır. Sosyal medya ve iletişim teknolojileri keyfi gerekçelerle yasaklanmamalıdır.
- Proje kapsamında yapılan anket çalışmasına göre, ordu ve polis Türkiye'de en güvenilen kurumlardır. Bu aynı zamanda toplumda yüksek

\* Lauren Mooney, "Introduction," in *Counterterrorism Measures and Civil Society: Changing the Will, Finding the Way*, ed. Lana Baydas and Shannon N. Green (Washington, DC: CSIS, March 2018), 1, [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180322\\_Counterterrorism-Measures.pdf?EeEWbuPwsYh1iE7HpnS2nPyMhev21qpw](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/180322_Counterterrorism-Measures.pdf?EeEWbuPwsYh1iE7HpnS2nPyMhev21qpw). For more information, see Shannon N. Green and Keith Proctor, *Turning Point: A New Comprehensive Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism* (Washington, DC: CSIS, November 2016), <https://www.csis.org/features/turning-point>.

\*\* Lütfen çalıştay, mülakat, odak grup toplantıları ve proje kapsamında çıkarılan raporların listesi için rapor sonundaki 'Appendix' kısmına bakınız.

tehdit algısı ve korkunun hakim olduğunun göstergesidir. Bu algı aynı zamanda sosyal uyumun önünde bir engel olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu anlamda, toplumsal huzurun arttırılmasına ve gerilimin azaltılmasına yönelik politikalar geliştirilmelidir.

- Ordu üzerindeki sivil kontrol ve ordunun özerkliği arasında bir denge tutturulmalıdır.
- Türkiye’de insanlar savaş, deprem, darbe gibi kriz anlarında yüksek birlik ve dayanışma göstermektedir. İyimser bir bakış açısıyla, bu birlik ve dayanışma ruhu kutuplaşmayı aşmak ve sosyal uyumu geliştirmek için kullanılabilir.
- Sivil alanın genişletilmesinin önemine dair:
- Yapılan anket çalışmasında sivil katılım tüm alt temalar arasında en düşük skoru almıştır. Bu anlamda, sivil alanın genişletilmesi ve sivil katılımın teşvik edilmesi sosyal uyumun arttırılması için hayati önem taşımaktadır.
- Otoriteler sivil alanın çoğulcu bir şekilde genişletilmesi adına sivil toplum gruplarına eşit fırsat sağlamalıdır. Bu şekilde sivil alanın belli başlı gruplar tarafından domine edilmesi ve FETÖ gibi grupların palazlanması önlenmelidir.
- Terörle mücadele önlemleri sivil alanı daraltmak için kullanılmamalı ve açık, çoğulcu bir sivil toplumun şiddet içeren aşırılık ve terörle mücadele çok önemli bir rol oynadığı hatırlanmalıdır.
- AB’ye üyelik sürecinin demokrasinin teşvik edilmesi ve sivil alanın genişletilmesi için önemli bir çapa olduğu hatırlanmalı ve bu sürece ağırlık verilmelidir.

Siyasi kültürün önemine dair:

- Kutuplaşmanın körüklenmesinde ideolojiden ziyade duyguların daha büyük bir oynadığı bilinmektedir. Bu anlamda siyasiler sert söylemlerden ve negatif duyguların perçinlendiği seçim kapmanyalarından kaçınmalıdır.
- Yapılan ankette siyasi partilere güven oranı çok düşük çıkmıştır. Bu anlamda siyasi partilere duyulan güven oranını arttırmaya yönelik politikalar izlenmeli ve özellikle yolsuzlukla mücadele öncelik verilmelidir.
- Türkiye’de son dönemde siyasetin tabandan koptuğu gözlemlenmektedir. Bu anlamda siyasiler tabanla yeniden bağ kurmalı, tabanın istek ve taleplerine öncelik vermeli.

Görüşülen kişilerin büyük bir çoğunluğu başkanlık sisteminin tek başına Türkiye’nin mevcut sorunlarına çare olamayacağı görüşündedir. Bu anlamda sorunların çözümünde asıl önemli olanın siyasilerdeki istek ve kararlılık olduğunun altı çizilmiştir.

- Yeni sistemde güçlü bir yasama ve güçlü bir sivil toplumla kapsayıcılık ve katılımcılık teşvik edilmelidir.

Türkiye’de sosyal uyuma dair:

- Anket çalışmasına göre Türkiye’de orta düzeyde (55/100) bir sosyal uyum vardır ki Türkiye’de sosyal uyum oranı OECD ülkeleri arasındaki en düşük orandır. Bu anlamda, Türkiye’de sosyal uyumu arttırmaya yönelik acil önlemler alınmalıdır.
- Anket çalışması Türkiye’de sosyal kurallara uyum ve insanlara güven oranının çok düşük olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu anlamda, bu normların geliştirilmesine yönelik sosyal politikalar geliştirilmeli ve bu politikalar medya, eğitim ve diğer ilgili araçlarla desteklenmelidir. Farklı grupların birbirlerini tanımalarına yönelik projelere özellikle ağırlık verilmelidir.

Türkiye’de Kürt meselesi ve sosyal uyuma dair:

- Kürt meselesi Türkiye’de sosyal uyumun önündeki en büyük engellerden biridir ve bu anlamda çözümüne öncelik verilmelidir. Çözüm sürecine geri dönülmesi durumunda daha kapsayıcı ve şeffaf bir süreç izlenmeli ve özellikle yerel halk daha iyi bilgilendirilmelidir.
- Kürt meselesinin son yıllarda edindiği bölgesel boyut dikkate alınarak, sürdürülebilir bir çözüm için sorunun iç-diş dengesi iyi kurulmalıdır.
- Türkiye’nin doğu illerinde istikrar için devlet otoritesi aracılığıyla güvenliğin sağlanması öncelikli olmalıdır. Ancak bu süreçte devlet bölgeye yapılabilecek yatırımları engelleyebilecek aşırı gözetim tedbirlerinden kaçınmalıdır.

Sosyal uyum ve ekonomik refaha dair:

- Sosyal uyum ve ekonomik refah arasında pozitif bir korelasyon olduğu bilinmektedir. Ancak yapılan çalışmalar ekonomik refahın tek başına mutluluk getirmediğini, ancak toplumsal birlik ve dayanışmayı arttırmaya yönelik kullanıldığı takdirde mutluluk getirdiğini göstermektedir.

Bu anlamda, sosyal uyumu arttırmak için kapsayıcı büyümeye yönelik çalışmalara ağırlık verilmelidir.

- İş sahibi olmayan gençler yasadışı gruplar için önemli bir insan kaynağı oluşturmaktadır. Bu anlamda özellikle doğu bölgelerinde iş sahaları geliştirilmeli ve gençler ekonomiye kazandırılmalıdır.
- Bölgede ekonomik kalkınma için turizm, hayvancılık ve tarıma ağırlık verilmelidir.
- Bölgede ekonomik sorunları çözmeden güvenlik sağlamak çözüm getirmeyecektir. Sürdürülebilir kalkınma için güvenlik ortamı sağlanmalı ve kapsayıcı büyümeye ağırlık verilmelidir.

Toplumsal mütabakatın sağlanmasında kadınların rolüne dair:

- Kadınlar, çatışmadan en çok zarar gören gruplar olarak çözümde de çok büyük rol oynayabilirler. Bu anlamda kadınların barış süreçlerindeki rolleri teşvik edilmeli, siyasal ve sosyal süreçlere dahil edilmeleri sağlanmalıdır.
- Araştırmada, Türkiye’de kadın grupları arasında dayanışma eksikliği olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Yapılan çalışmaya katılan temsilciler, çözüm süreci esnasında kadın gruplarının ortak bir söylem geliştirmemiş olmasının kaçırılan bir fırsat olduğunun altını çizmişlerdir. Bu anlamda, kadın grupları arasında işbirliği desteklenmelidir.
- İş yaşamında ve siyasette kadınlara erkeklerle eşit fırsatlar tanınmalıdır. Bu tür girişimler tabandan da destek bulacaktır zira yapılan anket çalışmasına göre halkın büyük bir çoğunluğu kadınların iş hayatı ve siyasette aktif rol oynamasını desteklemektedir.

Kutuplaşmayı aşmada sanat ve sporun rolüne dair:

- Sanat ve spor alanı siyasi baskılardan arındırılmalıdır. Sanat ve spor kutuplaşmayı aşmada etkin araçlar olarak kullanılmalıdır.
- Sanat ve spor farklı sosyo-ekonomik gruplardan insanları bir araya getirmek için kullanılabilir. Bu araçlar çatışmayı körüklemek için değil, farklılıkları kucaklamak için kullanılmalıdır.
- Spor müsabakalarında ayrımcı dil ve eylemleri önlemeye yönelik tedbirler alınmalıdır. Aksi takdirde spor toplumda kutuplaşmayı azaltıcı değil körükleyici bir araç olarak öne çıkar.

## INTRODUCTION

Turkish democracy has faced significant challenges in recent years. The failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016 has resulted in the restriction of civilian space and the securitization of a number of issues. Coupled with Turkey's response to developments within its region, particularly the ongoing Syrian crisis, a process of securitization and militarization has marked Turkish politics over the last few years. Consequently, the state of emergency, which was declared shortly after the failed coup attempt in July 2016, has been extended for the seventh time in a row amid both Turkey's military intervention in Syria and preparation to head to the polls for the sixth time in the last five years.

Turkey's recent democratic deficits, nevertheless, are not an exception. According to the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS), in 2017, the civic space was considered "closed, repressed, or obstructed" in 109 countries because of overly restrictive counter-terrorism measures.<sup>2</sup> Such measures, indeed, contradict the critical role civil society plays in counter-terrorism. According to several studies, "civil society plays an integral role in countering violent extremism and terrorism through delegitimizing terrorist narratives."<sup>3</sup> In the Turkish experience, one could argue that as a result of a historical lack of sufficient state support for civic participation—or support for only a selected group of civil society organizations (CSOs)—the civic space in Turkey has been dominated by groups in line with state/government interests. The Fethullah Terror Organization (FETÖ) could indeed be seen as an outcome of this selective promotion of CSOs in Turkey. As such, it could well be argued that if the government equally supports the enlargement of the civic space and public participation by all groups in society, there could be a more vibrant and more heterogeneous civil society, which eventually could prevent the dominance of certain groups like FETÖ.

It is, therefore, a timely endeavour to create platforms and opportunities for objective and inclusive debates. Such goals have thus constituted the basis for the Dialogue and Sustainable Conflict Resolution in the Kurdish Question and Polarization in Turkey Project. Conducted between June 2017 and May 2018, the project aimed to support enhanced political dialogue and conflict resolution through research and trans-

formative mediation techniques in order to be able to help contain the Kurdish question and polarization as the two main hurdles for stability and democracy in Turkey. It also aimed to identify the main causes of polarization and Kurdish issues as obstacles for social cohesion in Turkey.

This project was built on the findings of the Post-Coup Opportunities on Conflict Resolution and Democracy Project,<sup>4</sup> a project conducted by IPC between October 2016 and April 2017. According to the findings of this project, the lack of inclusiveness, empathy, representation, strong civil society, and the existence of polarizing language in political debates come to the fore as the biggest hurdles for conflict resolution and democracy in Turkey vis-à-vis polarization and the Kurdish issue. Furthermore, the research findings maintained that weak social cohesion and weak institutions are sources of instability and conflict and create a sound base for social unrest, conflict, and future coup attempts.

In this regard, the Dialogue and Sustainable Conflict Resolution in the Kurdish Question and Polarization in Turkey Project aimed to provide spaces for inclusive debate and dialogue. It also aimed to understand the level of social cohesion in Turkey and what needs to be done to foster social unity as a prerequisite for peace and stability.

2 "State of Civil Society Report 2018," CIVICUS, March 6, 2018, accessed April 30, 2018, <https://monitor.civicus.org/SOCS2018/>.

3 Mooney, "Introduction," 1.

4 For further information on the project please see, <http://ipc.sabanciuniv.edu/project/darbe-girisi-sonrasi-catisma-cozumu-ve-demokrasi-firsatlari-projesi/?lang=en>.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The Dialogue and Sustainable Conflict Resolution in the Kurdish Question and Polarization in Turkey Project had two main dimensions: fostering dialogue to promote peace and democracy and conducting research on common practices reinforcing polarization and the Kurdish issue in Turkey. The project was designed to utilize both qualitative and quantitative methods through conducting workshops, focus group meetings, interviews, and a quantitative survey on social cohesion in Turkey conducted in partnership with the Human Development Foundation (İNGEV).

Dialogue was fostered through the “empowerment and recognition” of participants from different circles by relying on “transformative mediation” as a method of fostering sustainable conflict resolution and democracy.<sup>5</sup> Developed by Robert A. Baruch Bush and Joseph P. Folger, transformative mediation is a technique that emphasizes “empowerment and recognition” as two key tenets of the conflict resolution process. The method focuses on the interaction of participants—therefore the process rather than the end result—to foster participation and enhance dialogue and empathy between the parties. Unlike “problem solving mediation,” which focuses on settlement through a more directive strategy, transformative mediation is based on a more procedural strategy and encourages the parties to own the process and seek open-minded solutions for their problems.

The project facilitated various levels of dialogue among elites representing the main cleavages begetting polarization in Turkey, including the Turkish-Kurdish, pro-government vs. anti-government, religious-secular, and gender-related divides. The project participants were selected from a pool of high- and mid-level bureaucrats, the government, political parties, academia, business circles, NGOs, and the media. The selection criteria for the participants in the workshops and field research was based on their involvement and ability to influence public debate as well as their being part and party to the main cleavages begetting polarization in Turkey.

To be able to gather quality data and foster dialogue among different parties, two closed workshops were held at the Karakoy office of IPC focusing on “The Role of Arts and Sports in Overcoming Polarization”

(15 participants) and “The Role of Women in Societal Consensus and Conflict Resolution” (17 participants).<sup>6</sup> In addition to the workshops, two focus group discussions were conducted in Van with members of the Provincial Organization and Eastern Industrial and Business Federation (DOĞUSİFED) and the People’s Democratic Party (HDP), with four participants in each discussion. All workshop and focus group participants were cited anonymously. Interview participants were also given the option to be cited anonymously. A total of 26 people were interviewed in Ankara, Istanbul, and Van within the scope of the project.<sup>7</sup>

The workshop topics were chosen with the idea that they represent both important and underexplored areas of polarization. Arts and sports are areas that could both fuel polarization and offer means to overcome it. The workshop, therefore, aimed to bring together persons that have participated in arts or sports projects aiming to contribute to peace and conflict resolution, with relevant bureaucrats, representatives of political parties, civil society, the media, and academia in attendance in order to lay out policy recommendations as to how arts and sports could be used more efficiently in overcoming polarization.

In a similar vein, the role of women in overcoming polarization and in resolving the Kurdish issue in Turkey has been significantly undermined. The workshop on “The Role of Women in Societal Consensus and Conflict Resolution” thus aimed to examine this role by investigating the elements that strengthen or weaken cooperation and collaboration among women themselves, women’s immediate needs in peacebuilding, and new feminist strategies for peace. Designed and moderated by Sabancı University Professor Ayşe Betül Çelik, the workshop brought together women representatives from the state, political parties, civil society, the media, and academia.

Data from the workshops, focus group meetings, and interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded, and analyzed in order to generate certain themes on which the project publications were built. The primary data gathered from the interviews and workshops were also shared with the project’s experts, Bülent Aras, E. Fuat Keyman, Asuman Suner, Altay Atlı, and Ayşe Betül

5 Please see, Transformative Mediation Institute, “Transforming Communication, Transforming Conflict,” accessed April 30, 2018, <http://www.transformative-mediation.com/>.

6 See the appendix for a list of workshops.

7 See the appendix for a list of interviews.

Çelik, who contributed to the project by writing policy reports.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to its qualitative dimension, quantitative research was also conducted as part of the project. The survey on social cohesion in Turkey was conducted between January 10 and February 8, 2018 in 26 cities across Turkey that represent 26 subregions of the second degree of nomenclature of units for territorial statistics. Through computer-assisted personal interviews (CAPI), 1,514 adults (age 18+) were interviewed. Demographic distribution ratios were applied in selected cities during the field research.

Social cohesion was analyzed under three main headings: “connectedness,” “social relations,” and “focus on the common good.”<sup>9</sup> A cohesive society, in this sense, “is characterised by resilient social relationships, a positive emotional connectedness between its members and the community, and a pronounced focus on the common good.”<sup>10</sup>

These headings were then divided into three subfields for each of the areas, including “identification, trust in institutions, and perception of fairness” for connectedness, “social networks, trust in people, and acceptance of diversity” for social relations, and “solidarity and helpfulness, respect for social rules, and civic participation” for focus on the common good. Survey question sets were prepared according to these headings. During the analysis, the Social Cohesion Index was calculated gradually once the data was graded.

The report also relied on field observation and data gathered from informal talks during the course of the project. The secondary materials used were reports, newspapers, commentaries, academic writings, and policy reports. The findings from the analysis of secondary materials were used to cross-examine the research findings from the workshops and interviews in order to minimize probable biases.

The following sections will elaborate on the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research conducted as part of the project. As such, the topics discussed have

been generated in accordance with the highlights from the derived data. Against this backdrop, the report will first examine polarization as a source of conflict in Turkey by looking into the main axes of polarization, the role of politics and the media in fuelling polarization, and the link between polarization and securitization. It will then scrutinize social cohesion as an antidote for polarization in Turkey. The report will continue by highlighting Kurdish issue as a setback for social cohesion in Turkey by focusing on its domestic and regional dimensions. It will then focus on the role of women, arts, and sports as unexplored issues in overcoming polarization and building societal consensus. The report will conclude by offering policy recommendations for stakeholders.

<sup>8</sup> See the appendix for a list of relevant policy reports.

<sup>9</sup> The model used in this survey has been modified from the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) and Bertelsmann Stiftung’s model of social cohesion. See, Eurofound and Bertelsmann Stiftung, “Social Cohesion and Well-being in the EU,” Reference no: EF1472, November 25, 2014, accessed April 30, 2018, [https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef\\_publication/field\\_ef\\_document/ef1472en.pdf](https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_publication/field_ef_document/ef1472en.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Bertelsmann Foundation, *Social Cohesion Radar. Measuring Common Ground. An International Comparison of Social Cohesion* (Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann Foundation, 2013), 11.

**POLARIZATION AS A SOURCE OF CONFLICT IN TURKEY**

Research demonstrates that polarization is a major driver of conflict and can halt social improvement. Recent studies indicate a rising level of polarization in Turkey.<sup>11</sup> According to the survey conducted on social cohesion in Turkey by IPC and İNGEV, the Turkish-Kurdish, pro-government vs. anti-government, and religious-secular divides constitute the three main axes of tension in Turkey.<sup>12</sup> As such, ethnic, political, and religious polarization come to the fore as the main axes of polarization in the country.

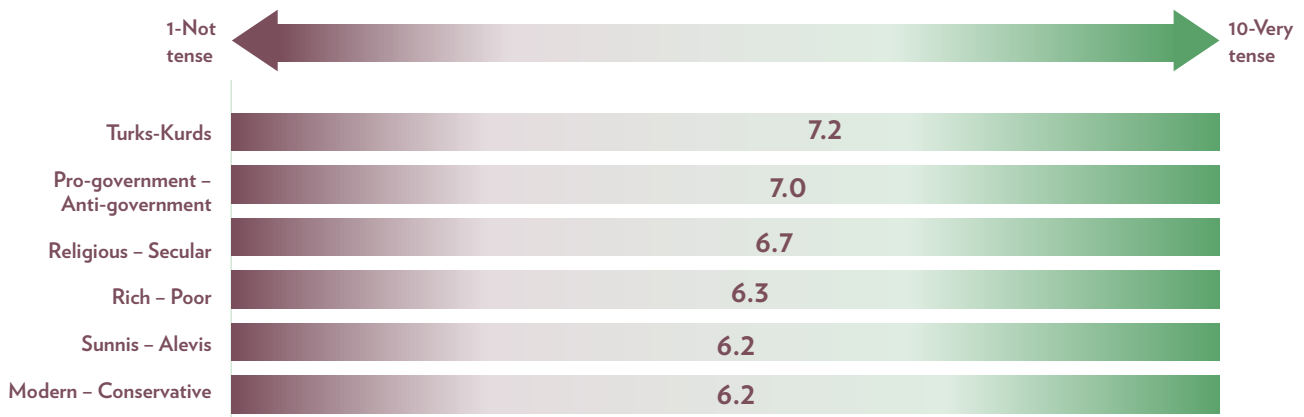
These are, in fact, expected cleavages since they represent the largest demographic groups in Turkey. Polarization is usually more common and can be better managed or controlled between large groups. Authorities often fuel polarization between larger groups since it is easier to manage or control few larger groups compared to many smaller ones.

The fuelling of polarization by politicians and the media has been a global trend in recent years. As resources erode and the level of prosperity declines, politicians fuel polarization since it is easier to rule and control people when they are divided into well-defined, homogenous camps. While it is easier to predict the political tendencies of well-defined camps, it is also easier to legitimize the dominance of one group over the other.

11 Istanbul Bilgi University Center for Migration Research, The Black Sea Trust for Regional Cooperation, and Istanbul Bilgi University, *Dimensions of Polarization in Turkey Report* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University, 2018) accessed on April 25, 2018, [https://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2018/02/06/dimensions-of-polarizationshortfindings\\_DNzdZml.pdf](https://goc.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2018/02/06/dimensions-of-polarizationshortfindings_DNzdZml.pdf); Mustafa Aydin et al., *2017 Survey on Social-Political Trends in Turkey*, Center for Turkish Studies (Istanbul: Kadir Has University, 2018).

12 Aysen Ataseven and Çağla Bakış, “Türkiye’de Sosyal Uyum [Social Cohesion in Turkey],” *Istanbul Policy Center and İNGEV Policy Report* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, May 2018).

**Level of tension / Average (Scale of 1-10)**



The media plays an important role in fuelling polarization since it is an important ideological state apparatus.<sup>13</sup> According to data scientist and academic Ravi Iyer, fake news is a symptom rather than a cause of polarization.<sup>14</sup> Fake news also depletes the reliability of trustable media outlets, which, for instance, was evident in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. During the elections, the real and the fake were deliberately mixed, and as a result, voters ignored a number of reliable news sources about then presidential candidate Donald Trump.

As had been evident in the U.S. elections, the media also efficiently exploited the “savior myth”: a common myth creating a “savior” that can protect one group against the perceived evil of the other. This myth effectively displays people’s willingness to compromise on democracy when in the presence of such a “savior.” This myth is fed by polarization, which then in turn feeds into further polarization.

Social media also plays an important role in both fuelling and overcoming polarization. Social media is significant in that it has created a medium that can exist without intermediaries. As such, people are now able to share their ideas without the filtering or manipulation of information by intermediaries, which disturbs authorities around the world. Thanks to social media, the public space no longer belongs only to the bourgeois and the ideal citizen but also to the “other.” Historically, critical ruptures such as crises, wars, and revolutions have triggered the creation or enlargement of public spaces. Similarly, in recent years social media usage has peaked during periods in which we see critical phenomena such as the Arab Spring or Occupy Wall Street.

It is, therefore, no surprise that there are now various restrictions on social media and the internet in several countries. Wikipedia, for instance, has been banned in Turkey since April 29, 2017.<sup>15</sup> Social media sites such as Twitter or Facebook have been banned or slowed

down on several occasions during protests or other incidents that pose a threat to the government. In contrast, during the one-month period following the July 15 coup attempt, the government provided subsidies to telecom companies so that they could offer free calls and data to promote social media usage in order to support the post-coup vigils that took place across the country. Users heard a voice message by President Erdoğan when placing a call on the anniversary of the coup attempt that read, “As president, I send congratulations on the July 15 National Day of Democracy and Unity and wish the martyrs mercy and the heroes [of the defeat of the coup] health and wellbeing.”<sup>16</sup> As evident in these examples, while the use of social media and communication technologies can at times be promoted by the authorities for the sake of peace and stability, at other times they can be banned arbitrarily when their use conflicts with the interest of the authorities.

13 Louis Althusser, “Idéologie et appareils idéologiques d’État (Notes pour une recherche),” *La Pensée*, No. 151, June 1970.

14 Susan Bell, “Does technology fuel polarization in the current political climate?” USC News, December 7, 2017, accessed April 30, 2018, <https://news.usc.edu/132209/does-technology-fuel-polarization-in-the-current-political-climate/>.

15 “Wikipedia still ‘not sure’ why it is still banned in Turkey,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, January 17, 2018, accessed April 30, 2018, <http://www.hurriyet-dailynews.com/wikipedia-still-not-sure-why-it-is-still-banned-in-turkey-125858>.

16 “Erdoğan voice message surprises Turkey mobile users on failed coup anniversary,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, July 16, 2017, accessed April 30, 2018, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-voice-message-surprises-turkey-mobile-users-on-failed-coup-anniversary-115552>.

## THE POLARIZATION–SECURITIZATION NEXUS

According to the survey outcomes, Turkish citizens consider the lack of security and terror as the biggest hurdles against living in unity and harmony (34/100). This also corresponds with the outcomes of questions on trust, which indicate a very low level of trust in other people (19/100). As evident in these outcomes, there is a very high level of threat perception among Turkish citizens. The already existent threat perception among the Turkish public has been further elevated with the failed July 15 coup attempt as well as the crises pertaining to Turkey's region. The Syrian crisis in particular has fuelled this threat perception due to Turkish citizens' fears that the conflict could spill over into Turkey, of the massive refugee crisis on Turkish soil, and of the possibility of the establishment of a Kurdish entity on Turkey's border.

Another interesting outcome of the survey was that the military (73/100) and the police (72/100) were still considered the most trusted institutions in Turkey despite the recent July 15 coup attempt. This is, in a way, understandable given the dominance of security concerns and threat perception among the public. However, there were also concerns among some project participants that civil-military relations have largely been damaged after July 15. For instance, HDP MP Sırrı Süreyya Önder, Republican People's Party (CHP) deputy Fikri Sağlar, and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Turkey Institute board member Haldun Solmaztürk all argued that the military has been under the political authority's control since the failed coup attempt. They all argued that there is no such thing as civil-military relations anymore.

Solmaztürk added that while in the past the Turkish army had full autonomy and acted like a state within the state, it now has zero autonomy, which is equally non-efficient for the state and the military itself. The military is no longer a professional institution. He suggested that what needs to be done is to find a middle ground similar to the examples in the United States, the UK, or France where the military is under the control of the government but enjoys professional autonomy as well.

The perceived lack of security and threat perception are also what unite Turkish citizens in times of crises. Earthquakes, the July 15 coup attempt, and the recent Operation Olive Branch are examples of such an attitude. Turkey's recent military operation has gained large-scale support from a wide array of

societal groups including seculars, religious people, nationalists, liberals, and leftists. As such, more than 80 percent of Turkish citizens support the operation.<sup>17</sup> However, Turkey's threat perception is deeply rooted in an existential fear that corresponds with the "Sevres Syndrome," or the fear of outside powers plotting to divide Turkey. According to our survey, 47 percent of Turkish citizens are supportive of the measures taken after the July 15 coup attempt, while 46 percent are supportive of counter-terrorism measures, and 42 percent are supportive of the policies applied vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue.

On the optimistic side, if used constructively this sense of unity and solidarity could be utilized to overcome polarization and ensure social cohesion. It should also be underlined that Turkey is in a relatively better position compared to its counterparts. For instance, various arguments were made after the July 15 coup attempt, one of which was that the increased level of polarization in Turkey encouraged the coup plotters. The high level of polarization gave a wrong assumption to the coup plotters that they would easily gain public support for their attempt. On the contrary, people from all walks of society quickly united against the coup and took to the streets with the fear that their very own survival was at stake.

In a similar vein, despite its 40-years history, the Kurdish issue in Turkey has never turned into a large-scale civil war. According to Sağlar, this is a result of the prudent attitude of the Kurdish and Turkish peoples. Despite being a polarized and somewhat conflictual society, Turkish citizens do not escalate conflicts to the extent that they would obstruct their personal comfort. Sağlar noted that the spoilers who want to fuel conflict are trying to do so by highlighting sectarian differences. In this view, the common sense of the Alevis would play a very important role in preventing conflict. He argued that unless a new political understanding and prudent politicians who do not try to fuel polarization take stage, Turkey will eventually experience a "Turkish Spring."

17 "Afrin harekatı için ilk anket! Destek yüzde kaç çıktı?" *Sözcü*, January 24, 2018, accessed April 30, 2018, <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2018/gundem/afrin-harekatı-icin-ilk-anket-destek-yuzde-kac-cikti-2188154/>; "Son ankette Zeytin Dalı operasyonuna yüzde 90 destek," *Türkiye Gazetesi*, February 12, 2018, accessed April 30, 2018, <http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/gundem/543072.aspx>.

Despite the perceived prudence of Turkish society, there is, however, a tendency to draw out conflicts, neither escalating nor resolving them. As such, the everyday comfort of Turkish citizens outweighs a much bigger comfort that they could acquire in the long term through peace. This, nevertheless, does not mean that society is not polarized. According to Ray, “When society is highly polarized, the potential cost of rebellion is extremely high, and this cost may serve as the guarantor of peace. So, in highly polarized societies, the occurrence of open conflict should be rare but its intensity very severe, whenever it happens.”<sup>18</sup> As such, despite polarization’s role as a guarantor for peace, this role is unstable since there is always the possibility of an open conflict.

The fact that conflicts are not escalated to the level of a large-scale civil war could also be explained through the high level of identification with the society and intersectionality in the “perception of us” among Turkish citizens. According to our survey, 80 percent of Turkish citizens feel strongly connected with their country and society. While this ratio is at the highest among conservatives (82/100), it is at the lowest among Kurds (67/100). In a similar vein, 88 percent of the people in Turkey are proud of being a Turkish citizen. While, expectedly, this ratio is highest among Turks (91/100) and people who define themselves as religious (91/100), it is the lowest among Kurds (69/100).

The survey results also indicate intersectionality between groups that Turkish citizens identify themselves with. Societal identity groups were analyzed in two levels including primary identity groups and general identity groups. In this sense, while 41 percent consider Turkishness as their primary identity, 80 percent always or often consider themselves as Turkish (as a general identity). This ratio is at six to 23 percent for Kurdishness, 19 to 56 percent for Kemalists, and seven to 24 percent for Alevis. These results are also indicative of the high level of intersectionality between identity groups. Interestingly, many of those surveyed who consider themselves to be Kurdish also identified themselves as Turkish. In a similar vein, 66 percent of those surveyed considered themselves religious and also identified themselves as Kemalists. As such, the high level of connectedness within society prevents the instigation of polarization into open conflict.

It should, nevertheless, be underpinned that according to studies, “identities in themselves do not cause the destruction of cohesion, but it all depends on the

politicization by the political parties, which have an enormous ability to affect this degree of consensus.”<sup>19</sup> In this view, “the greater the political polarization, the greater the disruptive effect on interpersonal trust, and, therefore, on social cohesion.”<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein, regarding the current political crisis in Turkey, Aras argues that, the crisis “is the direct result of policy actors losing touch with, and to a certain extent disregarding, societal demands for policy making, utilizing a populist attitude in a way to reflect deepseated divisions and polarization in the country, as well as feeding into these divisions in order to extend one’s domestic hold on power.”<sup>21</sup> As such, building societal trust and therefore social cohesion are the ultimate prerequisites for overcoming polarization.

18 Joan Esteban and Debraj Ray, “Polarization, Fractionalization and Conflict,” *Journal of Peace Research* 45, no. 2 (2008): 163–182.

19 “Political polarization destroys social cohesion and trust, according to a study,” Universitat Pompeu Fabra Barcelona, May 24, 2017, [https://www.upf.edu/en/web/media/enoticies/-/asset\\_publisher/wdGAWZ7EMj53/content/id/8612932/maximized#.Wucj4NNuam0](https://www.upf.edu/en/web/media/enoticies/-/asset_publisher/wdGAWZ7EMj53/content/id/8612932/maximized#.Wucj4NNuam0). Please also see, Sergio Martini and Mariano Torcal, “Trust across political conflicts: evidence from a survey experiment in divided societies,” *Party Politics*, DOI: 10.1177/1354068816685933, (2016): 1-14.

20 Ibid.

21 Bülent Aras, “State Capacity, Foreign/Security Policy and Political Crisis in Turkey,” *IPC Policy Report* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, February 2018), 3.

**SOCIAL COHESION IN TURKEY**

According to the survey findings, Turkey has a medium level of social cohesion, with a score of 55 out of 100. This is a rather low score when compared with Turkey’s counterparts, since according to the OECD’s Society at a Glance report, Turkey has the lowest level of social cohesion among OECD countries.<sup>22</sup> Of the three main areas of assessment—“connectedness,” “social relations,” and “focus on the common good”—“focus on the common good” received the lowest score, with 40 out of 100. Under “focus on the common good,” civic participation received the lowest score, with 22 out of 100, which is an indication of a low level of political and civil participation.

Particularly since the failed July 15 coup attempt, Turkey has experienced a significant restriction of the civic space with the arrest of thousands of civil society members and the closure of numerous CSOs based on counter-terrorism measures.

Similar to the outcome of the survey, several project participants also argued that the current political culture is a major drawback for social cohesion in Turkey. An anonymous civil society representative, Solmaztürk, and Sağlar all referred to the tense political culture and discourses as sources of weak social cohesion. In this sense, Solmaztürk stated that the biggest hurdle for resolving domestic and international issues

GENERAL SOCIAL COHESION INDEX → 55 (Medium Level)					
CONNECTEDNESS	66	SOCIAL RELATIONS	60	FOCUS ON THE COMMON GOOD	40
Identification	80	Social Networks	68	Solidarity and Helpfulness	59
Trust in Institutions	59	Trust in People	46	Respect for Social Rules	39
Perception of Fairness	59	Acceptance of Diversity	66	Civic Participation	22

Despite the common belief that Turkey is a politicized society, this score indicates an opposite trend. While there is very high voter turnout in Turkish elections (usually over 80 percent) and politics is part of everyday conversations among the public, there is a very low level of participation in political parties or civil society organizations among the Turkish public. The reason for such a trend could be explained through two processes. While such civic culture is low among the people, the state is also not supportive of civic participation. While this has been a common trend throughout Turkish history, the beginning of Turkey’s EU accession process in 1999 had a significant impact on the expansion of the civic space in Turkey. Followed by the ruling Justice and Development Party’s (AK Party) rise to power, Turkey had enjoyed an enlargement of the civic space until recent years. As such, this enlargement has been a short-lived experience hampered by a re-securitization process in Turkey triggered by various domestic and regional developments.

is the current political administration and its political culture. He further argued that the centralization of power and the tendency to hold on to it leads to aggression and a lack of tolerance.

A local journalist from Van and businessperson 3 suggested that the lack of social cohesion is caused by politicians. They both argued that politicians have to be more involved with the problems at the grassroots level. Moreover, they both indicated corruption as a source of polarization and a setback for social cohesion. These arguments correspond with the survey, according to which there is a very low level of trust in political parties in Turkey (40/100). As such, measures to increase the reliability and accountability of political parties should be taken in order to increase these scores. As also underscored by Solmaztürk, there is an urgent need for the political party act and the election law to be revised. He believes these changes should be made based on consensus through the incorporation of universities, law schools, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary citizens into the process.

<sup>22</sup> OECD, *Society at a Glance 2016: OECD Social Indicators Report* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2016).

Prejudice against other groups was also underlined as a setback for social cohesion, which corresponds with the outcome of the survey, as well. According to the survey, while Turkish citizens have close relations with relatives and close friends (68/100), trust in people outside their immediate circle is very low (46/100). Coupled with weak civic participation, the outcome is indicative of weak social cohesion. State official 1, for instance, believes that citizens' lifestyles that are not transitional and being stuck in homogeneous ghettos are the fundamental reasons for weak social cohesion. According to the bureaucrat, certain groups prefer leading closed lives as it is more comfortable to live without confronting the "other." In this view, people do not want to disturb their existing mindsets, and stepping outside those mindsets means stepping into a zone of conflict. Similarly, businessperson 3 from Van posited that ideological baggage is a serious problem and stated that people support political parties the same way they support sports clubs. This argument is also supported by academic studies such as Iyengar et al., who argue, "affect is a more appropriate indicator of mass polarization than ideology."<sup>23</sup> In this view, "the vast majority of the public does not think about parties in ideological terms and that their ties to the political world are instead affective, based on a primordial sense of partisan identity that is acquired very early in life and persists over the entire life cycle."<sup>24</sup> As such, emotions rather than ideologies are more influential on people's political leanings and thus on fuelling polarization. Iyengar et al. further posit, "Exposure to loud negative campaigns is very likely not the strongest factor, much less the only factor, contributing to affective polarization."<sup>25</sup> In this regard, it was conceived that politicians instigate polarization through the exploitation of emotions and exposure to harsh rhetoric for electoral gains, and this is a major driver of polarization. In support of this view, some participants argued that nationalist policies and discourses are major causes of polarization in Turkey.

The survey highlights low civic participation, low respect for social rules, and low trust in people as the main setbacks for social cohesion in Turkey. These elements also often fuel polarization. As such, promoting participation, enhancing trust, and respecting social rules are keys to increasing social cohesion and overcoming polarization. In a similar

vein, there appeared to be a consensus among project participants that the lack of societal cohesion could be overcome by promoting more dialogue. For instance, academic 1 stipulated that NGOs and think tanks can play a major role by organizing workshops and events to bring people from varying backgrounds together.

State official 1 believes that only through dialogue and more encounters a common benefit can be found and reached. The official also maintained society needs more than tolerance to live together. In other words, tolerance in itself is not sufficient, and society must normalize by loving each other. Similarly, Sağlar stated, "people cannot love each other without getting to know each other." As such, projects that would enable people to get to know the "other" should be promoted by the state and civil society.

<sup>23</sup> Shanto Iyengar, Gaurav Sood, and Yphtach Lelkes, "Affect, Not Ideology: A Social Identity Perspective on Polarization," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2012): 23.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

## KURDISH ISSUE AS A SETBACK FOR SOCIAL COHESION IN TURKEY

A number of project participants argued that the Kurdish issue is a major setback for social cohesion in Turkey. Journalist 1, for instance, suggested that resolving the Kurdish issue would bring about democratization, which would eventually help in the resolution of various issues in Turkey. According to him, the peace process, at the time, led to a rise in economic welfare and relaxation of the socio-political environment. Similarly, HDP deputy Sırrı Süreyya Önder suggested that the current conflictual environment is a hurdle to maintaining social cohesion.

There was a general conception among project participants that the peace process should be resumed, since people in the region were more optimistic about the future during the process. Some participants underpinned that if the process resumes, it must be inclusive and transparent. For instance, businessperson 3 stated that it is crucial that local institutions, non-governmental actors, and unions are included and that actors are selected more carefully based on their ability to influence the process. Similarly, businessperson 4 posited that the process should be planned and implemented more wisely. In that regard, he pointed out the importance of transparency and maintained that trust must be built between the citizens and the state. What will be done has to be communicated in advance. Another businessperson also indicated that the people in the region were not well informed and that the process remained too elitist. Participants also underlined that one of the reasons for the failure of the process was politicians' self-interest rather than working for the common good.

Some businesspeople in Van believed that, during the peace process, there was a lack of sufficient state authority and security in the city. Businessperson 3, for instance, stated that the peace process empowered the "organization," or the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). State authority has only been re-established since the suspension of the peace process. He argued that the PKK instituted a de facto authority by establishing courts, racketeering money from people, and by controlling the polling stations during elections. Another businessperson, on the other hand, argued that the cities in the region have been the ones where the state of emergency has been felt the most. He noted that (anti-riot) water cannon vehicles are stationed outside buildings even during a simple gathering. As such there is serious security surveillance in Van, which significantly prevents the flow of investments to

the city. Therefore, despite the need for security, this should be provided in a more subtle way.

Businessperson 3 maintained that, despite all the fury, the appointment of trustees has significantly improved municipal services. He also pointed out that there is a problem of political representation in Van. For instance, the recent HDP candidate in local elections was from outside Van and unknown by the local people. According to the businessperson, this is very problematic, since unlike MPs, who spend a majority of their time in Ankara, mayors live in the city. He suggested that the focus during local elections should be on the quality of services not ideologies.

Küçükcan, as well as some bureaucrats, maintained that thanks to the government the Kurdish question is not a historical taboo anymore. He stated that the government recognized Kurdishness as an identity, provided cultural rights, and made investments in the Kurdish-majority regions. He posited that the PKK sabotaged the peace process by not agreeing to drop its weapons. Bureaucrat 1, on the other hand, pointed out that the emergence of the Democratic Union Party/People's Protection Units (PYD/YPG) in the region due to the Syrian civil war halted the peace process. A scholar who is known to hold a pro-government stance suggested that it would not be accurate to solely blame one side for the failure of the peace process. The scholar affirmed that the current conflictual environment makes it difficult to objectively analyze the current dynamics. Solmaztürk suggested that it would be difficult to resolve the Kurdish question as long as the PKK carries out acts of terror.

Several participants from Van suggested that there is a positive correlation between economic welfare and social cohesion. In that regard, businessperson 1 stated that unemployed youth could pose a major human resource for illegal groups. He argued that the evacuation of villages and displacement lead to excess unemployment. Similarly, businessperson 4 put emphasis on the lack of sufficient jobs in Eastern Turkey and lack of sufficient border trade. He claimed that there is suppression at the borders, and if border trade was free and promoted, the region would have increased economic welfare leading to more social cohesion. These arguments correspond with the outcome of the survey, which postulates that while security and terror are seen as the biggest problems in Turkey (34/100),

these are followed by economic problems, unemployment, and poverty (27/100).

Similarly, a majority of Turkish citizens believe that the national income and the tax burden are not fairly distributed. While more than half of the people surveyed were skeptical about tax expenditures (53/100), a similar ratio of participants thought that the gap between white- and blue-collar workers is unfair (51/100). In this respect, providing security without resolving economic problems would be done so in vain. In order to enable sustainable development, inclusive growth should be promoted. Studies also demonstrate that while social cohesion is higher in affluent societies, “what makes citizenries of affluent societies happier is, in the first place, their capacity to create togetherness and solidarity among their members—in other words, cohesion.”<sup>26</sup> In this view, economic progress cannot bring happiness unless it is used to enhance the feelings of unity and solidarity.

Businessperson 3 argued that as a result of the current stable and secure environment, investors are now coming to Van. Many of the participants interviewed suggested that there is huge potential for tourism in Van, both for Turkish tourists and tourists from the region such as Iran. However, there is a need for the improvement of local economic conditions, which could be easily accomplished through state and private investment. There is also a need to invest in human resources since there is a shortage of qualified labor in Van. The high number of youth in the city offers an opportunity for labor-intensive sectors and tourism.

It was also maintained by a number of participants in Van that there is great potential for tourism, agriculture, and husbandry in the city. There are many unexploited tourism potentials such as the Keşiş Lake. Similarly, the Akdamar Church was renovated during the peace process after many years of neglect. It was highlighted during the meeting with DOĞUSİFED that despite its vast potential, Lake Van lacks a beach reserved for public use and most of its coastline is occupied by the state. The vast tourism potential for Iranian tourists was also underlined a number of times. According to one businessperson, 600,000 Iranian tourists visited Turkey in 2017. The number of tourists visiting Van from Iran could easily be increased if the necessary measures are taken. It was also pointed out that the bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran have a huge impact on tourism and thus should be handled

prudently without unnecessary quarrels. Regarding the potential of agriculture, one businessperson underlined that agricultural initiatives such as ÇAYKUR in Rize and FİSKOBİRLİK in Giresun should be realized in Van in order to promote local agriculture.

Another problem that was underpinned vis-à-vis problems of the region was the increased level of brain drain and capital drain from Van towards western cities. As such, the need for a free and secure environment for the economy and business to flourish was indicated by a number of participants.

The participants held diverging positions regarding the possible impact of the presidential system on the Kurdish issue. While some argued that the new system would not have a major impact on the issue, others posited that it would have a positive impact. One of the participants argued that the change of system would not make an impact on the Kurdish issue and maintained that what matters is the sincerity of the politicians rather than the system. In this view, as long as there is a sincere willingness and effort on behalf of the politicians, the resolution would come about.

According to journalist 1, the presidential system will not be able to bring solutions to Turkey’s problems. He argued that Turkey should go back to a well-defined parliamentary system. A civil society representative who criticized the presidential system underlined that any presidential system should have a strong and efficient legislature, which is largely absent in the presidential system proposed by the government.

Önder stated that Turkish society is too complex—that is, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic—to be administered by a centralized authority. The presidential system for Turkey, therefore, is not only politically but also technically not appropriate. One participant argued that switching to the presidential system will not solve the problems that could not be solved within the parliamentary system. It is the political culture rather than the political system that brings about stability and welfare. Another participant argued that despite some fears that the presidential system would bring about regional autonomy to Kurds, the presidential system, by definition, cannot lead to autonomy. Rather, it would create a more centralized and authoritarian environment. Businessperson 3, on the other hand, emphasized that Turkey suffered due to political coalitions in the past and the presidential system would bring about stability in the country. However, he also noted that there is a thin line between stability and dictatorship that should be protected.

26 Jan Delhey and Georgi Dragolov, “Happier Together: Social Cohesion and Subjective Well-being in Europe,” *International Journal of Psychology* 51, no. 3 (2016): 163.

Many of the project participants pointed out that inclusiveness and participation should be promoted in the new system. As such, the importance of meritocracy was underlined several times during the project. Sağlar, for instance, claimed that the presidential system may undermine inclusiveness and thus the political culture has to change. Solmaztürk suggested that the parliament must have a more democratic bylaw and internal regulations. Similarly, Önder contended that the centralization of power is a major drawback for inclusiveness. In that regard, the transition of power from the periphery to the center is problematic. To give an example, Önder maintained that the administration of 85 municipalities has been transferred to trustees, which leads to the misrepresentation of around three million people.

## REGIONAL REPERCUSSIONS OF THE KURDISH ISSUE

The Kurdish issue in Turkey has been largely affected by regional developments. The fact that the PYD/YPG had gained a foothold in Northern Syria rang alarm bells for Turkish authorities, who eventually carried out two military operations into the region including Operation Euphrates Shield and more recently Operation Olive Branch. While these operations gained large-scale support among the Turkish public, there have also been various criticisms of the operation. In a similar vein, our project findings reflect mixed results as well.

According to journalist 1, Turkey should have collaborated with the Kurds right in the beginning of the Kobane siege and helped them establish an autonomous Kurdish territory in Syria. In this way, Turkey could have prevented non-regional actors such as the United States or Russia from gaining a foothold in the area. This would also bring Turkey forth as a valuable ally in the region for these powers. On the contrary, according to the journalist, the Islamic State (ISIS) was defeated without the help of, or even despite of, Turkey. This is, in this sense, a serious departure from Turkey's image in the beginning of the Arab Spring, when it was pointed to as a "model" country for the region.

Most participants agreed that it is rather hard to speak of a positive outcome for Turkey vis-à-vis the Syrian crisis. Küçükcan noted that the complexity of the issue makes it difficult to resolve the crisis since hostility has emerged between groups such as Alevis, Sunnis, Kurds, and Arabs, which gives the conflict a sectarian dimension. He argued that the fact that the PYD/YPG had opened space to maneuver through military means posed a security threat for Turkey. He underlined that an ideal solution in Syria would be possible only if the central authority gains political legitimacy and reinstates order in the country through a formula that would offer possibilities for societal groups to have equal representation. This would not be possible if each group tries to establish control over certain regions with weapons.

Some participants from Van suggested that the developments in the Kurdish regions of Syria directly affect the Kurds in Turkey. For instance, businessperson 2 maintained that Kurds in Turkey and Kurds in Syria are relatives, and therefore, it is too difficult for a Kurd in Turkey to remain calm when Kurdish villages are burnt down in Syria. He stated that deep wounds have been opened. Similarly, a local journalist from Van

suggested that Turkish foreign policy in Syria caused a massive emotional break-off. He argued that the developments in Syria affected Turkey more than they were supposed to because Turkey tried to intervene in Syria before solving the domestic dimension of the Kurdish issue. Many of the people from the state or close to the government opposed this view. According to bureaucrat 3, recent developments in Syria have forced Turkey's Kurdish question into a context where an armed solution is the only option. Academic 1 also argued that the developments in Syria—particularly the fact that the PKK and its extensions have exploited the process with malign intentions—have stiffened the security paradigm. In this view, it would not be fair to put all the blame on the government for the ongoing process of securitization. As such, he argues that the changing attitude of NATO or ISIS should also be taken into account.

## THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN BUILDING SOCIETAL CONSENSUS

The role of women in overcoming polarization and building societal consensus is largely undermined in Turkey despite the fact that studies demonstrate the significance of women's roles in resolving conflicts.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, as also underpinned by several participants of the Role of Women in Societal Consensus workshop, women and children are the most vulnerable groups in conflicts. As also underpinned by a workshop participant, femicide and violence against women have increased disproportionately over the past years. Women, therefore, being the fundamental victim of unrest, could indeed play an important role in conflict resolution and improving social cohesion.

One workshop participant stated that women do not go through the same experiences as men during times of war and conflict. Therefore, if women internalized this fact, they could play more constructive roles in maintaining peace. Another participant pointed out that war is significantly sexist. While this could decrease hope for peace, it could also motivate women to own the processes of peace. A former MP from the CHP argued that Turkey is gradually becoming a totalitarian regime, and this danger could be utilized as an element that could bring women from different societal groups together. She argued that in case of rising authoritarianism, women from several factions of society—that is, Turkish, Kurdish, headscarved, or secular—face harm regardless of their identity. She also pointed to the importance of dialogue among different women's groups.

It was also underlined both in the workshop and during the interviews in Van that despite measures to increase their participation, women's participation in the workforce and in politics still lags behind that of men, especially in Eastern Turkey. The participants underlined that this is mainly due to the dominance of the feudal culture in the region. According to a member of the HDP, there have been improvements in recent years. While women in Eastern Turkey were not permitted to even leave their village in the past, now they can go to other cities to study at universities. Moreover, she argued that the political culture of the HDP, which promotes “co-leadership” of the party by men and women, has had a significant impact on promoting the

role of women in politics. According to her, political parties around the world have copied this model.

The survey outcomes on women's role in society, especially in the workforce and politics, revealed optimistic outcomes. Sixty-eight percent of the people surveyed contended that women should play an active role in the workforce, while 67 percent agreed that they should be active in politics. Fifty-seven percent thought that women's primary role should be within the family. Interestingly, this ratio is much lower than those that promote the role for women in the workforce and politics. This could indeed be explained by economic problems and the fact that Turkish families are in need of additional income provided by women. Another interesting outcome is that only 37 percent of those surveyed thought that women are treated equally with men in the workforce, which is indicative of the prevalent perception of discrimination and unfairness between men and women.

It was also underlined during the workshop that there are some obstacles that need to be overcome by women to be able to play such roles. One such obstacle is that there is a lack of cooperation and collaboration among women's groups to be able to play such roles, which was evident during the peace process. During the workshop it was underlined a number of times that the lack of a unified voice among women's groups for peace during the peace process was a missed opportunity. In other words, polarization was also present among women's groups, which stemmed mainly from the differences in ideological belongings. One participant, for instance, suggested that women become the prisoners of their ideology in times of conflict. Therefore, they cannot utilize their capacity to resolve conflicts.

Another participant suggested that there is a need to construct common discourses among women. Similarly, it was also maintained that women must develop a common definition of what is meant by peace. According to one participant, a mutually agreed upon definition of peace can only be reached when women leave their ideologies, identities, and political demands behind and organize around mutual demands. She stated that it is normal to have diverse demands and that demands may not match all the time. It is vital, however, to meet on common ground. In that regard, who stood by who in the past was an imperative discussion among the participants. Some headscarved participants stated that women as a whole did not support

<sup>27</sup> Ayşe Betül Çelik, “Toplumsal Mutabakatta ve Çatışma Çözümünde Kadınların Rolü,” *IPC Policy Report* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, March 2018), 4.

them in the past, whereas some participants referred to Kurdish women's loneliness and lack of support today.

One participant stated that Turkish women failed to unify in the past. For instance, women could not unify for headscarved women's right for education. Ünsal stated that women felt indebted to the new Republican elites when their right to vote was recognized. They were, therefore, rather hesitant to come together and demand more rights. Headscarved women had a similar experience. They also felt indebted to the current government when headscarved women's right to be elected was recognized. In other words, women's participation in the struggle for more rights in other fields has prevented them from demanding more rights overall, since it is perceived that they are in debt. This thought, however, is problematic. All women's groups, therefore, must disentangle from their indebtedness and rally around a common discourse. Women should cease to be thankful for their rights and instead unify as free individuals.

Although several participants suggested that women could not come together regarding the headscarf issue, one participant stated that this discourse is not accurate. There are several types of women and women's groups who struggled for headscarf women's freedom for election to parliament or education in the past. Another participant stated that Turkey is not comprised of solely Istanbul and Ankara and that there could be radical secular or conservative women who are not willing to change and compromise. There could be, for instance, women who do not accept the headscarf. In this view, women should think they are not the majority. At the end of the day certain polarizing groups must be ignored, and women should always focus on the positive, increase their self-awareness, maintain their inner peace, and influence other women around them.

Another issue the participants addressed was women's pacification and objectification. Most participants referred to this through examples from the recent peace process. A participant, for instance, underscored that the peace process was initiated through the discourse "May the mothers never cry again." She stated that this particular point of departure is problematic in itself. She noted, "Women cannot solely be defined by motherhood; they are also working people, engineers, professors, teachers." She maintained that this sort of narrative seeks to pacify women. Rather, women should be active objects of the process rather than passive subjects. Similarly, another participant posited that women from certain ideological backgrounds

could not say anything during the peace process. Thus, on the contrary, in remaining passive they were utilized as objects. She also criticized the narrative "May the mothers never cry again" and referred to the BBC's reporting on Kurdish women militants. She stated that images of female militants brushing their hair and doing their makeup were presented as proof of them being "good" people. However, this just goes to show that, she explained, during either peace or war women remain as passive objects. Similarly, a participant accentuated that although the "May the women never cry again" discourse was influential, women were never presented as active actors during the peace process.

On the other hand, some participants suggested that constructing a common discourse and unifying women is not easy. A participant suggested that the meaning of peace varies depending on geography. For instance, people from Diyarbakır and Sakarya perceive different things when they hear the word peace. Similarly, another participant also emphasized the complexity of taking identical belongings out of context. She stated it is idealistic to suggest that all women should come together leaving their political belongings behind. It might not be more realistic, however, to expect women from Kadıköy, Avcılar, or Sur—i.e., women from neighborhoods with ideologically opposing majorities—to react to issues differently. A woman's reaction from Sur whose house has been destroyed by war, for instance, will never be independent from her identity. She will always say, "I lost my home because I am from Diyarbakır."

A participant stated that more people must be convinced to take responsibility on societal matters. She stated that gathering in workshops with educated people by itself could be elitist and is, in fact, not enough. In that regard, women should reach out to more people. Similarly, another participant suggested that workshops could be elitist, and women should try to convene in different cities and meet with different groups.

## THE ROLE OF ARTS AND SPORTS IN OVERCOMING POLARIZATION

Arts and sports have been important instruments of ideational, emotional, and physical expression for centuries. Due to their universal characteristics, they offer a platform for the interaction of people from different walks of society. As such, arts and sports are both able to affect and be affected by politics.<sup>28</sup> According to Suner and Atlı, since the July 15 coup attempt, arts and sports have become another area in which polarization has been reproduced. Moreover, the restriction of the civilian space and the manifestation of the dominant discourse have been felt in the fields of arts and sports, as well.

In the Role of Arts and Sports in Overcoming Polarization workshop, although some participants maintained that arts and sports could play a role in overcoming polarization, most of the participants agreed that, in an already highly polarized socio-political environment, arts and sports play a rather negative role. In other words, arts and sports could lead to pernicious results when conflicting parties are brought together through either competitive sports or artwork; this case is not peculiar to Turkey and can be observed all around the world.

It was underlined by some project participants that the shrinkage of the public space in Turkey in recent years has had a direct impact on arts through censorship and the dominance of the artistic space by a selected group of artists that have the approval of the ruling elites. As such, the homogeneity of ideas and the exclusion of the other stand out as major threats to diversity in the arts. Suner argues that since 2013, the Turkish art scene has been witnessing “culture wars.” In this view, the art scene has turned into a zone of conflict and struggle. In this regard, the common lines of polarization in Turkey, including religious, ethnic, and political lines, can be seen in the arts, as well. This is not new for Turkey, since the arts have been used as an instrument of imposing dominant discourse and ideology since the establishment of the Turkish Republic. As also underpinned by Suner, the Turkification of arts had been a common process throughout Republican history during which many non-Turkish ethnic works of art had been systematically Turkified.<sup>29</sup> Patriarchal ideas have also dominated the artistic scene. For instance,

according to a young director who participated in the workshop, there is prejudice against films on woman’s rights at the film festivals in Turkey. He argued that films that contain elements of violence or erotism are censored in the first round of the festivals. As such, directors often have to apply self-censorship to be able to remain in the sector.

Similar to arts, sports is also a field that has the potential to fuel polarization and conflict. As also maintained by Atlı, due to its competitive nature, unless well managed, sports can easily become a field of conflict.<sup>30</sup> Sports may also fuel polarization since it appeals to fans through satisfying their need of belonging by creating an “other.” However, as also argued by Atlı, sports is a rather neutral instrument and is shaped by how it is utilized.

One participant from the workshop gave the example of Gaffar Okkan, former Chief of Police of Diyarbakır, who famously said, “We will change the destiny of the region with sports.” Subsequently, as also highlighted by Atlı, Okkan paid special attention to the Diyarbakırspor sports club as well as handball competitions. In an attempt to overcome polarization through sports, both the men’s and women’s Turkish National Handball Team were organized in Diyarbakır, which was a milestone for sports in Turkey.<sup>31</sup>

The case of Amedspor was also mentioned several times during the workshop. The games of Amedspor are usually subject to tension and conflict, since it is seen as a team representing Kurdish separatism. The name of the team was changed from “Diyarbakır” to “Amedspor” (Amed being the ancient name of Diyarbakır) in 2015. Nationalist factions in Turkey have criticized this change as a separatist move. Racist slogans and chants can often be heard during Amedspor games. Similarly, media outlets censor the name of Dersimspor due to its political connotations reminiscent of of the old name of the city of Tunceli: Dersim.<sup>32</sup>

28 Altay Atlı and Asuman Suner, “Toplumsal Kutuplaşma Ekseninde Sanat ve Spor,” *IPC Policy Report* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, March 2018), 4.

29 Ibid., 7.

30 Ibid., 10.

31 Ibid., 13.

32 Throughout Turkish history, the names of certain cities, neighborhoods, and streets have been changed deliberately from their original ethnic origins into Turkish names as part of a process of nationalization.

## CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This report is based on the outcomes of the Dialogue and Sustainable Conflict Resolution in the Kurdish Question and Polarization in Turkey Project conducted by Istanbul Policy Center between June 2017 and May 2018. The report investigated polarization and social cohesion in Turkey with a focus on crosscutting issues such as the domestic and regional dimensions of the Kurdish issue, inclusive economic growth, the role of women in building societal consensus, and the role of arts and sports in overcoming polarization in Turkey. Against this background, the study offers the following policy recommendations for relevant stakeholders in exploration of means and ways to overcome polarization and increase social cohesion in Turkey.

On polarization in Turkey:

- The media is a significant instrument for influencing people's perceptions and therefore should be utilized prudently to overcome polarization and increase social cohesion.
- The media should not be censored, and it should be allowed to operate freely to ensure democracy.
- Similar to the conventional media, social media and the internet should not be censored and should instead be utilized to promote peace and stability. As such, social media and communication technologies should not be banned arbitrarily.
- While, according to the survey, there is high level of public trust in the armed forces, this is also indicative of a high level of threat perception and fear among Turkish citizens, which is a setback for social cohesion. As such, measures to increase public serenity should be taken to decrease the level of tension.
- A balance should be struck between civilian control over the military and the military's autonomy.
- In Turkey, people tend to demonstrate unity and solidarity in times of crisis. On the optimistic side, this could be utilized to overcome polarization and enhance social cohesion.

On the importance of unrestricted civil space:

- Since civic participation in Turkey gained the lowest score among all sub-fields in the survey,

special attention should be given to open up the civil space and open more room for civil society to maneuver.

- The authorities should equally support the enlargement of the civic space and public participation by all groups in society in order to promote a vibrant and heterogenous civil society, which eventually could prevent the dominance of the public space by certain groups like FETÖ.
- Counter-terrorism measures should not be misused to restrict the civil space, and it should be kept in mind that an open civil society plays a constructive role in countering violent extremism.
- The EU process should be accentuated as an anchor to promote democracy and the expansion of the civil space.

On the importance of political culture:

- Political culture plays a vital role in fuelling polarization. Therefore, the use of harsh rhetoric and loud, negative campaigns should be avoided in politics.
- Public trust in political parties should be enhanced, and trustbuilding measures such as targeting corruption should be implemented.
- Politicians should be more involved at the grassroots level and respect societal demands.
- The political party act and the election law should be revised through societal consensus with the incorporation of universities, law schools, non-governmental organizations, and ordinary citizens into the process.
- The presidential system is not a catch-all remedy. It will not solve Turkey's problems without sincere willingness on the part of the politicians. Problems will remain without a change in the political culture.
- Inclusiveness and participation should be promoted in the new system through a strong legislature and a strong civil society to ensure democracy.

On social cohesion in Turkey:

- The survey outcomes indicate mid-level social cohesion in Turkey, which is way below the OECD average. Therefore, the authorities and relevant stakeholders should work to urgently improve the level of social cohesion in Turkey.
- The survey revealed a low level of respect for social rules and trust between people in Turkey. As such, measures should be taken to improve these norms through social projects, the use of the media, and education, among other relevant tools. Projects that would enable people to get to know the “other” should be promoted by the state and civil society.

On the Kurdish issue and social cohesion in Turkey:

- The Kurdish issue is a major setback for social cohesion and therefore should be resolved. In case of the resumption of the peace process, a more inclusive and transparent process should be followed. Local people should be well informed.
- The domestic-regional balance should be stabilized vis-à-vis the Kurdish issue to ensure a sustainable resolution.
- Security is a prerequisite to ensure stability in the eastern regions of Turkey and must be established through state authority. However, while establishing security policies, the state should avoid excessive surveillance measures, which prevent the flow of investments to the region.

On economic welfare and social cohesion:

- There is a positive correlation between economic welfare and social cohesion. However, economic progress cannot bring happiness unless it is used to enhance the feelings of unity and solidarity. As such, inclusive growth should be promoted to enhance social cohesion in Turkey.
- Unemployed youth are a major human resource for illegal groups. Jobs should be created, particularly in Eastern Turkey, to include these groups in the economy.
- Tourism, agriculture, and husbandary should be promoted to improve the regional economy.
- Providing security without resolving economic problems would be counterproductive. In order to enable sustainable development, inclusive growth should be promoted.

On the role of women in societal consensus:

- Being the fundamental victims of conflict, women can play vital roles in conflict resolution. As such, their roles should be promoted through their inclusion in political and social processes.
- There is a lack of sufficient cooperation and collaboration among women’s groups in Turkey. It was underlined in the workshop that there was a missed opportunity with respect to creating a common discourse among women’s groups during the peace process. Therefore, collaboration should be promoted among women’s groups.
- The equal participation of women and men in the workforce and politics should be promoted. Such initiatives would be welcomed, since a majority of the people surveyed contended that women should play an active role in the workforce and in politics.

On the role of arts and sports in overcoming polarization:

- The space for arts and sports should be liberated from political pressure, and arts and sports should be utilized as effective tools in overcoming polarization.
- Arts and sports should be used to bring together people from different socio-cultural backgrounds in order to embrace differences instead of sources of conflict.
- Measures should be taken during sports games in order to prevent discriminatory narratives and discourses. Otherwise, sports activities might widen the already existing gaps among society rather than bring different cultures and people together.

## APPENDIXES

### Appendix 1: List of Project Workshops

- 1 | The Role of Art and Sports in Overcoming Polarization Workshop, moderated by Fuat Keyman and Altay Atlı, Istanbul, October 5, 2017 (15 participants)
- 2 | The Role of Women in Societal Consensus Workshop, moderated by Pınar Akpınar and Ayşe Betül Çelik, Istanbul, January 11, 2018 (17 participants)

### Appendix 2: List of Focus Group Discussions

- 1 | Discussion with members of the Provincial Organization and Eastern Industrial and Business Federation (DOĞUSİFED), moderated by Pınar Akpınar and Ayşe Köse Badur, Van, December 4, 2017 (four participants)
- 2 | Discussion with the People's Democratic Party (HDP), moderated by Pınar Akpınar and Ayşe Köse Badur, Van, December 5, 2017 (four participants).

### Appendix 3: List of Interview Participants

Football fan club leader, interviewed by Altay Atlı, Istanbul, October 19, 2017.

Kenan Öner, KNN Sports Director and former National Women Handball Team Manager, interviewed by Altay Atlı and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Istanbul, November 17, 2017.

Journalist 1, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Istanbul, November 17, 2017.

Fikri Sağlar, CHP deputy, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Ankara, November 21, 2017.

Sırrı Süreyya Önder, HDP deputy, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Ankara, November 21, 2017.

Talip Küçükcan, AK Party Deputy, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Ankara, November 21, 2017.

Civil society representative, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Ankara, November 22, 2017.

Bureaucrat 1, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Ankara, November 22, 2017.

State officer, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Ankara, November 22, 2017.

Bureaucrat 2, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar, Ankara, November 23, 2017.

Haldun Solmaztürk, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Turkey Institute Board Member and retired military officer, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Ankara, November 23, 2017.

Bureaucrat 3, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Ankara, November 23, 2017.

Academic 1, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Istanbul, November 24, 2017.

Non-Muslim academic and member of Istanbul's non-Muslim community, interviewed by Altay Atlı, Istanbul, November 24, 2017.

Peyami Battal, Van Yüzüncü Yıl University Rector, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Ayşe Köse Badur, Van, December 4, 2017.

Local journalist, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Van, December 5, 2017.

Mehmet Aslan, President of Van Organized Industry District, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Van, December 5, 2017.

Politician and lawyer, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar, Ayşe Köse Badur and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Van, December 5, 2017.

Businessperson 1, interviewed by Ayşe Köse Badur, Van, December 5, 2017.

Businessperson 2, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Van, December 6, 2017.

Businessperson 3, interviewed by Pınar Akpınar and Efe Doğuş Selvi, Van, December 6, 2017.

Businessperson 4, interviewed by Ayşe Köse Badur, Van, December 6, 2017.

Businessperson 5, interviewed by Ayşe Köse Badur, Van, December 6, 2017.

Alin Taşçıyan, Director and Film Critic, interviewed by Asuman Suner, Istanbul, December 7, 2017.

Arif Akdenizli, Director, interviewed by Asuman Suner, Istanbul, December 7, 2017.

Journalist 1, interviewed by Asuman Suner, Istanbul, December 12, 2017.

Academic 2, interviewed by Asuman Suner, Istanbul, December 14, 2017.

#### Appendix 4: List of Project Policy Reports

E. Fuat Keyman ve Ayşe Köse Badur, “Çatışma Çözümünde Ekonomik Aktörlerin Rolü” [The Role of Economic Actors in Conflict Resolution], *IPC Policy Report* (Istanbul: Istanbul Policy Center, May 2018).

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