

## **ABSTRACT**

The present study examines the impact of Erdogan's policies on the Kurdish diaspora in France. It begins by providing a comprehensive historical analysis of the Kurdish question in Turkey since its founding, emphasising the Kurdish identity's struggle for existence against the ideologies of Erdoganism and Kemalism; this includes the Kurdish massacres that occurred during the early years of the Republic of Turkey.

The thesis highlights the comparative study of Erdoganism and Kemalist ideologies present in Turkey by moving forward by including the Kurdish struggle alongside political changes in Turkey and its international dynamics. Around 25 years of Turkish politics have been influenced by Erdogan's remarkable political transformation over the years, which has been a threat to the Kemalism thinking that has shaped Turkey's political history. The thesis delves into the analysis of the effects of Kemalist and Erdogan approaches on the Kurds, highlighting the persistence of the Turkish state's oppressive policies against them beyond ideological differences. Taking this information into consideration, the study tries to draw attention to how the Kurds resist the Turkish state tradition and the political approaches of both ideologies and how they are affected.

In addition to maintaining its anti-Kurdish policies in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, the Turkish government has also produced various techniques and resources for the Kurdish communities throughout Europe. In addition to shedding light on the history of the Kurds' migration to Europe, the research looks at the political and social circumstances that led to their displacement. It also shows the kind of perspective the Erdogan government has on Kurdish activism, while it reveals how its political outlook affects the social integration activities of the Kurdish diaspora. Furthermore, the strategies used by Kurdish communities to organise in diasporas and preserve their rights against Erdogan and any outside influence from dictatorial governments in an effort to preserve their Kurdish identity, language, literature, and culture are emphasised.

**KEYWORD:** Turkey, Kurdistan, Kurdish Question, Diaspora, Erdoganism, Kemalism

## INTRODUCTION

With an extensive past and rich culture, Kurds represent a significant and dynamic community in both the Middle East and Europe. However, Kurds identify the present-day borders of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran as their homeland, and Kurds have endured for centuries of political oppression, forced assimilation, and even massacres in defence of their collective identity and culture. This study emphasises the past experiences of Kurds but mainly focuses on the Kurdish diaspora's experiences in France and the diaspora's strategies for integrating and fighting off external influences.

From the first years of the foundation of the Republic of Turkey to the present day, Kurdish experiences have been negatively affected by Turkish politics. These negative experiences of the Kurds should not be attributed only to the leaders, because after Atatürk, this would become a state tradition. However the increasing importance of Turkish nationalism, which started with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, paved the way for the systematic marginalization and assimilation of minorities such as Kurds. The Kurds gave the first signals that they would not not consent to Turkish states repressive policies when the first uprising appeared in the early years of the Republic. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who is considered the most important figure in the history of Turkish politics after Atatürk, was another leader who continued his unlawful policies against the Kurds. Erdogan, who tried to pursue positive policies against the Kurdish question from time to time, actually continued to become more authoritarian with each passing day, and this deepened the Kurdish question further.

These oppressive policies, placed on a systematic basis in Turkey, caused the Kurds to be displaced and to form a diaspora in different parts of Europe. France has also become a most important destination for Kurds. The reasons why the French diaspora turned into the most important center for the Kurds were their unity as a community as well as the opportunities provided by France for Kurdish activism.. Several political and non-political organisations can be discussed in France, a country with an outstanding level of organisation. Due to these Kurdish organisations, Kurds, who are considered to be among the best organised communities, may encourage their integration and social harmony into French society.

Kurds continue to be influenced by the Turkish government, headed by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, throughout both the Middle East and Europe. Although the Kurdish diasporas in Europe can be seen as reflections of the Middle East's harsh policies and military actions, these policies can

also have an impact on the diaspora's dynamics. Given the effectiveness of the Kurdish political movement and activism throughout Europe, it is well known that the Erdogan government puts pressure on those countries about this matter as well. When these diplomatic pressures were not sufficient, there are clear allegations that Turkey carried out intelligence operations against the Kurds in Europe. Furthermore, it is widely known that Turkey's use of its media influence and lobbying efforts to damage Kurdish organisations in Europe. In addition, the Kurdish community in France is not only fighting to preserve its cultural identity and rights but also has to deal with the harsh reality of Erdoğan's policies.

### **Research Questions and Methodology**

This study first examines the history of the Kurds in preserving their identity and culture and then focuses on the impact of Turkey's policies under the Erdogan government on the Kurdish diaspora. The data for this research was obtained through semi-structured interviews, observation and document analysis. The semi-structured interviews were conducted because an in-depth analysis of the complex socio-political relations of the Kurdish community was required.

Furthermore, Turkey's repressive policy towards the Kurds under Erdogan's government is carried out through diplomacy or secret sources. For this reason, semi-structured interviews were conducted so that participants could freely express their experiences and thoughts. In these interviews, care was taken to ensure that the participants came from different professional and age groups, and the information was collected with the consent of the participants.

In this research, in which the observation technique was frequently used, I was able to experience the range of activities of Kurdish activists and organizations. At the same time, I had the opportunity to better observe the diaspora through the network that was available to me through my research internship at the Kurdish Institute in Paris and my participation in the events organized there. The information resulting from this research will contribute to a broad discussion on immigration, minority rights and social cohesion in today's Europe. The research questions are as follows:

- What challenges have the Kurds endured under the rule of different leaders in Turkey, and how have these shaped their collective identity and culture?
- How did the two political approaches of Kemalism and Erdoganism, which shaped the history of Turkey, affect Turkish politics and what position do the Kurds take?
- How Erdoganism emerge, and how Erdogan policies impact the social, cultural, and political lives of Kurdish diaspora members in France?
- What strategies and responses are employed by Kurdish diaspora communities to navigate and counteract the influence of Erdoganism in their lives while in exile?

## **OUTLINE OF THE THESIS**

This thesis comprised of an introduction, 3 main chapters and a conclusion. The significance of this subject and why it was chosen are explained in the introduction. Additionally, the research questions and methodology are presented, followed by an outline of the thesis.

Chapter 1 examines Kurdistan's geography, history, and culture from many angles as well as the language, literature, and culture of the region. Additionally, it highlights the significance of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk—who is portrayed as the founder of the Turkish Republic—for Turks and talks about the massacres and oppressive regulations that the Kurds endured under the Kemalist period.

Chapter 2 assesses the idea of Erdoganism and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) from a historical perspective. While shedding light on the principles and policies of Erdoganism, which is now referred to as an ideology, attention is drawn to Turkey's handling of the Kurdish Question under Erdogan's government.

Chapter 3 analyse the reasons that led the Kurds to emigrate to France and the difficulties they experienced in France, taking into account the opinions of the members of the diaspora. In contrast, the actively engaged Kurdish diaspora's processes of discrimination, assimilation, and integration are addressed. An attempt is made to examine the consequences of Erdogan's and Turkey's policies on the diaspora in a socio-political and historical framework using the data that the diaspora members have shared.

The study's conclusions are summarizes the research findings, which also defines the causes of the problems that the Kurds and the Kurdish diaspora in general are facing. This includes Erdogan's cross-border pressure, which has an impact on the diaspora community's everyday activities and political activism.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF KURDISTAN AND IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF KEMALISM**

### **1.1: Brief History of Kurdistan and Kurdish Identity**

Scholarly consensus indicates that the Kurds are descended from a mixed group of indigenous people and later Indo-European immigrants who arrived in the region about three thousand years ago. For this reason, the Kurdish people are among the oldest nations in the Middle East; their origins can be traced back to between 3000 and 400 BC.

Anthropologically, Kurds primarily exhibit traits associated with Mediterranean descent; they have skin tones, general complexions, and physical attributes in common with communities from southern Europe and the Levant. Still, there are two underlying racial components that are consistently present: an indigenous darker Palaeo-Caucasian component and occasional Alpine-type blondness in the central districts of Kurdistan (Meho L., 2021).

Many scholars have discussed that ‘‘the world's largest people are without a state of their own’’ (Sokmen, 2019) Many Turkish nationalists claim that the Kurds are people who do not have the right history and culture; even Turkish nationalists legitimise Kurdish cultural expression by framing the Kurdish language as a mere diversity of dialects or by lacking a written standard, and deny the right to basic education in their native language (Leezenberg, 2023). Also, one day we heard from a Turkish speaker of parliament, Bülent Arınç, that ‘‘Kurdish is a language without a civilisation.’’

Despite this, the Kurds, who already had a key role in the arts, history, and philosophy, began to assert, from the middle of the 9th century onwards, their own political power. Additionally, despite all the repression and suppression by the governments in Kurdish geography and their efforts to ignore Kurdish history, the Kurds have always protected their heritage. Apart from this, the information spread around the Kurds that they are not modern and have a civilisation is actually unreal and not true. The Kurds had a literary civilisation in early modern times, a well-documented history through Kurdish writers, and a kind of linguistic standardisation (The Kurdish Institute of Paris).

The evolution of the Kurds into a political consciousness, or their unification as a people, dates back to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in the early 20th century. McDowal discusses and approaches this idea with two main focuses of Kurdish modern history: the Kurds' continuous struggle for territorial autonomy from the government and their transformation from an ethnically diverse population into an integrated community with national characteristics. In the former case, assimilation was not the goal; instead, empires like the Ottomans and Iranians sought to establish dominance over Kurdish lands due to geographic factors. To preserve their power, local leaders—often tribal chiefs—manipulated these relationships. With a few notable exceptions, like the seventeenth-century poet Ahmed-i Khani, Kurds only started to politically come together in the ‘early twentieth century’, despite having a long history of cultural identity (McDowal, 2021).

### **1.1.2: Exploring the Geography, Population, and Language of Kurdistan**

#### **Language**

The Kurdish people have a rich dialect texture in their language that reflects their varied cultural background. Kurdish dialects, broadly speaking divided into two main groups: Kurmanji and Pahlavi, are spoken by most of the Kurds. Most Kurds speak two Kurmanji dialects: Bahdinani, also known as Northern Kurmanji, and Sorani, also known as Central Kurmanji. Of these dialects, Bahdinani is the most spoken. In contrast, Dimili (also known as Zaza or Havrami) and Gorani (also known as Kermanshahi or Southern Kurmanji) comprise the Pahlavi group that is utilised by the rest of the Kurdish population. Kurdish language harmony is highlighted by the fact that, despite variations within these main dialects, they are all related to the northwest region of the Indo-European language family, specifically the Iranian branch (Meho L., 2021).

This linguistic diversity reflects the deep-rooted historical and geographical diversity of the region where the Kurdish people live, as well as the rich texture of their culture. Also, there is no denying that Kurdish linguistic identity has been shaped by historical influences and subtle regional differences over the centuries, as evidenced by the numerous sub-dialects within each major dialect. Kurdish language traditions are interconnected, and their common heritage is emphasised by their common membership in the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family, which acts as a unifying force despite these differences. Despite historical and geopolitical challenges, Kurdish

communities have managed to preserve their cultural heritage and resilience, as evidenced by the linguistic diversity that unites them.

Sheyholislami discusses two key points and suggests that language is one of the most crucial components of identity based on this information. First, there is no unified language of Kurdish, and second, there are more languages than Kurdish in Kurdistan.

Furthermore, it is not very encouraging that Kurdish is spoken as the official language of four countries (Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran) or that it is prohibited by some states. Kurdish broadcasts had been temporarily banned after the Baathist coup in 1968; however, an important deal signed in 1970 by Kurdish leaders and the Iraqi government made Sorani Kurdish the country's second official language. As a result of this acknowledgment, Sorani became the standard language and was widely used by the majority of Iraqi Kurds in public institutions, media, and education.

On the other hand, Kurdish people in Syria lack official status and are not taught in either the public or private educational system. Publications and broadcasts in Kurdish were permitted for a short time during the French Mandate (1920–1937), but this ended when it became obvious that the Kurds supported Syrian independence. Kurdish media II. Syria's position on language went through an important change starting in 1955, in spite of a brief recovery during World War II. Kurdish publications were taken away and destroyed, and Arabic was the only language taught in schools (Sheyholislami, 2011).

Kurds in Iran and Turkey, however, faced similar circumstances. Speaking Kurdish is strictly prohibited by law in Iran. After the 1990s, the situation somewhat changed as an outcome of the Kurds' resistance, allowing them to publish some materials and organise some events in their native tongue. Additionally, the policies of banning and suppressing the Kurdish language, which started in 1923, continue today in Turkey (Meho L., 2021).

Furthermore, Atatürk's conversion of the Turkish alphabet to Latin and the Kurds' forced adoption of a new script occurred during the early stages of the creation of modern Turkey. In addition, Kurds endured persecution in Turkey, where it was illegal for them to publish anything, speak in public, or teach in educational institutions. Such Kurdish mayors are still facing legal action since 2009 for using the Kurdish letters (W, X, Q, Ê) in their invitation letters, which do not exist in Turkish. It was illegal to refer to Kurdish people by name or to listen to Kurdish music until

1983. People were afraid to speak Kurdish on the phone; even today, people in prison cannot communicate in Kurdish with their families over the phone.

## **Land**

McDowal indicated that the term 'Kurdistan' was first recorded by the Saljugians in the twelfth century as a geographical designation. Over the subsequent centuries, as Kurdish populations migrated outward, its boundaries expanded geographically. This expansion reached regions eastward past Kirmanshah and westward into places like Sivas, Erzurum, Marash, and the Mesopotamian plain of Kirkuk. It also covered areas north of the Araxes River. The majority of Kurds are from Turkey, and while they are dispersed throughout urban areas like Istanbul, Ankara, Tabriz, Tehran, Baghdad, Damascus, Armenia, Azerbaijan, northern Syria, and eastern Iran, they are concentrated in the triangular region where Iraq and Iran are united.

Additionally, Kurdistan the ancestral homeland of the Kurdish people, holds significant strategic importance within the Middle East, encompassing key regions of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. This geographical entity emerged from historical divisions dating back to pivotal moments such as the aftermath of the battle of Chaldiran in 1514, which saw Kurdistan split between the Ottoman and Persian empires. Further reshaping occurred during the early 20th century, particularly between 1920 and 1923, as British and French influences led to the partitioning of Ottoman Kurdistan among Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Presently, estimates indicate that Kurdish-majority areas span between 230,000 and 300,000 square miles, distributed across Turkey (43%), Iran (31%), Iraq (18%), Syria (6%), and the former USSR (2%), with the latter primarily comprising regions in Armenia and Azerbaijan obtained through territorial shifts from Persia in 1807–1820 and the Ottomans in 1878 (Meho L., 2021).

The Zagros Mountain ranges, which are prominent in this area, are distinguished by their untamed landscape and sedimentary mountains like those in Hakkari. Kurdistan's year-round pleasant weather is characterised by average temperatures that, particularly in larger cities like Diyarbakir, range from 30°C in August to -5°C in January. Despite being a significant pastoral and agricultural region historically, Kurdistan has seen deforestation as a result of a number of factors, including the demand for timber, contemporary warfare, the extraction of fuel, and human activities like livestock overgrazing. Livestock constituted the main economic activity until the late

nineteenth century; large herds of sheep and goats were frequently driven to multiple tribal communities and the village's higher summer pastures. Despite this, the concept of Kurdistan as mythical is also significant. Due to their long occupation, which dates back to historical invisibility, the Kurdish people have a special connection to that region. An almost mystical perception of "The Mountain," a location that is both real and fantastical, is another aspect of Kurdistan that many Kurds find interesting. The 'Mountain' retains its power despite the fact that the majority of Kurds have moved out of the mountain valleys and into towns and cities. This is because nations are first built on dreams, rather than on solid ground (Mcdowal, 2021).

### **Population**

According to the Kurdish Institute of Paris, there is no official or reliable number of Kurds in the world, but other than information, the institute gives us some information regarding the Kurdish population in the world. Most of the statistics come from the cities where the majority of Kurds live. The area where Kurds live in Kurdistan in Turkey is mostly east of Turkey, and officially, the population is 14.2 million in Kurdistan, Turkey. According to many surveys, 86 percent of them are Kurds, some of them living in cities with Arab minorities (Urfa, Siirt, and Mardin) or Turkish (mainly police, military, and civil servants). Well, based on this information, the Kurdish Institute estimates that 12.2 million Kurds are living in Kurdistan, Turkey. Apart from that, there are many reasons why Kurds live in diasporas such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Adana, and Mersin, and the estimated number of Kurds living in these major cities is approximately 7 to 10 million. After all these statistics, the institute assumes that there are about 20 million Kurds living in Turkey, and that makes up 25% of the population in Turkey. Giving another opinion about the Kurdish population of Turkey, the European Commission estimates that there are between 14 and 18 million Kurds living in Turkey. With the same research method, the institute refers to the Kurdish population in other parts of Kurdistan, such as Iranian Kurdistan. About 12 million Kurds live in Iran and more in Iraqi Kurdistan. 8.4 million Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan and last Syrian Kurdish populations, even heavily affected by civil war dynamics, are estimated at 3 to 3.5 million, accounting for a notable segment of Syria's populace. As a final piece of information about the Kurdish population, the Kurdish Institute refers to the Kurdish diaspora, with a population of 1.5 million Kurds in Western Europe.

On the other hand, while regional governments frequently try to reduce population estimates, Kurdish nationalists might have a tendency to exaggerate them. (Meho L, 2021) Although there are no formal censuses on the demographics of the Kurdish population, it is

generally accepted by multiple sources that the population is currently over thirty million, with about one-third living outside of traditional Kurdish territories as a result of economic hardships, forced relocations, or conflict. In the Middle East and among the various diaspora communities, McDowall and other scholars estimate that there are more than 30 million Kurdish people. However, precisely calculating this number is still difficult because states are reluctant to formally acknowledge ethnic identities that are not confirmed by their governments. In Iraq, for example, where a Kurdistan region has been established, there are still disputed areas that make it impossible to conduct thorough censuses.

McDowall's estimates that roughly 18 percent of Turkey's citizens are Kurds, and 9 percent of Syrians may identify as Kurds, 10 percent of Iranians and around 18 percent of Iraqis though these numbers are highly tentative and open to discussion. Maho L, provided insights into the Kurdish diaspora, noting significant Kurdish communities in various countries. Large concentrations of Kurds are reported in Germany (exceeding 600,000), Israel (over 100,000), and Lebanon (ranging from 75,000 to 100,000). Additionally, countries such as Australia, Canada, England, Finland, France, Greece, Sweden, and the United States each host Kurdish populations surpassing 10,000 individuals.

| Country               | Percentage | Kurds       |
|-----------------------|------------|-------------|
| Turkey                | 18         | 15 million  |
| Iran                  | 10         | 8 million   |
| Iraq                  | 18         | 7.2 million |
| Syria                 | 9          | 1.8 million |
| Diaspora and Caucasus | —          | 2 million   |
| Total                 |            | 34 million  |

Estimated numbers of Kurds living in the region and around the world.

### **1.1.3 Kurdish Identity**

Identity can be understood and analysed from different perspectives and there are many factors such as ethnicity, nationality, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status and life experiences that can affect a person's identity. It has an impact on people's relationships with others, their sense of self, how they are viewed by others, and their position in society. In his research, Sheyholislami provides the following details about the identity. "people's source of meaning and experience." As well as it is crucial to understand that the expression of Kurdish identity, like all ethnic identities, is a dynamic process that changes over time depending on numerous internal and external events. Kurdish views and goals are now different from those of a few decades ago, and future developments will likely bring even more change (Barkey&Fuller, 1997).

As many scholars described identity based on experiences and dynamics of the time but according to Brubaker and Cooper 'identity' should be analysed carefully and identity can be helpful in organizing groups politically, but applying identity to understand society leads to problems as well. According to the authors, "identity" is oversimplified and does not adequately represent the complexity of human relationships and experiences. They recommend applying various methods of social analysis to gain greater awareness of these complexities.

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, Brubaker and Cooper (2000) contend that this perspective might result in some extremely problematic assumptions because identity is considered as the aim of daily experiences and political practices "Replicating the Marxian epistemology of class, identity is positioned as something to be discovered and something about which one can be mistaken. Identity is something that all people have, or ought to have, or are searching for. It is something that all groups (especially ethnic, racial, or national groups) have, or ought to have. Furthermore, strong concepts of collective identification imply strong concepts of group homogeneity and boundedness, implying high levels of groupness, a sharp distinctiveness, and a sense of "identity" or sameness among group members."

Regarding these opinions, analysing the Kurdish identity requires caution; we must refrain from defining it in terms of a simple idea or understanding. Such an analysis will not only give us incorrect outcomes, but it will additionally have an impact on the outcome we want. It is essential to remember that historical, geographic, and cultural elements affect Kurdish identity. Kurdish identity is shaped by external factors as much as the different internal dynamics of Kurdish society. For

instance, we would fail to recognise the diversity within the community if we assumed that all Kurds have the same political ideology, experiences, or beliefs.

However, from a historical point of view, numerous Kurdish nationalists claim that the Kurds have existed as a nation since ancient times which their precursors have never separated from Kurdistan. They state that Kurdistan has been occupied by strong and dominant countries through this perspective, or that it disintegrated the territory of Kurdistan in the internal dispute between the Kurds. If we accept that there is another factor that constitutes identity in Kurdish nationalism, it is claimed that Kurdish nationalism is a natural and continuous movement that is not due to a certain class or historical period. Anyway, Kurdish nationalists argue that Kurdish society has a single ethnic common history and language, and therefore state that they will naturally establish their historical units of Kurdistan and have the right to establish Kurdistan.

Since Kurdistan is located within the borders of four distinct nations, its interactions with other societies play a significant role in shaping the Kurdish identity. Therefore, attempting to analyse Kurdish identity apart from these and related factors will result in the marginalisation or exclusion of Kurdish groups or perspectives. Therefore, an in-depth study of the Kurdish identity that takes into account the complexity and experiences of the Kurds' natural dynamics is necessary.

But it's crucial to understand that a lot of the elements that make up the Kurdish national identity are significantly fragmented as a result of numerous internal and external factors. An identity that is fragmented has been exacerbated by internal divisions within the Kurdish community, such as linguistic diversity, tribal relations, and regional differences. Furthermore, attempts by the Kurdish factions to attain unity and coherence in their national identities were hampered by political and ideological disagreements that further exacerbated this fragmentation. External factors contributing to the erosion of Kurdish unity include past and present hostilities with neighbouring states, as well as geopolitical actions by regional and international organisations such as (Turkey, Iran, Syria, Iraq). Due to these external factors, Kurdish identity has been suppressed, attempts at cultural assimilation have been made, and state authorities have imposed divisive policies, further rupturing the cohesive fabric of Kurdish national identity. Consequently, despite the fact that Kurds have a shared language, cultural heritage, and history, the fragmented nature of their identity makes it difficult to realise a single, cohesive Kurdish national identity (Sheyholislami, 2011).

Many of the Middle Eastern governments where the Kurdish community resides, such as Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, frequently uphold the rejection of Kurdish identity and Kurdistan as a distinct entity. Kurdish language, culture, and political expression have historically been suppressed in these states as part of their policy to assimilate Kurdish communities into the dominant national identity. Sheyholislami indicated that “The history of Kurdish dynasties and principalities goes back as far as the eighth century.”

When one talks about Kurdish intellectuals, one finds that there is a sizable group of people in the Kurdish community who have accomplished a great deal in a variety of fields. As Leezenberg has described that within Kurdish courts and rural Quranic schools, poetry and intellectual endeavours flourished, helping to foster a vernacular Kurdish culture, especially in the Northern Kurdish or Kurmanji dialect. Prominent individuals such as Melayê Cezîrî, Ehmedê Xanî, and Sheref Khan Bidlîsî surfaced as poets, historians, and intellectuals, contributing to the enrichment of Kurdish literature. Prominent Kurdish literary works include *Sherefname* by Bidlîsî and *Mem and Zîn* by Xanî, the latter of which has been regarded as the Kurdish national epic since the late nineteenth century. *Mem and Zîn* has been interpreted mystically and allegorically, highlighting the Kurds' centuries-long cultural and literary tradition (Leezenberg, 2023).

## **1.2: Emergence of Kemalism and Its Legacy**

The ideology of Kemalism is named after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of Turkey. Kemalism corresponds to the early years of the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in the 1920s. Kemalism represents the ideology of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Turkish Republic, based on nationalism, which is against imperialism, completely independent, and aims at political, social, and economic development. In general, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk planned to build Turkey into a modern and secular state with the aim of equipping it with the principles of republicanism, nationalism, secularism, statism, populism, and reformism. Kemalism is generally defined by a dedication to building a contemporary, secular, democratic nation-state in Turkey while also upholding the nation's rich cultural legacy and fostering unity within the country. The Republic of Turkey has had a significant impact on Turkish politics, society, and institutions ever since it was founded in 1923 (Albayrak, 2010).

In addition, at a time when Europe was increasingly secularised and modernised, the main goal of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's vision was to create a democratic and westernised country. His vision of Turkey was one of equality, scientific advancement, and individual liberties in accordance with Western ideals. Secularism was one of the crucial points while Atatürk was trying to rebuild Turkey. Secularism became the main principle of Atatürk's Turkey and was the most important way to build and develop Turkey (Yavuz & Ozturk, 2019).

Meanwhile, Atatürk understood that some structural changes had to be made in order for a new war-torn nation to rise up immediately and take action. However, the overthrow of the Ottoman Empire and the proclamation of a republic caused objections by some parts of the people, and the efforts to be prevented were the issue. There were two groups of people at that time: kemalists and anti-kemalists. (Tabak, 2020) But despite all the obstacles and objections, he exhibited a decided stance and implemented extensive reforms in the areas of governance, law, and education. In addition to establishing western legal systems and secular institutions, he also advanced women's rights, laying the groundwork for the development of a modern state. Well, we can say that a dedication to democracy was at the core of Atatürk's vision; he emphasised the value of representative government and public participation. Also, the scholars Koukoudakis and Pieper agree with the outcome of the Kemalism ideology and point out that “Westernised and democratised Turkey as the end product of the implementation of his ideology.”

On the other hand, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's vision for the Republic of Turkey gave rise to the ideology of Kemalism. It was an ideology that needed to be quickly embraced by the entire nation. A number of measures were taken in order to disseminate and elucidate the Kemalism philosophy throughout Turkey. For example, in order to teach the new Turkish language and to explain the culture, religion, and tenets of the new Turkey, some teachers were dispatched to villages and underdeveloped areas. Also Kemalism influenced not only Turkish politics and society but also had resonance in a number of foreign contexts. Other Muslim-majority nations have seen political and social changes sparked by the ideas of kemalism, such as secularism, modernization, and nation-building.

For instance, discussions on Kemalism affected discussions about gender relations in Muslim society during Yugoslavia's interwar years. Moreover, the overarching objectives of Kemalism, including modernization and secularisation, have permanently influenced the political

beliefs and policies of leaders in nations like Tunisia, Indonesia, Iran, and Tunisia. Kemalism's emphasis on modern, scientific education has also influenced educational changes in a number of nations with a majority of Muslims. Also, It was begun to be taught and accepted in Turkish with new Latin alphabets in areas like Bulgaria and Cyprus, where there was a large Turkish community (Tabak, 2020).

One of the important issues that should be mentioned is that Ataturk came up with all these innovative ideas, but it was a question of what will happen to the minorities and to those who have come since the Ottoman Empire. The consequences of Ataturk's understanding of one nation, 'one language' and 'one nation' create oppression for different cultures, languages, and religions. Assimilation and discrimination policies were applied to identity, culture, and language (Ozcan, 2019).

In fact, while Turkey celebrated the establishment of the Republic in 1933, he made the famous sentence that is still important in Turkey. 'How happy is the one who says, I am a Turk?' In the new Ataturk's Turkey, understanding of nationalism was reflected in institutions and all the organs of Turkey. One of the best examples of this was the 'Student Oath' (Andımız), which in 1933 made it compulsory to read in primary schools every morning before class by the national education minister of the period in Resit Galip (Cook, 2016).

*'I am a Turk, honest and hardworking. My principle is to protect the younger, to respect the elder, to love my homeland and my nation more than myself. My ideal is to rise, to progress. O Great Atatürk! On the path that you have paved, I swear to walk incessantly toward the aims that you have set. My existence shall be dedicated to the Turkish existence. How happy is the one who says, I am a Turk!''*

In the 90s, while continuing the struggle and discussion between Islamism and Kemalism, Necmettin Erbakan became prime minister for two years 1996 when he was president of the Welfare Party (Fazilet Partisi). and he made a statement that student oath is a racist and there is no relation to Islamism. Because of this sentence he was going to be judged. After some years Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who started his political career in Necmettin Erbakan's party which 'Milli Selamet Partisi' and while Erdogan was a prime minister, he banned the student oath 8<sup>th</sup> of October in 2013 Erdogan's decision may have been seen in Turkish politics as Erdogan's success in Islamist Philosophy.

### **1.3: Brief History of Kurdish Struggles, Including Rebellions During Early Years of Turkey**

The Kurds are one of the most populous nations in the Middle East, and they exist in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran, with the largest number of Kurdish people living in Turkey. During the years of the establishment of the Turkish republic, the Kurdish problem still stood there as a problem that did not deteriorate. Atatürk was aware of the need to benefit from the Kurdish population in the independence war 1919-1922, where Turkey opposes many different nations, and they took steps accordingly and answered the war in their favor. Most of the Kurds believed in the independency of Turkey at the time and Kurds loyally followed Atatürk. (McDowal, 2004) The Kurds were following Kemal and joining Turkey's Great War to save the country, but prior to this decision, Kemal had promised the Kurds that at the end of the war, The Kurds would eventually gain their political autonomy and cultural identity and language. That was the main motivation for the Kurds to get involved in the war (Miley&Venturini, 2019).

Later, talks with Kurdish elites would not accept the demand for the establishment of Kurdistan in places where the Kurdish population most populated. That was one of the crucial moments for Kurdish independence history in Turkey. After all the Kurds and Kemalists face in meetings held in Istanbul, their request of independent Kurdistan was going to be denied by the Kemalists and Atatürk (Barkey&Fuller, 1997).

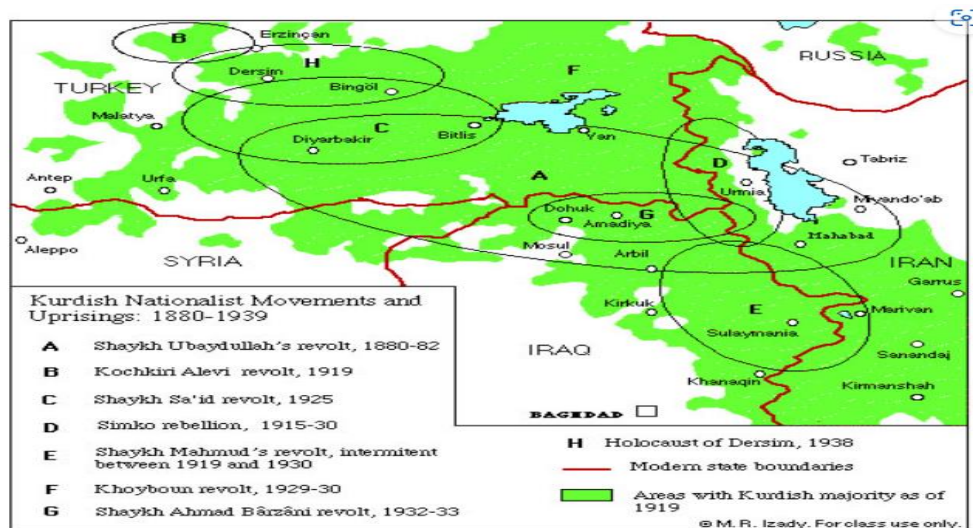
Kurds started to seek their rights during the independence war because they thought Mustafa Kemal Atatürk had broken his early commitments to them and Kurdistan. Atatürk was prepared to use any methods necessary to accomplish his objectives, but he remained steadfast in his resolve to put his ideals into practice and create a new Turkey. Because of his unwavering dedication, he put an end to Kurdish uprisings throughout the independence war, using both military might and nonviolent means of dissuasion.

Atatürk's approach to addressing Kurdish insurgencies involved a dual strategy of military suppression and linguistic assimilation. Military power was deployed to quash Kurdish rebellions, while educational policies aimed at promoting Turkish language and culture further marginalised the Kurdish minority within the Turkish state. Despite the coercive nature of these assimilation efforts, Atatürk's ultimate goal remained the preservation of Turkish national unity and the

suppression of Kurdish separatism. But the Kurds were increasing their resistance in the east of the country and determined to raise their voices against assimilation (Barkey&Fuller, 1997).

Furthermore, the progress of this assimilation was greatly dependent on the Turks' relocation policy, which was consistently implemented against minorities. This policy was also applied to the Kurds during the Ottoman Turkish genocide against the Armenians between 1915 and 1923, during which the Armenians were compelled to leave their homes. Following the genocide, roughly 700,000 Kurds were driven from their homes and left with additional challenges, forcing them to relocate to the country's western cities. Even though the Kurds continue to carry this immense suffering, these and related experiences continue to influence their own lives (Khayati, 2008).

Kurdish nationalist movements and resistance during this period was intense and geographically widespread, as seen by the map of the Kurdish rebellions from 1880 to 1939.



Source: Institut Kurde de Paris.

### 1.3.1: Sheikh Said Rebellion

Kurdish nationalism rose again as a result of the uprisings in Kurdish areas during the independence war, motivated by a desire to protect their language, cultural identity, and historical legacy. In opposition to Atatürk's initiatives to integrate Kurds into Turkish society. Kurdish nationalism was a necessity to preserve its culture, history, and language, and the Kurds were trying to establish unity among themselves. At the end of all these resistances, 'Sheikh Said Rebellion', one of the biggest rebellions happened in 1925' (Barkey, Fuller, 1997) Sheikh Said, who was Kurdish, was one of the leading figures of a religious sect and directed this resistance himself.

Although this religious position of Sheikh Said has raised questions about the purpose of resistance, Kurdish and International sources say that it is a Kurdish struggle for independence. According to Bozarslan, this resistance is a emergence of Kurdish nationalism.

Furthermore, Shaikh Said rebellion was one of the biggest rebellion in Turkey history although Shaikh Said's rebellion was not a major military threat to Turkey, it was a turning point in the history of the republic. The trend towards authoritarian government was accelerated and policies were introduced that were deliberately intended to destroy Kurdish ethnicity.. The comparatively liberal prime minister Fethi Okyar was removed from office as soon as the insurrection began, and Ismet İnönü took his place. To clarify his stance on the Kurds, İnönü declared in the open, "We are openly nationalist. Nationalism is the only cause that keeps us together. Besides the Turkish majority, none of the other [ethnic] elements shall have any impact. We shall, at any price, turkicize those who live in our country, and destroy those who rise up against the Turks and Turkdom (Bruinessen, 1994).

However, the Sheikh Said rebellion would set the limit of the brutality of the Kemalism ideal, and it would be an event in which the only authoritarian state and military understanding were clearly exposed to it (Miley & Venturini, 2019). But many Turks, particularly Kemalists, interpret the uprising as a resistance against the establishment of the republic and secularism; others argue that it represents the aspirations of Kurds for independence. Also giving a different opinion on this subject, Robert Olsan, giving another reference in his work and addressing Martin van Bruinessen's comment, *"neither a purely religious nor a purely nationalist one."*

It is crucial to indicate that in order to prevent uprisings and any kind of rebellion, Atatürk and the authorities established independence courts (İstiklal mahkemeleri) in 1920, which marked a significant change in the approach of the Turkish government to address the uprisings and opposition. These courts were established with the aim of rapidly suppressing any difficulties for the newly established republic and neutralising opposition forces. In a country where the death penalty was actively imposed, the execution of Sheikh Said and his comrades in the summer of 1925 served as a clear warning to those who dared to challenge the authority of the state, and they executed Sheikh Said and his friends in front of the public. In the later years of 1926 and 1930, another rebellion known as the Agri (Ararat) riots erupted. These revolts show that the Kurdish people were not going to back down and that they were clearly showing their intention and their demands to the Turkish state. Some years later under the leadership of Seyit Rıza, the Dersim

(presently called Tunceli) rebellion arose, resulting in a devastatingly violent outcome. The Dersim revolt left a permanent mark on Kurdish history due to its brutal and bloody nature (Barkey&Fuller, 1997)

As a conclusion undoubtedly, the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925 continues to be a contentious issue in the history of contemporary Turkey. The nationalist perspective highlighted the impact of Kurdish nationalism on the rebellion and the goal of establishing a free, independent Kurdish state, while the religious perspective argued that the rebellion was a response to the fall of the Caliphate and the Kemalist reforms. Turkey's territorial integrity is in jeopardy. The uprising raised concerns about the state's position on the Kurdish issue and the way it impacted Turkey's foreign and domestic policies.

### **1.3.2: Dersim Massacre**

The Dersim massacre is a blemish in Kurdish history and a stark reminder of the brutalities committed by the Turkish state against the Kurdish people. Dersim (present-day Tunceli) region has a mountainous area and is located between cities such as Elazığ, Sivas, and Erzincan in eastern Turkey. There were many hiding places in Dersim's mountains: caves, refugees. Because of this, many people would save their lives during the massacre. According to some resources without giving the exact number of population, there were mainly Kurds, Orthodox Christians called 'Rumlar' and Alevis (the Alevis venerated Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law). (They refused the Sharia and remained attached to unorthodox Sufi beliefs.) However, after the Sheikh Said rebellion and the Koçgiri uprising in 1921, the Turkish government has focused on Kurdish areas and increased its measures to prevent possible uprisings. Over the decades, there has been a discussion in Turkey that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was not aware of what was going on in Dersim, and the genocide was out of his decision and mostly under Ismet Inonu authority. According to some scholars, this is not a reality, and Kieser Hans indicated that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the state president, stood personally behind it and died shortly after its end."

However, after the Sheikh Said rebellion and the Koçgiri uprising in 1921, the Turkish government has focused on Kurdish areas and increased its measures to prevent possible uprisings. And despite the potential implications of the uprising, Atatürk and his government did not hesitate to put then army to use in suppressing the insurrection. (Barkey, Fuller, 1997) The Dersim massacre occurred between 1937 and 1938 and The Kurdish community suffered great losses, was uprooted,

and lost many lives as a result of the ruthless and indiscriminate military operation. The rebellion once again compelled Turkey to mobilize some 50.000 troops against the Kurds. (Olsan, 2020) Civilians were slaughtered, villages were destroyed, and those who survived suffered from rape, torture, and other atrocious acts of brutality and forcibly relocated around Turkey.

The methods of killing people were really similar to those used against Armenians during the Great War. To give more details about the massacre, here are some of the ways the Turkish military used to kill such as the use of poison gas, a merciless and indiscriminate weapon used against people seeking sanctuary in caverns, was one such crime. These once-safe havens of nature turned into death chambers as poisonous gases flooded the air, smothering people who were confined inside.. Many others were burned alive, whether in houses or by spraying individuals with fuel. Tragically, girls and women took the painful decision to jump into the abyss when faced with the possibility of being captured and the horrors that would await them at the hands of the Turks. *‘A large proportion of the women and girls of the Kureyshian and Bakhtiyar [two rebel tribes] threw themselves from high cliffs into the Munzur and Parchik ravines, in order not to fall into the Turks' hands.’* (Bruinessen, 1994).

The Turkish army had perpetrated atrocities in the "inhabitable zone," but the atrocities were hidden from public and world view by a curtain of secrecy. Turkish newspapers were aware that there was a rebel in the Dersim region, but journalists were prohibited from entering the area, stifling any possible criticism or protest. The atrocities taking place inside Turkey's borders were mostly unknown to even its citizens. Officials from the government steadfastly refused to divulge information, tightly controlling the story that surrounded the area. The outside world remained oblivious to the extent of the violence, with only sporadic mentions, such as Prime Minister Ismet Inonu's vague promises of compulsory education, offering glimpses into the state's rhetoric.

According to some Turkish newspapers an estimated 40,000 lives were lost amidst this cloak of secrecy. While there is a lot of confusion about the number of people killed in Dersim according to the official records of the Turkish state, 13806 rebels were killed. (Agos 12 March 2012) the other Turkish newspaper report that 13,160 civilian deaths and 11,818 deportations (Radikal 20 November 2009).

In the meantime, by 1948, a journalist daring enough to venture into the region encountered a desolate landscape devoid of civilians, where tax collectors and soldiers were the predominant figures, underscoring the extent of the devastation and government control over the area (McDowall, 2021).

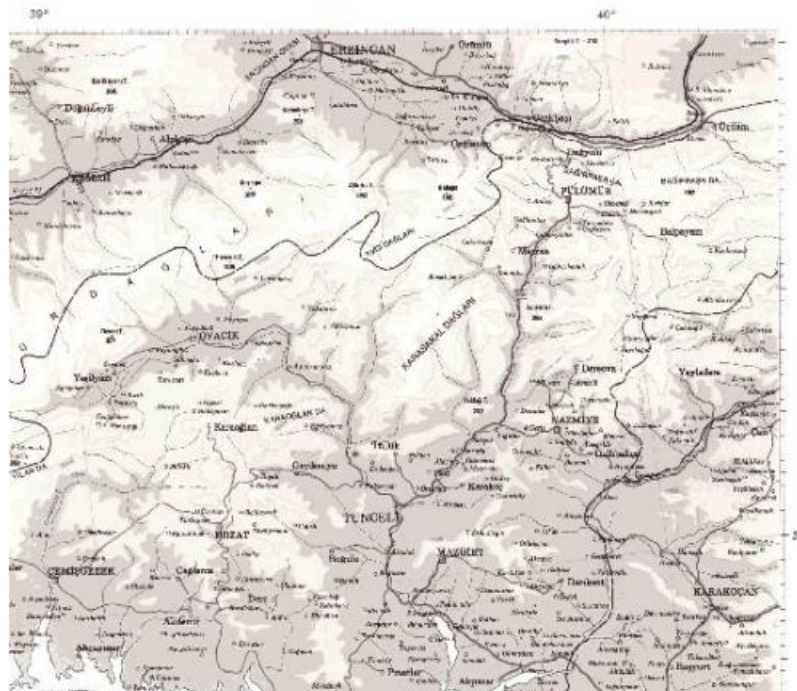
Today, although it is not seen as Dersim massacre of the Turkish state, it is described as a suppressed rebellion. In addition, the Turkish Armed Forces have put into operation their war effort which has used all their military capacity. He was throwing bombs with planes without making civilian segregation. Sabiha Gokcen, the first Turkish woman pilot who was the spiritual daughter of Ataturk, participated in these operations and bombed the Dersim Kurds and civilians. Some Turkish newspapers used to throw up scruffy headlines because of Sabiha Gokcen's involvement in the Dersim Massacre. Due to Turkey's heroization policy, the name of Sabiha Gokcen would later be given to the airport in Istanbul, 'Sabiha Gokcen International airport' and Sabiha Gokcen would remain an example and a guide to the Turkish modern woman (Olsan, 2020).

## G. MAPS :

Map N°1 : Turkey, source : Wikipedia



Map N°2 : Province of Dersim : source : Harita Dosyası, Yurt Ansiklopedisi (Istanbul: Anadolu Yay., 1981.



### 1.3.3: Ararat Uprising

The Ararat Rebellion echoed the sentiments of Sheikh Said's insurrection by emerging, like earlier uprisings, as a poignant expression of Kurdish nationalism and resistance to Turkish state repression. Acting out of a strong desire to preserve their historical legacy and cultural identity, the Kurdish insurgents protested the Turkish state's and Ataturk's assimilationist policies as well as the imposition of Turkish nationalism. The Kurdish people were determined to assert their rights and aspirations for autonomy within Turkey, and the Ararat Rebellion represented their unwavering

determination in the face of overwhelming military power and ultimate repression. This rebellion's legacy carries on to this day in Kurdish activism, emphasising the ongoing fight for justice and recognition against state repression.

It is clear that Turkey was abusing its power and that the fight was unfair. Turkey used all available violence without hesitation in order to put an end to this resistance. According to research by Mcdowal and Olson, Turkey was brutally employing its air force to bring down and defeat the Kurds. Although the precise total of air forces is unknown, estimates suggest that 80 of them were used towards Kurds. An example of this is the indiscriminate attack by Turkish air forces on a Kurdish village only two kilometres from the Iranian border. Regarding the operations of the Turkish Forces, a recent study revealed information from the Historical Archives of the Turkish War Ministry that informs us that between July and September, the Turkish Force killed about 45 people, including women and many wounded from the Halikanlı tribe, as well as numerous animals (Olson, 2000).

There have been reports during uprisings that the Soviet Union provided logistical support to Turks while Iran aided Kurds in using their territory as a place of residence. Turkey was prepared to do whatever it took to put an end to this resistance as quickly as possible. They claim that Iran would be acting 'liberal action' against Turkey if they permitted Kurds to use their territory and did not stop them. Turkey was attempting to take advantage of their diplomatic power in the meantime. Ultimately, Iran took the lead and ordered the Kurds to either leave all of their weapons here or quickly return to Turkey. But the Turkish government also wanted to take advantage of the weather, so they waited for winter so that the Kurds could escape the cities and head for the mountains. Although the specifics of this strategy are still unknown, mountains are seen by Kurds as symbols of liberty, and in ancient cultures, mountains play a significant role in the lives of Kurds (Mcdowal, 2020).

Numerous accounts claim that thousands of people, including women and children and innocent people, were killed during the resistance. According to some Kurdish sources, 5,000 women, children, and elderly people were among the forty-seven thousand people who died. The way in which those people were killed violated even war crimes. One of the Turkish soldiers made the claim that we had killed innocent people with an automatic machine gun. Those who were arrested were gathered and executed with great brutality. (July 13, 2022, Rudaw) However, on July

16, the Turkish Republic of Press reported that 15,000 were killed. A few days later, the Turkish readers of the same newspaper were informed that "the rebels were annihilated in 5 days."  
(Sokmen, 2019)

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **EMERGENCE OF ERDOGANISM: SHIFTING POLITICAL LANDSCAPE IN TURKEY**

## 2.1: Historical Background and rise of Erdoganism and AKP in Turkey

To understand Recep Tayyip Erdogan, it is necessary to look at his early life and how these experiences shaped him as a future political figure. He was born and grew up in a poor environment called Kasimpasa in Istanbul. His family was conservative, and he was influenced by his family's religious experiences in his childhood. That is one of the reasons that his family decided to send him to one of the religious schools (Imam Hatip) high school. There is no doubt that the way his family raised him and the school he attended shaped Erdogan's political identity and influenced Turkish politics in the future.

Later, he graduated with a bachelor's degree from Marmara University in Istanbul, and he graduated in 1981. Although it is not certain how accurate this academic success is, there are allegations that Erdogan did not graduate from the university, and this is discussed in the media from time to time. Besides that, Erdogan first became involved in politics as a teenager by joining anti-Western, anti-Semitic, and Islamist nationalist parties. Erdogan's political life started in the early 1994, with was elected Mayor of Istanbul by Istanbul's citizens from the Welfare Party with 25.19 votes. 1990s of Necmettin Erbakan's Welfare Party. In 1994, he was elected Mayor of Istanbul by Istanbul's citizens from the Welfare Party with 25.19 votes (Sullivan, 2018). Furthermore, he read a poem while serving as mayor, for which he received a 10-month prison sentence and a fine. Although it was claimed that his poetry incited hatred and animosity towards people on the basis of differences in class, race, religion, sect, or region, he was ultimately given a 4-month sentence and allowed to carry on with his political career. He obtained popularity throughout Turkey as a consequence of this penalty, and he was able get votes across the country. The poem began with these lines:

*"Minarets are bayonets, domes are helmets, mosques are our barracks, believers are soldiers  
(Milliyet, 1998).*

However, Necmettin Erbakan's legacy has a strong connection with Erdoğan's political path, indicating an important turning point in the development of political Islamism in Turkey. Erdogan's following political rise was made possible by Erbakan's leadership of multiple Islamist parties, despite the Kemalist establishment's shutdowns and judicial challenges. for instance, he set the

stage for later Islamist movements with his membership in the National Order Party (MNP), which was founded in the early 1970s with the goal of defending Islamist values in the Turkish political system. Even after the MNP was shut down by the constitutional court in 1971 due to its opposition to Atatürk principles and secular ideals,

Erbakan persisted in his attempts to promote political Islamism. However, he faced many obstacles from the Kemalists, but there was no doubt that he was also the voice of those who opposed the secular ideology of Kemalism (Yılmaz, 2021). But these challenges would not stop them. Erbakan and his friends were all the more driven to battle on because political Islam was struggling to make an existence for itself in Turkish politics.

At this point, it is necessary to focus on what the 'National Vision Movement' is because this will allow us to better understand the political life of Erdoğan and Necmettin Erbakan. The national vision movement entered the Turkish political scene in 1969 when Necmettin Erbakan was elected as an independent member of parliament from Konya. This movement, which started as the "Independence Movement" later became a political entity with the establishment of the National Order Party (MNP). Necmettin Erbakan, by assuming the leadership of the movement, represented a perspective that aimed to shape the state based on Islamic principles, and also claimed that liberal and leftist views could not meet spiritual needs and remained distant (Engin, 2019). We can say that this ideology based on Islam was a strong enough movement to influence the last 50 years of Turkey's political history, and its influence still continues. The involvement of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in politics through the National Salvation Party within this movement, along with the participation of Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç, founding members of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), provides deeper insights into Erdoğan's political trajectory.

Besides that all parties formed and led by Erbakan were based on the fundamental idea that serving religion should come first. Religious ideas and principles were integrated into a nationalist, contemporary, secular, and political framework, causing these parties to change. They formed their political speech and policies by using religion as a tactical tool. In an attempt to create a new Islamic identity and state, Erbakan's interpretation of Islamism can be understood as an authoritarian ideology influenced by the Jacobin conception of state and revolution (Yılmaz, 2015). There are many descriptions of the National Vision Movement but one day Erbakan clearly stated that:

*‘National opinion; It is the belief, history and identity of our nation. In short, National Vision is the nation itself. National Vision, the one who fought the war of independence. It is the opinion of Sultan Alparslan and Sultan Fatih. Sultan Alparslan and Sultan Fatih were neither leftist, rightist nor liberal. They were National Visionists’ (Uzun, 2013).*

However, Erbakan resumed his political involvement when the MNP was shut down, creating the National Salvation Party (MSP), which ultimately suffered the same fate in 1980 under the military dictatorship. Still, Erbakan's resilience in the face of hardship gave rise to the Welfare Party, indicating a revival of political Islamism in Turkey. With the goal of reviving the Islamist movement, this party gave leaders like Erdoğan a platform to enter politics and promote Islamist principles. As a result, Erdoğan's political career can be seen as carrying on Erbakan's legacy, moulded by the chances and difficulties given by Turkey's complicated political environment (Cantelmo, 2017).

We should not find it surprising that the parties, which mostly set out with the ideology of political Islam, were closed down by military force at certain periods in Turkey's political history. After Atatürk's death, until 1946, it was a period when there was only one political party and we could not talk about democratic elections. As a result of the international pressure, which would later allow the opening of new parties. Since 1946, military has carried out three coups and overthrew the same number of elected Turkish governments (in 1960, 1971 and 1981 respectively). Throughout the 1990s and, in some respects into the 2000s, the military continued to exert influence in Turkish politics, declaring itself the “guardian” of the Kemalist state (Koukoudakis& Pieper, 2014). Atatürk's legacy and tradition are being tried to be continued by the army. However, all coups until the emergence of Erdogan's AKP were carried out with a Kemalist approach. Erdogan was clearly aware of Turkish political history, and during his political career, he intended to prevent this and similar events.

Apart from this, Erbakan played an important role in the establishment of another party, the Welfare Party, in 1983 under the ideology of the National Movement with his companions after the closure of MSP, but he could not play an active role in the party due to his political ban. Erbakan, whose political ban was lifted in 1987, was elected as the leader of the Welfare Party and then appointed as the prime minister by the Coalition government in 1996, and he became the first

Islamic President of Turkey (Yılmaz,2015). However, Erbakan would soon resign from his post as prime minister.

Not surprisingly, the Welfare Party would be shut down by the Constitutional Court for acts "contrary to the principles of the Secular Republic," adding another one to the closure of the political parties we became used to. Koukoudakis points out that this development shows that Kemal's legacy has been revealed more clearly, and the Welfare Party has also suffered from this. Later, Fazilet (Virtue) Party was established which was viewed as its continuation of the Welfare Party.

Moreover, the Virtue Party—which emerged subsequent to the Welfare Party—would close its doors in 2001. In Turkey, where there are many examples of political party closures, the closure of the Virtue Party would lead to the establishment of two conservative parties. Some politicians choose to follow another path and stop joining Erbakan's new parties and decide to follow Justice and Development Party, which Bülent Arınç and Abdullah Gül led to its founding; Erdogan was undoubtedly one of the founders of the AKP. Those who chose to join the AKP made it quite evident that they had removed their Islamic national movement shirts and that the party was committed to conservative democratic principles. The other politicians decided to walk with the Felicity Party, headed by Karamalloglu, which is another prominent political party that is still in the game (Yılmaz, 2021).

Besides that, Erdogan began his political career under the National Vision ideology, and some of his statements and approaches to conducting politics have a clear similarity to Erbakan. For instance, Erbakan did not shy away from using religion as a material for politics, often accusing people he was dissatisfied with or political opponents of working for America or the CIA, or accusing them of believing in the "Potato religion" that rejected Islam. Yılmaz emphasises that Erbakan's discourse has a discriminatory and intolerant tone. Similarly, Erdogan's ways of addressing the Turkish people include declaring some people who oppose him as terrorists or describing the participants in the Gezi Park protests in 2013 as "Çapulc.u" (roughly translated to marauders) In addition, he waved the Quran on stage and asked for votes. Obviously, the language Erdogan is using is similar to Erbakan, and it may provide clues about the origins of his political ideology.

In addition, both Erbakan and Erdogan have demonstrated an intolerant attitude towards criticism or opposition and have frequently described their political opponents as enemies. Also, both leaders have frequently adopted personal attacks targeting opponents as part of their policy styles. This circumstance might demonstrate the intensity of rivalry and division in Turkish politics, as well as the similarities in the political leadership ideologies of the two presidents.

In 2001–2002, the AKP became a fully operational political body by using the huge social infrastructure that the Welfare and Virtue parties had built before it. Three significant elements made this transfer easier. First, the Virtue Party's division between traditionalists and reformists resulted in the latter's formation of the AKP, which was backed by a significant number of the party's former members. In the meantime, traditionalists established the Felicity Party, which was only marginally influential in politics. Second, the AKP leadership has successfully navigated the difficulties associated with adapting as a political party. These obstacles include choosing effective leaders, creating a flexible organisational structure, and bringing the party's philosophy into line with shifting public perceptions.

The third reason is the 2001 financial crisis, which sparked widespread disapproval among former secular parties accused of economic mismanagement, played a major role in the AKP's rise to power. Public trust in the traditional political leadership quickly declined as a result of the Central Bank of Turkey's premature abandoned of the fixed exchange rate regime in February 2001 and the failure of the IMF-led stabilisation plan. Public dissatisfaction and the need for change increased as a result of the economic instability, which also resulted in a significant decrease in the GNP, rising rates of inflation, and a marked increase in the amount of borrowing required of the public sector. In reaction, the AKP intentionally presented itself as a fresh candidate who could address Turkey's financial issues. Also, many voters, particularly in areas with a conservative leaning, have found connections in between Erdogan's leadership and the party's emphasis on Islamic values. Moreover, the restoration of stability and confidence in the economy was greatly aided by the AKP's pragmatic governance style, which was typified by swift economic reforms and actions. The party was able to navigate the economic crisis and emerge as a powerful political force in Turkey thanks to its ability to forge alliances and create consensus despite political differences (Yesilada, 2016).

Many scholars agree with Yesilada's evaluation that the AKP's rise was made possible by the country's financial crisis or turbulent period during that time. To be more detailed, Turkey's economy was in terrible shape in the 1990s, and there were significant income gaps. Subsequently, one of the greatest hits to Turkey's economy came from the 1999 earthquakes near Izmir and Marmara, which were among the strongest in the country's history. About 50,000 people were injured, and about 20,000 people lost their lives. The earthquake's effects on the economy were equally devastating. Economic outcomes: As unemployment rose, the per capita national income started to decline even further. One by one, businesses filed for bankruptcy, which was followed by a high devaluation and inflation that hit 70%.

Additionally, the Marmara earthquake had implications for politics. In general, middle-class residents lived in earthquake-prone areas, which also happened to be the areas where CHP, the party founded by Ataturk, received a higher percentage of votes. The public wasn't convinced that the state's initial response to the earthquake or its delayed aid following it were sufficient. The media and people were constantly criticising the government and thought that the state had lost its function. Two years after the earthquake, in 2001, the great economic crisis was sufficient to completely destroy the political atmosphere. In Turkey, the current state of political and economic unrest has prompted voters to cast different ballots in the upcoming elections. It can be said that this facilitated the rise to power of the AKP, a newly established party, in 2001 (Koukoudakis, 2017).

The AKP used the political vacuum in the right way and came to power, but while a deeper understanding of the AKP's underlying ideology remains unclear, certain researchers studies provide some insight. First of all, despite their claims to have strayed from the National Vision approach, Islam was a tool used in the AKP's early years. Guidi, examine that the impression AKP and Erdogan gave to the people of Turkey, apart from the secular Muslim image, was the understanding that democracy would be permanent, a secular state required by the Turkish army, removed from politics, civil rights would be protected, and a state of law would also comply with the Copenhagen criteria. Nevertheless, it wouldn't be incorrect to characterise the party's founding ideology as "post-Islamist" and democratic. Some groups have been controversial in their opposition to this interpretation of the AKP since the party's creation. While the AKP side characterised Islam and religion as human values, they also emphasised how crucial democracy and open discussion of all issues are in Turkey. They knew that the AKP's early understanding of this was an essential factor in its ability to win over support from every part of Turkey and gain power.

Erdoğan stated in one of his comments that he believed the AKP did not take inspiration from Islam (Sujibto, 2019).

What was the ideology of the AKP when it was established? This question has been asked many times by politicians and academicians. Even though the AKP was founded on Islamic principles, there were some similarities between the AKP and Christian democracies in Europe. (Insel, 2020) From this perspective, the AKP's emphasis on social conservatism, inclusive politics, and democratic governance can be connected to this reconciliation. Like Christian democratic parties in Europe, the AKP sought to establish a political framework that combined Islamic principles with contemporary methods of governance, and it additionally attempted to find a middle ground between democratic principles and religious beliefs. Also, the economic platforms of numerous European Christian democratic parties that support free market capitalism and are frequently influenced by social welfare policies mirrored the AKP's dedication to economic liberalism and market-oriented policies. Furthermore, the AKP's emphasis on grassroots activism and encouragement of civil society participation reflected the idea of a participatory democracy frequently connected to Christian democratic movements in Europe.

Tepe called the AKP an "Islamic-prone, democratic party" in 1998 and 2005. In those years, Erdogan and the AKP were perceived as following Islamic customs and values, maintaining the rule of law, free and fair elections, and functioning within the parameters of a democratic system. It is important to remember, though, that even in those years, there has been discussion and analysis regarding the extent to which the AKP successfully combined Islamic and democratic values. In light of these considerations, it would be fitting to point out the comments that Erdoğan made in 1996, while serving as Istanbul's mayor, to Nilgün Cerrahoğlu in the Milliyet newspaper.

*"Democracy is like a train: when you reach your destination you get off."*

Koukoudakis used a similar approach when he stated that the AKP initially appeared to be more moderate and reformist than its Islamist predecessors. This move allowed the AKP to take advantage of the present political situation and quickly establish itself as a major player in Turkish politics. Considering this understanding, the AKP and Erdoğan adopted a number of measures to maintain democracy and follow European norms during their establishment. Nevertheless, the party

and its leader started displaying authoritarian characteristics in 2010 and 2011, and they implemented policies that damaged democratic institutions. Press freedom violations, suppression of opposition voices and pressure on political rivals are clear examples showing that the AKP has moved away from democratic principles.

## **2.2: Key Principles, Policies, and Shifts in Erdogan's Political Ideology**

When AKP came to power in 2002, no one expected that AKP would make such a breakthrough and appeal to a large audience; however, Turkey became a candidate for the European Union as a result of the party's supported reforms, and the West confirmed that Turkey's democratic maturity had progressed beyond a certain stage. The leaders of the AKP frequently highlighted universal values and values-based discourses during this time, including the Copenhagen criteria, European Union standards, human rights, equal citizenship, freedom of belief, democracy, and free market principles. Despite being a religious and conservative party, the AKP rejected all options except for full membership in the European Union and did not advocate against the West.

Turkey's economy rose to become the 17th largest in the world because of Erdoğan and his party's wise use of the flood of cash that was allocated to developing countries following the global financial crisis. (Sullivan, 2018) Furthermore, to stop the corruption and bribery they have promised to Turkish citizens, or to guarantee equal access to education (by opening schools for the poor areas), or to reduce market restrictions so as to increase Turkey's competitiveness in the global arena, etc. This strategy was a significant step in the political and ideological development of the AKP. Turkey's domestic and foreign policies underwent substantial changes as a result of the party and its leaders' shift away from religious allusions and towards a focus on more secular and universal values. Through this process, the AKP was able to shift from its initial path of democratisation to a more authoritarian style of governance.

However, with a vote of about 50% in 2011, Erdogan was able to secure the majority of deputies in the parliament, which was crucial for the AKP and Erdogan as it allowed him to more easily implement his policies. With his newfound authority, Erdoğan could see no real opposition and became closer to totalitarian regimes. Although Erdoğan and his party adhered to their conservative-democrat ideology after the elections, things slowly started to turn around, and their reformist and democratizing aspects began to disappear. The erosion of democratic values, pluralism, human rights, freedoms, equal citizenship, and non-discrimination became glaringly

obvious as the AKP and Erdoğan's rule grew. Over time, the leadership of the AKP gradually strayed from the ideals of inclusiveness and democratic governance, which served as the party's original foundation. The political space has narrowed, with opposition parties facing oppression and dissenting voices quiet, replacing the once-celebrated pluralism (Yilmaz, 2015).

It is important to remember that Erdoğan still holds profound feelings towards the Ottoman Empire. His declaration following the 2011 election read, "We want to raise a Turkish generation worthy of the Seljuks and the Ottomans." He characterised the election as a victory for Turkey and the Ottoman heritage. (Sullivan, 2018). Such a remark from an Islamist politician is not surprising, but even this one should indicate the direction Erdoğan and the AKP are taking towards democracy in 2011. Many of Erdoğan's remarks were strangely symbolic of Ottoman policies, and it is evident that this particular statement was instrumental in receiving support from Turkey's conservative parts.

A 'Time' magazine article that effectively expressed his perspective on the Ottoman Empire was one of them. Erdogan made an effort to bring the Ottoman Empire back, as evidenced by the policies he put in place, according to the article "Why Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Love Affair with the Ottoman Empire Should Worry the World." Examples given include Turkey's military actions in Syria, Yemen, and Libya; its focus on Sunni religiosity; and its domestic repression of Kurds, Alevis, women, journalists, Christians, and intellectuals.

An additional occurrence indicating the significance of 2011 for Turkish politics is Turkey's 2011 signature of the Istanbul Convention, which it later withdrew with Erdoğan's signature. However, Insel also examines the 2011 election in Turkey and says that there is no doubt that Erdogan prioritised Sunni Islamism, and Erdogan's policies became deeply embedded in Turkish society's daily lives. Erdoğan, who was not afraid to express his conservatism in public, did not hold back from taking any actions or saying anything that would have contributed to the division of society in public spaces. Erdogan was determined to further separate Turkey by continuously criticising Turkish-Kurdish Sunni-Alevi, Atatürk or, Kemalism.

Consequently, Erdoğan's Turkey was ruled by increasingly anti-democratic policies. Erdogan declared war on the Kemalist mindset and used all of his resources to strengthen his hold on power. To consolidate this, he preferred the media, which is the place that every authoritarian

regime resorts to, and media channels were at his disposal to manage perception as he wanted. In order to silence the voices that would oppose him, he ensured that the media was taken over by some people who had already collaborated with AKP. By somehow getting people who have a say in the media to bring in names close to them, the media achieved unanimity. Of course, the Radio and Television Supreme Council also imposed various penalties to punish opposition channels.

Trying to take over the media, Erdoğan also took to social media to minimise opposing voices. The government employed intimidation and censorship strategies to suppress critical news. Authorities are able to sue bloggers, journalists, and social media users for allegedly "insulting the president" or "spreading terrorist propaganda" due to tighter laws restricting free speech and expression. Starting in 2009, there were countless detentions and arrests of Journalists in the case of Ergenekon and Balyoz. Turkey had the highest number of jailed journalists in the world by 2012, with 61, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists (Yılmaz&Bashirow, 2018). They are trying to create an empire of fear in the country led by Erdoğan, and thus the aim was to intimidate people without dissenting, and that is why people started to hesitate even to post a tweet.

In 2014, YouTube faced a ban in Turkey that lasted more than two weeks. Turkey perhaps faced more restrictions on freedom of thought than ever before in the 21st century. The most important example of media restrictions was the 'Gezi Park' resistance that occurred in Istanbul in 2013. The Gezi Park resistance represented a crucial democracy test for Turkey and could have been a comeback for Turkish democracy (Koukoudakis, 2017). But he did not listen them and chose another way that he made every effort to prevent this by utilising all available resources from the law enforcement. Erdogan doesn't seem to have given up on his cruel decisions in the face of resistance, where police violence is prevalent, and lives are lost.

Additionally, this resistance initially started with the logic of an environmentalist action; it later turned into an ongoing resistance that brought people to the streets across Turkey to raise their voice against Erdoğan's undemocratic activities. These protests, which lasted approximately 30 days, caused thousands of injuries as well as those who lost their lives, and Erdogan would associate the Gezi Park resistance with terrorism. During the resistance, no channel, except a few opposition media, reported on Gezi Park for nearly 24 hours. This revealed the extent to which the media was controlled by Erdoğan at that time (BBC Turkce, 2019). It should be clearly stated that

Erdogan and his supporters, who chose to remain silent on the first day of the Gezi Park resistance, were in a great shock because, for the first time, a large young mass was rejecting Erdogan's Islamist, patriarchal, and autocratic policies (Insel, 2021).

Furthermore, the public began to follow the events on social media in the first place, demonstrating the power of social media when the media chose to ignore the Gezi Park resistance. Twitter was blocked multiple times when the situation upset Erdoğan and his circles. As a result of these and related events, Turkey would drop to 154th place out of 180 nations in the world press freedom ranking under Erdogan's leadership.

A lack of democracy and human rights would undoubtedly have a negative impact on the economy of a country. Turkey's financial success up until 2011 would eventually fall as a result of authoritarianism. In parallel with authoritarianism, the story economic success disappeared. Under the Erdoğan leadership, there would be a noticeable decrease in the country's per capita national income, forcing the Turkish people to experience financial difficulties more than before. It would consequently experience a sharp decline, going from being the 17th largest economy to the 19th in 2015. Any undesired economic or political development in the new Erdogan Turkey would be explained by conspiracy theories. The media had a huge share in creating this perception, and the media channels would not look for the blame on Erdoğan or the other authorities, but they found the people guilty and called them foreign powers (Dış güçler).

In addition, Yılmaz explains that attempts are made to increase the charisma of authority figures who hold power by adorning them with leadership attributes. He states that Erdoğan was given concepts such as "master," "leader," and "Chief" by the people gathered around him and that Erdoğan was blessed like a prophet. Furthermore, according to Yılmaz, senior party executives—such as the vice president and provincial president—typically make these comparisons. It is attempted to sanctify this autocratic figure by making a link with the events or the city of his birth. For instance, he did not object when the term "Commander in Chief" was applied to him on a regular basis following the 2016 coup attempt. This assertion was significant because the first and last person to receive this title in Turkish politics was Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Apart from this, Erdoğan, who tried to create an Islamic generation, was also practically applying this ideology and thought to real life. For Atatürk, 'as long as a person speaks Turkish, he

is a Turk.' According to Erdoğan, in order to be a Muslim, 'the person must first be Sunni..' (Guidi, 2018) It is a clear fact that Erdogan and the AKP government are against Kemalist ideology-principles and express this from time to time. Of course, although they are doing this carefully so as not to antagonise the entire population in Turkey, Erdogan insists on applying his Islamist ideology to Turkey. Erdogan's foregrounding of Sunni Islam and associating it with the Turkish identity shows us the result of his desire to question Turkey's secular structure and place an Islamist ideology at the centre of society. As mentioned before, Erdoğan's policies that divide and polarise society appear here as well, and he does not seem to give up on the policies he has established on ethnic and national identity.

It is well known that the majority of Erdoğan's supporters in Turkey are conservatives. A number of comments he made to the media were highly debated in Turkish politics, and it seems it was an effort to keep his supporters and party base alive. In 2012, he made a statement criticising Kılıçdaroğlu, the head of the main opposition party, the CHP.

*"He says that from my speech yesterday, he divided Turkey into 'religious people and non-religious people'." First, let your ears get used to hearing... There is no such thing as religious or non-religious in my statement. There is a religious youth upbringing. I say this again, I stand behind this. Mr. Kılıçdaroğlu, do you expect us, the AK Party, which has the identity of a conservative democratic party, to raise an atheist generation? It may be your job, it may be your purpose. But we do not have such an aim. We will raise a generation that is conservative and democratic, and that protects the values, principles and principles of its nation and homeland, which come from history. We are working for this" (Hürriyet,2012).*

It is widely believed that Erdoğan is participating in polarising politics; in this instance, Kılıçdaroğlu makes reference to this and accusations Erdoğan. However, Erdogan, who does not accept this criticism, displays a populist approach by personalizing the criticism made against him in order to gain the sympathy of his voters. In another example, Erdoğan expresses how much he does not care about law, social freedom and secular structure with the following words.

*"From neighbors regarding the issue. We cannot throw these reports aside, and our governorships and police departments evaluate such reports and act on them." (Vatan, 2013)*

2011 was crucial for Turkey because Erdogan started to change the political landscape of the country. We could observe that Erdogan's power was growing daily and that he was making more

and more attempts to manipulate Turkey's social structure with his words and policies. Erdoğan was able to act more freely by suppressing opposing views by using all state resources, but no powerful opposition could stand in Erdoğan's way. As the footsteps of Erdoganism became increasingly apparent, Kemalism was no longer the only official doctrine in Turkey and the term "Erdoğan regime" had become widely spoken throughout the world (Yılmaz&Bashirow, 2018).

Erdoğan, who has been in power for more than 20 years, has managed to concretize the concept of 'Erdoganism', an ideological framework that is said for him around the world. No one expected that when his political career first began, he would become one of the most powerful leaders in Turkish history. With his policies, he was slowly erecting his ideal nation. Its emergence as a strongest leader both domestically and worldwide after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, creator of the Republic of Turkey. In the media, it would be frequently discussed in international organisations and institutes and would come across terms such as "dictator" and "new sultan". One by one, he put forward policies that disregard the principles of the Republic of Turkey and tried to make his power and policies accepted by everyone. On the one hand, he continued to pursue his policies in order to increase his power, and this would reveal the ideology of procreativity (Sujibto, 2019).

|         | 2002 General Elections |       | 2004 Local Elections |                     | 2007 General Elections |       | 2009 Local Elections |                     | 2010 Const. Ref.       | 2011 General Elections |       | 2014 Local Elections |
|---------|------------------------|-------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|-------|----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|------------------------|-------|----------------------|
|         | %                      | Chair | %                    | Provincial Assembly | %                      | Chair | %                    | Provincial Assembly | Votes                  | %                      | Chair |                      |
| AKP     | %35                    | 363   | %42                  | 2276                | %47                    | 341   | %38                  | 1889                | Votes for YES: % 57.88 | %50                    | 326   | %45/43               |
| CHP     | %20                    | 178   | %18                  | 392                 | %21                    | 112   | %23                  | 612                 |                        | %26                    | 135   | %27/25               |
| MHP     | %8                     | 0     | %10                  | 178                 | %14                    | 71    | %16                  | 414                 | Votes for NO: %42.12   | %13                    | 53    | %15/17               |
| BDP+HDP |                        |       |                      |                     | %5                     | 21    | %6                   | 235                 |                        | %7                     | 36    | %6                   |

Vote rates received by the Justice and Development Party from its establishment until 2014. (Fuat Keyman, 2014)

As we know, Islamist groups or parties were against the secular Turkey built by Atatürk. At this point, many communities and structures have formed in Turkey over time, and one of them is a community based on Islamic principles called the 'Gülen movement' or 'service'. However, on July 15, 2016, the coup attempt was the turning point for Erdoğan's Turkey. But let's not overlook the fact that the 2016, coup attempt was one of Erdoğan's greatest victories and the one in which he expanded his power. After the coup attempt, Erdoğan wanted to position himself as the only person with authority, and everything was now set up for him. For Erdoğan, who wished to essentially

establish the one-man regime on a political basis, the coup attempt was very beneficial. Immediately after the coup attempt, Erdoğan was going to take the country to a referendum and change the political regime.

A point that should not be overlooked: for the first time in Turkey's history, an Islamist group attempted to carry out a coup. We know that the Turkish army has always been the protector of the Kemalism ideology (Yılmaz, 2015). However, this time, this coup attempt within the Turkish army was not carried out by the Kemalists, which is why some people believe that was the reason why the coup did not succeed. Furthermore, some generals and commanders opposed the spinal chain of command on the night of the coup attempt after realising it was not motivated by Kemalist principles. It is very interesting that while Erdoğan was waiting for the Kemalist group to raise an uprising against him, he found the guardians of the Gülen movement. Erdoğan has supported this community almost from the beginning of his political career and has not hesitated to use the state's resources, but one of the important aspects of Turkish political history has been witnessing the Gülen movement's involvement in the coup attempt rather than the Kemalists.

Apart from that, it would be helpful to comprehend the relationship between Fethullah Gülen (the founder of the Gülen movement) and Erdoğan. Gülen's service grew so much over the years and began to appeal to a large segment of society that, during this time, it spread to crucial organs of the state, with the support of the AKP. It has become a structure that political parties follow to get support for votes. Erdoğan and the Gülen movement were two structures that supported each other in every sense until 2013, and their common point was that they were both centered on Islamic values and against Kemalist Turkey. However, in 2013, Gülenist police carried out a corruption operation against the AKP and many bureaucrats were arrested, and AKP MPs and ministers could not escape this investigation. After all the audio recordings and documents that emerged after the close monitoring of the Gülen movement, this was the first incident in which Erdoğan and Fethullah Gülen seriously confronted each other (Sullivan, 2018). Later, Erdoğan launched a major operation to purge the Gülen movement from politics and the state. He made many arrests using all the help of the state, but this cannot be said to be very successful because they were very well hidden, especially in the Turkish army. Despite all the diplomatic efforts of Fethullah Gülen, Erdoğan, who still lives in America, the USA did not extradite Fethullah Gülen. As a result, Fethullah Gülen and Erdoğan, who had a falling out due to the unlimited ambition and desire to be the sole authority in both of them, would come face to face for the second time on July

15, 2016. However, this showdown would also mean very serious consequences for Turkish society.

It all started that night when the military blocked the Istanbul-Bosphorus bridge and did not allow traffic. F16s went as far as flying low and dropping bombs on the Parliament in Ankara, and this had never happened in any coup in the history of Turkey. Helicopters and tanks fired at police stations, sometimes randomly. During the night, Erdoğan connected to a television programme via phone through a reporter and invited the Turkish people to the streets and asked them to prevent this coup. As a result, more than 200 civilians died and nearly 2000 civilians were injured. According to allegations, around 8 thousand soldiers, 170 generals, 37 helicopters, 35 fighter jets, and around 240 tanks participated in the coup attempt (Kardes&Balci, 2019).

Erdogan declared a state of emergency immediately after the coup attempt and aimed to eliminate members of the organisation and purge them from state organs. During this state of emergency, while Erdoğan aimed to eliminate the Gülen movement, he also aimed to turn this into an advantage and eliminate organisations and politicians that could hinder him. As a result, by 2018, he had dismissed 125 thousand civil servants, sent thousands of non-governmental organisations, 2271 private sector training institutes, 73 magazines and newspapers, 34 television channels, 40 radio stations were closed and dozens of journalists and Kurdish politicians to prison. Finally the state of emergency ended on July 17, 2018, but it was extended seven times during that time (Zafer, 2020). Erdoğan, who worked until there was no risk of a coup anymore, was trying to guarantee his own future.

However, what happened on the night of the coup attempt and the fear and uncertainty created afterwards forced some people to follow Erdoğan and his policies. In 2017, AKP went to the Turkish people for constitutional amendment and won by a narrow margin. This constitutional amendment consisted of 18 articles and introduced a presidential system that abolished the position of Prime Minister and had almost no parliamentary powers. Thus, he took society and social life under control more easily and introduced the one-man regime in Turkey (Sullivan, 2018). Erdogan completely changed the political landscape of Turkey with the 2017 referendum and would now determine the new future of Turkey.

After the failed coup attempt, Erdogan saw this as an opportunity to make his policy happen in Turkey. Even once, he clearly stated that ‘the gift of God’ Erdogan was a leader who knew that whatever was happening, good or bad, for Turkish citizens, he was going to use this opportunity

(Zafer, 2020). While these and similar events strengthened Erdogan and increased his authority, they also caused us to research the phenomenon of Erdoganism. Undenibly the emergence of Erdoganism is a very important turning point in Turkey's political history. Erdoganism consists of principles such as electoral authoritarianism, neopatrimonialism, populism and Islamism (Yilmaz & Bashirrow, 2018). Erdoganism appears to be an issue that needs to be questioned and researched in detail, but it can be said that Erdoganism has deeply affected Turkish political opinion. Erdoganism, which still maintains its influence, has turned into an ideology that is felt enough to affect the daily lives of the Kurdish and Turkish diaspora abroad, apart from domestic politics.

### **2.3: Analysis of Erdogan's Stance on Kurdish Question Within Turkey**

The Kurdish question appears to be a problem that has been waiting to be solved for centuries. In Turkey's political history, leaders and regimes have changed, but the existence of the Kurdish question has not been resolved. While the massacres and oppression policies that took place during Ataturk's Turkey are still being debated today, the Kurdish question has become very complex in Turkey under Erdoğan's leadership as well. Since the Sheikh Said rebellion, the Kurdish issue has consistently troubled the Kemalists, who have tried to prevent the Kurdish culture from growing or existing in politics (Koukoudakis&Pieper, 2014). Although the Kurdish question has been an ongoing conflict for many years, and from time to time when it is required, Erdoğan stated that there were Kurdish MPs, and minister at the moment as well as in the past, and suggested that there is no Kurdish conflict in Turkey because they can be anything they want or have a political career. It's true to some extent that there were Kurdish politicians in the past and Erdogan government in present as well.

But we need to point out that there have previously been politicians of Kurdish descent, but they entered the political sphere by embracing their Turkish identity rather than their Kurdish identity. According to the Kemalist interpretation, anyone living in Turkey is considered a Turk unless they behave differently; being biologically Turkish is not a requirement. For instance, Kurdish origins are shared by former prime ministers Turgut Özal and Ercan İnönü (Bruinessen, 1994). In this context, many Kurdish politicians of Kurdish descent held positions as ministers or MPs in Erdogan's party as well, but they made no remarks or acts in the least that had anything to do with the Kurdish question or the interests of the Kurds.

If we look at the issue from another perspective, the fact that politicians of Kurdish origin were members of parliament or in the cabinet of ministers could not prevent massacres and oppressive policies in the nineties or during the Erdoğan period. For instance, 90 Kurdish civilians were killed by the Turkish State in March 1992, during the Kurds' celebration of the New Year (Nevruz), when speaking and using the Kurdish language were still prohibited in those years. Turkish security forces frequently targeted Kurdish writers, journalists, and intellectuals. Approximately 1200 Kurdish intellectuals and civilians were killed between 1992 and 1995 (Koukoudakis, 2017). Despite the Kurds suffering during those days, similar acts persisted continuously under Erdoğan leadership. Politicians of Kurdish were still allowed to exist during these years, though it's arguable to what extent they could influence policy. The important point is that even if regimes, governments, or leaders change in Turkey, brutal policies are regularly applied to the Kurds regardless of time.

Erdoğan claims that there is no Kurdish conflict, but on December 28, 2011, we had to face another massacre. The Turkish Air Force dropped four bombs on a civilian group within a few minutes. This massacre, which went down in history as Roboski (Uludere), took place on the Iraq-Turkey border. While 34 Kurdish people, 17 of whom were children, lost their lives, Turkey claimed that they shot those who lost their lives in this operation because they identified them as PKK members, but most of them were crossing the border to buy cigarettes and gasoline. In addition, we face the fact that the soldiers and commanders at the border know these people who cross the border almost every day, and they knew that they are engaged in this activity for a while (Benson&Sokmen, 2019). It would later be said that this massacre, which was tried to be covered up by the government, was not a conscious act, and Turkish courts unpunished anyone, and those people still continue their duties that who is responsible for this act. Of course, Kurdish politicians, whom Erdoğan referred to as Kurds, did not even feel the need to make any statements.

It was necessary for Turkey to solve the situation that it had always faced, and it could also feel diplomatic pressure. However, attempts to find a solution to the Kurdish question have always been postponed and ignored due to the fear that the sovereignty of a unitary state would be endangered. At this point, the issue of peace with the Kurds, which was constantly on the agenda in the diplomatic activities of the outside world, namely the European Union (EU) countries, was perhaps forcing Turkey to take certain steps. Turkey, which turned to EU principles, was trying to

become an EU member as soon as possible. In this case, Turkey needed to minimise criminal violations and uphold human rights principles before it could claim to be a democratic nation, so that is why the resolution of the Kurdish issue is the most crucial sign that Turkey will become a democratic country according to the EU (Yılmaz, 2017).

The European Union and Turkey began negotiating Turkey's membership in 1963, and Turkey has taken numerous steps towards adhering to EU standards over the years. The beginning of discussion on a Customs Union Agreement in 1996 marked a significant turning point in this process and set the way for Turkey's eventual negotiations for full EU membership. But this process also resulted in more EU examination, particularly with regard to Turkey's human rights record and how it has handled the Kurdish issue (Barkey and Fuller, 1997). When full membership negotiations between Turkey and the EU began in 2005, a similar situation appeared.

During this time, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan became a vocal supporter of Turkey's EU membership, even though Turkey still needed to meet certain requirements. However, there were immediate consequences to this process, particularly for press freedom, human rights, and relations with the Kurdish population. Following this, steps were taken to address some of these issues, including the creation of TRT 6, a state television channel that exclusively broadcasts in Kurdish, and the introduction of Kurdish education in a few state institutions (Khayati, 2008). The Kurdish letters X, W, and Q are not recognised in the Turkish alphabet, which highlights continuous challenges to the linguistic and cultural rights of Kurds in Turkey. Nevertheless, there were still unresolved issues.

Apart from that, there was a critical point of the Kurdish Question in Turkey's political history in 2009. The relations between the Erdogan government and the Kurds noticed positive improvements with the diplomatic efforts carried out in 2009. Those days when Erdogan was prime minister, which would later be called the "Peace Process," were very critical times for the history of democracy in Turkey. The solution process started in 2009 with the following statement made by President Abdullah Gül to journalists: "Very good things will happen in the coming days regarding the Kurdish issue." (T24, 2009) With this process, they received positive feedback from Turkish society and continued to negotiate. In the first phase of the meetings, plans were generally made for the development of Kurdish culture and language, but they did not share that much information with the public.

These negotiations between Turkey and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) ended in 2011, and signatures were signed. Later, the negotiations, which started for the second time in 2012, became more clearly shared with the public. At this point, we need to talk about the PKK, which is a very important factor.

The Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) is generally blamed as the reason why the Kurdish conflict has not been solved in Turkey. However, the political and economic exclusion imposed on the Kurds, as well as many prohibitions and a brutal state policy against the Kurdish identity, are generally accepted as the facts that led to the establishment of the PKK. However, at that time, Abdullah Öcalan's close friend Mahir Çayan was killed during the Kızıldere massacre, and that was a crucial turning point in his life. Consequently, he took part in demonstrations at the university with his friends and received a seven-month prison sentence. With plenty of time on his hands, the imprisoned Abdullah Öcalan decided to confront the Kurdish people regarding the PKK project. As a result, the PKK was founded in Ankara in 1978 by a group of Kurdish and Turkish university students under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan.(Venturini&Miley, 2018).

PKK is a reality of Kurdistan geography, and we need to know PKK well. Although the PKK was founded in 1978, apart from small-scale operations, the armed struggle against the Turkish state began in earnest in 1984. The PKK demands recognition of Kurdish identity and the ability to freely exercise their citizenship rights with constitutional guarantees. It can also be said that they have a demand for autonomy under the umbrella of Democratic Confederalism (Savran, 2020).

In addition, PKK guerrillas, and Turkish forces, who have been fighting since 1984, when the violence peaked, have suffered more than 40 thousand casualties, although the numbers are not precise. Assuming that the PKK is a well-organised and trained organisation, this causes Turkey to focus much more on its fight against the PKK. As a result of these conflicts, the increase in the politicised Kurdish population at home and abroad was not to the benefit of Turkey, and Turkey had to constantly face this problem in its foreign relations. In addition, another consequence of the fight against the PKK is that Turkey has not been able to fully achieve economic and political stability, and a significant share of the national income is allocated to the fight against the PKK (Barkey, Fuller, 1997).

On the other hand, the second phase of the Peace Process, which was stopped due to political crises, continued at the same pace as of 2013. At that time, the PKK did not organise any

armed operations, and there was great curiosity about how the process would progress. On the AKP side, no negative thoughts were expressed about the issue, and Erdoğan even said the following in a statement in 2011 (Koukoudakis, 2017).

*‘‘We will work harder to end mothers crying and end the bloodshed. We did away with assimilation policies... we say peace, freedom and democracy in the region.’’*

The second phase of the solution process started again in 2013, when a group of Kurdish politicians visited PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in prison. Politicians who visited Öcalan periodically were sharing the information they received with Kandil (PKK headquarters), and they were doing this with the permission of the government. Meanwhile, the photographs taken between Kurdish politicians and guerrillas would later become a trending topic and be used as political material (Akgül&Görgün Akgül, 2022). Meanwhile, the AKP government sought legal ground to put the process into practice. As an example, the Wise People's Committee was established in 2013. The duty of the Wise People was to inform the people of the region about how the process was going and to learn their expectations from the peace process. It is a clear fact that the path from a disagreement to peace has never been easy, yet the process has been one of the most important points in Turkey's political history (Savran, 2020). The process ended in the summer of 2015 and the armed struggle started again. Turkey has missed the opportunity for peace, and it is wondered when such a step will be taken for peace.

So how did Turkey miss a historical opportunity? The conservative and undemocratic policies implemented by the AKP while the solution process was continuing were negatively received by the Turkish people and the international arena. In the general elections held in 2015, the AKP lost its majority in the parliament and missed the chance of coming to power on its own. This result was the AKP's first defeat since the 2002 elections and was important. In this result, the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP) won 13% of the vote. The fact that the Kurdish political party received 13% of the votes greatly shook Erdoğan's rule, and Erdoğan's policies turned against the Kurds by launching a campaign, imprisoning their politicians, and occupying Kurdish territories in Syria and Iraq. Also he started airstrikes and arrests against the PKK. In addition, he accused HDP MPs and politicians of being terrorists and expressed this very clearly in public (Yeşilada, 2014). In short, Erdoğan blamed the election result on the Kurds and tried to take revenge on the HDP.

Turkey, under Erdoğan's government, which lost the election, suddenly went out of control, and many terrorist attacks took place. One of these was the Suruç attack on Kurdish activists, resulting in 33 people losing their lives and more than 100 people being injured. Another terrorist

attack took place in Ankara on October 10, and 109 people lost their lives. These attacks remind us of the attacks during the Nevruz New Year demonstrations in 1992 (Koukoudakis, 2017). In Erdoğan's Turkey, which lost the elections, everyone was now forced to live in fear.

Later, in November 2016, Erdoğan had HDP's co-ministers Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ arrested, and again found a solution through undemocratic means. Once again, Erdogan was not surprised by not complying with the decision of the European Court of Human Rights that Selahattin Demirtaş should be released immediately. HDP leaders Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, who managed to get votes from all sides Turkey in the 2015 elections, are still held as political hostages in prison.

While Kurds have always been an important part of Turkish politics, they are sometimes tried to be used to set the agenda in politics. For example; when it comes to elections, the Kurdish society is always one of the main topics and does not fall off the agenda throughout the election period. That question asked to everyone; Who will Kurds vote for? This is why political parties in Turkey make special statements towards the Kurds and do not hesitate to implement separate policies if necessary. Of course, it is debatable how useful the election campaigns for the Kurds are, because actions that do not comply with democracy, such as the arrest of Kurdish MPs who were tried to be terrorized during the AKP period or the appointment of trustees from the state instead of mayors.

Another example would be Erdoğan's initial rejection of Sweden and Finland's need to join NATO following Russia's war in Ukraine. Finland was given permission by Erdoğan right away, and he also promised to approve Sweden's request to extradite some activist Kurds living in Sweden to Turkey. Erdogan does not think twice about using the Kurds in the diaspora as leverage in foreign policy, even as he continues to put pressure on them in domestic politics.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **IN THE SHADOW OF ERDOGAN: A CASE STUDY ON THE KURDISH DIASPORA'S CHALLENGES AND INTEGRATION IN FRENCH SOCIETY**

#### **3.1: Displaced and Resilient: The Kurdish Diaspora's Path to Europe**

Since ancient times, people have migrated to different parts of the world due to certain needs. The concept of 'Diaspora', which has started to be used more in the last century, has been the subject of constant research. In the first place, it was used to describe the forced migration of a group of people from their own ethnic community to another country. The idea of the diaspora is said to have originated with the migration of Jews to various regions of the world. The term "diaspora" is debatable even though there isn't yet a consensus definition for it. In general, these definitions refer to the forced migration of an ethnic group or religious group from their homeland, though there are differences in concepts and details. It also refers to individuals who suffered a horrific massacre or genocide and have spent a significant amount of time abroad due to political reasons. This idea is still fairly basic and superficial, and it does not adequately capture the idea of diaspora.

The term "diaspora" does not have a universal definition, according to Baser, who notes that the definition popularised in the 1990s primarily applied to Jews and Armenians and excluded many other ethnic groups. She argues that this 1990 definition fails to accurately capture the reality of Jewish and Armenian diaspora life even today. Baser provides a more precise description of "diaspora" by referencing Safran's definition from the 1990s, which has a number of important features, such as members who are dispersed throughout multiple nations; they forge memories and myths about the past and their home country; they successfully adjust to their new country of residence; they have the hope of returning there in the future; they work to advance and defend the interests of their motherland; and they uphold a sense of collective awareness and solidarity.

Although diaspora is a concept that has been used for many years, Richard Marienstras was the first to express diaspora in a real way. According to him, it is the numerical visibility of people from a nation who migrate from their homeland to the country they migrate to. However, he states that a certain time must pass to understand whether it is a real diaspora or not (Wahlbeck, 1998). Another opinion is that political refugees, guest workers, asylum seekers, or those who settle in the country for ethnic reasons and live in the host country for a certain period of time are defined as diaspora. According to this definition, diaspora acquires a very broad meaning (Khayati 2008). Another method of approaching this idea based on anthropology has a more essentialistic and see every individual outside their homeland as a part of the diaspora. With this definition, diaspora is very simplistic and does not make a difference between exiles and immigrant refugees (Baser

2013). Shain and Barth, without delving into different social dynamics, define diaspora as communities living outside their homeland and staying in a country for a certain period of time for ethnic or religious reasons.

When we go through these different definitions, we come across diasporas that formed for different reasons. For example, the Turkish diaspora in Germany was formed mostly for economic reasons and was not a forced migration for political reasons. In the 1960s and 1970s, Germany signed agreements with countries such as Italy, Greece, and Spain to meet its workforce, and Turkey was among these countries, and they received the most immigration from Turkey. Approximately 800,000 people immigrated to Germany, and most of them did not return. Apart from this, Jewish immigration spread to many parts of the world for a different reason than the Turks, namely, as a result of the oppression they experienced, and to create their own diaspora. The Armenian diaspora is similar to the Jewish diaspora. Armenians trying to escape the risks arising from the genocide or the tension between them and the Azerbaijanis can also carry out active lobbying activities by creating their own diasporas in countries such as Russia and America. Another example is the Italians who moved to Argentina, which at the time had a thriving economy, in search of a better life. They have been residing in Argentina for a long time because of the country's hospitality, and in this example of diaspora, we also meet economic considerations.

The question is, what kind of effects does diaspora have on the guest country or the country called the homeland? According to many scholars, diasporas can play an active role and influence the politics of both the homeland and the host country. In this role, they can often achieve success in influencing the politics of countries by carrying out lobbying activities or through non-governmental organizations. At the same time, diaspora members who can take an active role in political parties can also provide a voting base for political parties (Baser, 2013). The lobbying activities of the Armenian diaspora lobby in the United States for the recognition of the Armenian genocide, which are frequently on the agenda in the Turkish media, can be given as a good example.

In addition, as Shain and Barth state, diasporas can act as a bridge between their homeland and the host country. If they are from a country that is authoritarian and oppressive, they can participate in various political campaigns or demonstrations in the diaspora to strengthen democracy in their home country. Simultaneously, the diaspora's economic contribution to the economy of their

homeland is undeniable, and it is frequently noted that they wish to see the economic progress of their home country. For instance, it is widely acknowledged that Germany, where Turks were employed as guest workers, had a significant economic influence. Apart from this, the Turkish diaspora has always been a subject of discussion in Turkey-Germany diplomatic negotiations, and it is undoubtedly taken into account in politics.

After all these definitions, when we look at the Kurdish diaspora, we will encounter Kurds who migrated for different reasons. In the Kurdish diaspora, there are Kurds who were exiled, political refugees, or who are in the diaspora for economic reasons, but we also encounter a diaspora scattered across different countries in Europe. Among these countries, France, Germany, Sweden, Finland, and England are the leading countries. According to Khayati, Kurds migrated to Europe mainly as a result of two economic and political reasons, as follows:

*“First, the economic boom of Western Europe in the 1960s recruited a large number of Kurds as ‘guest workers’ to work mainly in Germany and in other western European countries. Second, the ongoing coercive assimilationist project that led to the increasing Kurdish resistance, including the armed conflict in Iraq (intermittently from 1961 to 2003), Iran (1967 to 1968 and 1979 to the present), and Turkey (1984 to the present), the involvement of Western powers in these conflicts and finally the interstate conflicts (Iran–Iraq from 1980 to 1988, and Iraq–Kuwait from 1990 to 1991) which turned the area into an active and enduring war zone, are among the other events that produced the huge refugee and migratory movements among the Kurds”*

Apart from this, the most important point that makes the Kurdish diaspora different and separates it from other diasporas is that the Kurds are stateless people (Baser, 2013). When we look at the geography of Kurdistan, there are Kurds with identities from Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria, and this detail brings the Kurdish diaspora to a more interesting point compared to other diasporas. When we examine it from another perspective, when talking about a stateless people, Shain and Barth's argue that 'diasporas can contribute to the economy of their homeland' remains a question mark as to how applicable it is to the Kurdish diaspora. That is why there is no precise and universal definition of diaspora.

Following all of these explanations, we will still come across Kurds who left their home country for various reasons when we examine the Kurdish diaspora. Not only is there a diaspora of Kurds spread throughout various European countries, but there are also Kurds who were exiled,

political refugees, or in the diaspora for economic reasons. The top five nations among them are England, France, Germany, Sweden, and Finland.

Kurds are defined as people without a state, but in order to fully understand diaspora, we must dig deeper into the concept of "homeland." Because of the Kurdish diaspora, the homeland is Kurdistan and most of them dream of a Kurdistan state. When asked what the homeland is for the diaspora, Alinia and Eliassi define it as follows:

*“The homeland mostly about a subjective feeling and individual and political constructions based on lived experiences, collective memory and history and political discourses. Consequently, the Kurdish diasporic community and movement, built around various politics of location, become the diasporic “home” where they can find a sense of continuity and belonging.”*

Furthermore, we are not talking about a long period of time when we examine the history of Kurds starting their own diaspora in Europe. But many scholars argue that Kurds were forced to migrate to Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria before creating their own diaspora in various European nations. These four countries, which pursued different goals with their forced migration policies towards the Kurds, were more interested in assimilating the Kurdish people. For example, a closer look at the existence of many Kurdish tribes gives us a significant idea of their distribution in the western, southern, and northern regions of Turkey. In other words, Kurds were forced to live in large Turkish cities like Antalya, Istanbul, Izmir, and Ankara as a diaspora. One instance of these policies in action is the forced relocation of 700,000 Kurds to other provinces in Turkey during the Ottoman Empire's genocide against the Armenian people.

Furthermore, the Turkish government passed the 'Settlement Law' in 1934, making it very evident that they intended to implement assimilation policies. The law initially targeted the Kurds. They believed that by breaking these people's social bonds—which were deeply ingrained in their families and cultures—their assimilation policies would be more effective. In another example, nearly 300,000 Kurdish-speaking Yazidis and Yarsanis in Turkey, Iraq and Syria forcibly emigrated to different geographies. These people are often described as 'devil worshippers' among Muslims, and many of them now live in the Kurdish regional administration of Northern Iraq, while thousands have been forced to settle in Germany. Alternatively, between 1991 and 1994, nearly 3000 Kurdish villages in Turkish Kurdistan were burned by Turkish military units, and these people were not given any options to go or settle. After this development, nearly 3 million internal

immigrants were formed, and they had to disperse to all cities in Turkey. It was claimed that the fact that the locals were sympathisers of the PKK was the reason these 3000 villages burned down (Khayati 2008; Curtis 2005; Brunessen 1999).

However, the migration of the Kurdish community to Europe is dependent to many reasons, including economic, environmental, and political pressures that have continued throughout history. The Kurdish diaspora is dynamic in terms of politics and culture, and it has formed very strong ties with Europe over the past few years. Before 1960, most of the first Kurds to immigrate to Europe were intellectuals and students. However, the actual Kurdish population would not become statistically noticeable until the 1970s and 1980s. Baser (2013). Kurdish intellectuals and students were the first who set a base for the Kurdish diaspora in Europe, where they migrated in search of better living conditions and educational opportunities.

Another reason that brought the Kurds to Europe was the two big earthquakes that took place in Northern Kurdistan, the east of Turkey. Thousands of Kurds were forced to flee their homes due to these two severe earthquakes. About 2300 people lost their lives, and 5300 thousand buildings were either destroyed or damaged in the 1966 Muş earthquake. Following the earthquake, many who had lost everything naturally felt less connected to the city and left to start new lives in other parts of Europe. Similarly, when the most powerful and deadly earthquake in the region, the 1976 Muradiye Van earthquake in Northern Kurdistan, claimed the lives of close to 4,000 people, the survivors were helpless and fled to Europe.

Kurds who migrated to Europe as a response to these oppressive policies that continued throughout history were systematically discriminated against and marginalised in their own homeland. However, the 1980s marked the actual beginning of the massive, actual, and numerical migration of Kurds to Europe. With the hope of finding safety and starting over in Europe, Kurds fled the violent political pressures, subordinated inclusion, denial, and mass murder campaigns, they were facing in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran (Alinia & Eliassi 2014). When economic reasons were added to these oppressive policies, the Kurds' desire to establish a new life emerged. However, it is worth noting that the Kurdish regions in Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran are the poorest regions of the geography. One of the common points of the Kurdish regions within the borders of 4 different countries was the level of poverty, and the question comes to mind whether this was a coincidence or a conscious policy of these states. For Kurds, one of the first destination was Sweden in the

1980s. Sweden's approach to human rights and optimistic asylum policies, where the Kurdish diaspora is still very strong and active. Intellectuals Kurds was choosing Sweden as well. The reason Sweden has emerged as the best destination for Kurdish writers, poets, and artists is that the Swedish government has provided moral and financial support to these artists, allowing them to publish their works and ensuring the survival and advancement of Kurdish literature and language (Khayati, 2008). So, what happened in the Kurdistan region in the 1980s and why did the Kurds decide to migrate to Europe intensively?

For the Kurds, the 1980s were a crucial decade. Newly oppressive policies against Kurds and minorities were developed following the Iranian Revolution of 1979. The eight-year war between Iran and Iraq, which broke out soon after the Iranian revolution, had a significant impact on the Kurdish population in the area. When the war occurred in regions populated primarily by Kurds, there was a serious security issue and a collapse of the economy. The Kurds left the Kurdish region for more than just this reason. Additionally, thousands of Kurds died in the Baath regime led by Saddam Hussein's systematic genocide of the Kurds in southern Kurdistan between 1986 and 1989. Saddam Hussein carried out one of the largest chemical attacks the world has ever witnessed in 1988 in 'Halabja'. Halabja Approximately 5,000 Kurds were killed in the attack that day, though exact numbers vary. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) report, in total, 43 thousand 753 people have lost their lives to date due to chemical attacks (Instute Kurde de Paris, 16 March 2018). Thousands of Kurds had moved to Europe after the Halabja massacre because it was evident to the Kurdish people that they were not safe under Saddam Hussein's regime. Europe had made it easier for the Kurds to obtain asylum after this terrible act.

Turkey's discriminatory policies against Kurds have been ongoing since the Republic period. The military coups in Turkey seriously damaged democracy and human rights in the country. In a country without human rights and laws, Kurdish activists, politicians and artists could be detained and arrested very easily. After the 1980 military coup, the regime did not allow the activities of Kurdish organisations and either closed down everything political against the Kurds or initiated criminal proceedings. The military regime, aiming to end the Kurdish left and its activism, was introducing new laws and regulations (Bruinessen, 1999). Many people, including Kurds, were subjected to brutal torture in prison, and allegedly, many people who could not stand this torture had to commit suicide. The people arrested were not just activists, included Kurdish musicians, writers, and poets (Kelly, 2002).

Moreover, the war between the PKK and Turkey, which started in 1984 and became increasingly violent, was reflected in the cities at some moments. The people of the region, who were exposed to discrimination, racism and assimilation policies during the war, were also experiencing great economic difficulties. As urban conflicts also occurred, workplaces and homes became unusable. Economic instability was brought to a higher level as the lands of people who mostly made their living from agricultural activities became unusable as well. Kurds, who no longer felt safe because of the war between the PKK and Turkey, saw Europe as a desirable destination (Khayati, 2008).

However, in general, it is challenging to reach an accurate assessment regarding the number of Kurds in Europe. One of the reasons for this is that many Kurds still have to carry another country's passport. Although different figures are discussed, approximately 1.5 to 2 million Kurds live in Europe. The largest number of Kurds reside in Germany, where there are about 850 thousand of them; in France, there are about 250 thousand. The population of Kurds is estimated to be 120,000 in the Netherlands, whereas figures in Sweden, the UK, Belgium, and Switzerland are roughly comparable, with populations ranging from 80,000 to 90,000 (Institute Kurde de Paris).

Taking these studies into consideration, the interviews I conducted for my research shed light on the reasons for the migration of Kurds from Turkey to France. Participants' statements underscore the widespread sense of political instability and repression in Turkey. Many Kurds express serious concerns about systematic discrimination and human rights violations, such as unfair detentions, restrictions on freedom of expression, and cultural oppression. A guy who immigrated to France about 7 years ago told us why he decided to move to France:

*We were working on a cultural and artistic project at the university when I was living in Istanbul, and we were connecting it to Kurdish language and culture. I wouldn't characterise myself as particularly political. One of my tasks was to offer Kurdish language classes to people who were interested in learning the language. But eventually, I became target. I had to have several surgeries after being brutally beaten and taken by radical Turkish nationalists one day. When the police came to the scene, they paid special attention to those who attacked me and gave them water etc. The police took me into the car, and I was subjected to violence from them as well. This incident helped me understand the reality of Turkey very clearly.*

These and similar incidents occur frequently in Turkey. This incident he experienced took place in Turkey under Erdogan's administration. This was just one of the examples, and the incident experienced by this Kurdish man was effective in moving to France. Apart from this, as Khayati stated, those who immigrated to France after the 1980s were mostly Kurds who came with intellectual knowledge, and many of them came with a university education or an educational project. Another person is Firat, who came to France from Turkey for political reasons as a journalist. He is living in France for 21 years. Firat, who first came to France to study the French language for a short period of 6 months, returned to Turkey who had to flee to France after arrests and detention processes.

*I didn't know any Turkish until primary school. All my classmates were Kurdish, and I had to learn Turkish first. Then I went to Istanbul to work and together with my friends we published a magazine called 'Medya Güneşi.' This magazine created more impact than expected. It was a magazine that published publications about Kurdish language, culture and Kurdistan. Later, after these publications, we were constantly investigated and detained, and then many lawsuits were filed against us. My family was also affected by this. The police went to my family's house and took my father to the police station several times and questioned him. Later, when the threats reached this level, my father had to come to Istanbul, leaving all his belongings in the village. I came to France and sought asylum. Later, I completed my master's degree here.*

Ahmet, who has been living in France for 23 years, is another Kurd who has been exposed to Turkey's ethnic discrimination and oppressive policies. According to Ahmet, coming to France at a young age was a little easier than other immigrants because he had relatives he could contact and get help from. That's why his first stop was the south of France, where his relatives lived.

*I discovered Kurdish very late in Turkey and was getting ideas to work on it. I thought that the way to do this was through the internet, so I was making websites in an amateur way, and later this would become my professional profession. At that time, I was aiming to bring together all the sites with Kurdish content on a single platform. We took action for this project with a few friends. Later, I started to be seen as a Kurdish nationalist in my circle. When you study Kurdish language and culture, you are defined as a Kurdish nationalist by those around you, but in fact it had nothing to do with it. Of course, I was going to study Kurdish language and culture because we needed it. Then my friends started to be arrested because of what we were doing. The police immediately arrested my colleague from the university. I realized that I could not stay in Turkey any longer.*

As can be seen from these examples, none of the interviews I conducted were people who did participate in an active armed struggle in Turkey or were members of the PKK. Based on this indicator, we can make the following comment: We see that Turkey's target is not just people who

dream of 'Kurdistan' and actively struggle for it. This shows us that Turkey or Erdogan's policies do not only target certain political groups, but also the Kurdish population and geography in general.

### **3.2: Examination of Challenges Faced by Kurdish Community in Terms of Integration and Assimilation in France**

One could argue that there is a distinction between the Kurds who arrived in France recently and those who arrived there initially. The Kurdish diaspora in France was still developing in the 1960s, and it's likely that the initial wave of arrivals struggled with socialisation, language, or economic issues. For instance, individuals who were new to the nation were unable to seek assistance on any matter from any Kurdish association or organisation. This help request may be related to learning French or obtaining more precise information regarding the asylum application procedure. The process was now a little simpler for those who arrived after the Kurdish Diaspora had been created. The Kurds who recently arrived here were now more widely acknowledged. Kurds who arrived in France after the 1980s, for instance, could apply to Kurdish associations and organisations to receive assistance on a variety of issues. These requests for assistance addressed a wide range of subjects, including information about applying for asylum, assistance in finding employment, and learning French. Consequently, there are notable distinctions between those who arrived first and those who arrived later. Those who arrived later were welcomed into a more structured and encouraging community as the Kurdish diaspora took shape. Kurds' lives in France are now more sustainable because of this period of transition. Leyla and her father provide an example of how Kurdish organizations in the diaspora helped Kurds who immigrated to France after 1980. Leyla summarizes her experiences as follows.

*Since we gave fingerprints in France, we could not go anywhere else and we had to stay here, but since we had no one here, my father and I were alone. In the places we went to for help, no one cared about us, and they did not help us in any way. We were waiting on the streets and in the queues of some French institutions for hours. We also had no place to stay. Later, the French Red Cross arranged a place for us for a few days, but then they said they could not help us any further, but the French state could not help us at that point either. Later, a friend of my father's friend was staying here in Strasbourg, and he was one of the officials of the Kurdish Party in France. He then called the Kurdish Cultural Center and they sent someone to help us, and the association helped us a lot. There were some Kurdish families from the Cultural Center and they hosted us in their home until we found a place to stay.*

In general, Kurds in France face a variety of difficulties, including social discrimination and bureaucratic obstacles. Overseeing the asylum application process at the French Office for the

Protection of Refugees and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) is one of the most difficult tasks. For Kurdish refugees, the intricacy and frequently long nature of these processes can be painful, leading to great anxiety and uncertainty. The procedures at OFPRA are known for their detailed and comprehensive nature, requiring applicants to undergo multiple interviews and provide significant evidence of persecution. For many Kurdish refugees fleeing difficult circumstances, gathering the necessary documentation and presenting a coherent case can be extremely challenging. This process not only tests their patience and endurance, but also exposes them to long periods of instability and insecurity. Ahmet, whom I interviewed regarding this issue, had experienced a situation that caused him great distress.

*I applied for asylum as soon as I arrived here. After a while, the office where I sought asylum told me that they did not have my documents. They lost all my documents. Of course, in this case, I become a fugitive in France, and I was told that I had to leave the country, but this is their fault, not mine. I could not become official in France for about 5 years and during this time I constantly worked illegally. I did not receive any help from the state. After that, I applied for asylum again.*

As Wahlbeck (1999) points out, obtaining employment is one of the most crucial steps towards participating in society but It's not easy to break into the French job market either. Due to limited professional networks, language barriers, and the acknowledgement of their foreign qualifications, many Kurds struggle to obtain employment. These circumstances frequently force them, in spite of their qualifications and prior work experience in their home countries, into low-skilled, low-paid jobs. Their ability to completely integrate into French society may be limited by this underemployment, which may also cause financial hardship. (Khayati, 2008)

In the fieldwork and interviews I conducted in France, almost everyone worked in restaurants and construction at least once in their life in France. Among the people I interviewed, almost all had work experience in these sectors. Most of them did these jobs until their temporary asylum period expired or until they adapted to France. In fact, it is observed that educated people do these jobs to make a living until they find a job in their own profession. Kurdish immigrants generally worked in these jobs in the first place, as working in the restaurant, construction and service sectors is not a major obstacle to the language barrier and they do not have to go through a huge learning process.

Another important issue that Kurds experience in France is undoubtedly the language barrier. French, which is a problem experienced by almost everyone interviewed in the diaspora, comes first as the primary need of Kurds in adapting to society. Firat, who spoke French partly before coming to France, is one of the people who encountered this problem. Firat summarizes the difficulties he experienced in France as follows.

*There were places with better asylum conditions, such as Sweden, Switzerland, and Norway, I could have gone there, but I chose France because I knew a little French and I thought this factor would make my integration here easier, maybe it wasn't a very good choice, now it comes to my mind sometimes. First of all, bureaucratic work tired me. Later, my area of expertise was languages, but I had a hard time finding a job here related to my field. Homesickness was another reason for adapting to the country and it was very difficult for me in the beginning. Apart from this, when I first came, there was a possibility of working in a restaurant or in construction, and most people had to do that job, including my friends. But later, using the advantage of my knowledge of French, I did translation from Kurdish-Turkish to French and this work was for refugees coming from Turkey and other part of Kurdistan, in line with the request of the courts and associations.*

Berfin, on the other hand, has encountered some not very pleasant experiences regarding the language in France. She states that she encountered a similar experience of the diaspora when she moved from Turkish Kurdistan to Istanbul. Based on this, Berfin states that living in two different countries with two different diasporas has advantages and disadvantages.

*For example, I am having problems with the language here. I am trying my best to speak better French, but this time I am faced with an accent problem from the right-wing segment. There is a right-wing group that has a problem with your accent, this bothers me, and they try to make you feel it. This is a little less in Paris, but smaller cities are more of a problem. I had this feeling when I had just started living in Istanbul, because of my accent when I was speaking Turkish. Moving from Kurdistan to Istanbul has some difficulties, cultural differences and you are in a diaspora. As a Kurd, it was culturally and linguistically difficult that you had to face it. For example, when it comes to France, there are advantages and disadvantages in sense of integration due to previous experiences. For example, you are used to this immigration and diaspora situation when you are in Turkey. Maybe same difficulties can be a little easier because you get used to it. But you also have a disadvantage because you get tired. I experienced this process once in Istanbul. For me, this is the second time I am faced with the adaptation problem and once again I am getting tired and bored.*

Of course, there are certain problems regarding integration for the Kurds, but in general, as a result of the interviews, it was said that the French did not implement racist policies for the Kurds. This facilitates the integration of Kurds into French society, enables them to live more comfortably

in society, and prevents the formation of prejudice against the French on the part of Kurds. Of course, the fact that discrimination against Kurds is at the lowest level minimizes the need for Kurds to be accepted in society and they do not have to repeat the experiences they had in Turkey. The respect of the French society and the Kurdish society for each other accelerates the integration, and until today, there have been no major events between these two societies. Of course, it is much more beneficial for the two communities and the country for the integration to occur as quickly as possible. In another interview, Berfin said that he did not have any problems adapting to France other than the language:

*I think Kurds are particularly popular in France. When I am asked where I am from and I say I am Kurdish, the older generation French people welcome me very warmly and their gestures and facial expressions can change suddenly, but I cannot say this for the new generation, they do not take this situation into consideration very much.*

Rojbin, who continues her PHD education in Paris, has a same opinion and confirms that she has not encountered any racism as a Kurdish woman, on the contrary, there is sympathy for the Kurds at some points, but she does not want the French to pity her because she is a Kurd.

*For example, there is sympathy towards the Kurds in France, this is true, especially in the French academy. They have great respect for Kurdish women warriors. If you are Kurdish and a woman, they respect you very much and of course I am proud of this. However, I have to point out that I do not want to be pitied because I am a Kurd. I do not want this feeling of pity to give me an advantage in my academic and social life. That's why I don't talk about my experiences in Turkey easily.*

It is the responsibility of the French government and institutions to help Kurds adjust to life in France, but it can also be a significant effort that migrants put in order to integrate as soon as possible. Societies that have difficulty adapting in case they spend their time in their own community and have difficulty in making any individual development for this reason. For instance, it is stated that thousands of members of the Turkish diaspora in Germany are unable to integrate into German society and even do not speak the language, even after years of residence.

An additional argument asserts that Kurdish students can enrol in Kurdish language, literature, or history courses offered by French universities. This is a chance for the Kurds to expand and preserve their cultural identities also It enables the increase in the number of Kurdish

academics. Meanwhile, Kurds can integrate into French society quite easily because of these reasons.

Besides that the active political Kurdish movement in France is aware of is that activism and lobbying activities cannot be successful without integration. In addition, one of the critical points we encounter in the diaspora is the opportunities that Kurdish organizations provide for Kurds. They offer various help options so that Kurds can adapt to the country as soon as possible. Various courses and activities are organized and it is a fact that this facilitates the adaptation of Kurds to French society. For example, the French language course they provide for Kurds makes it easier for Kurds to overcome the language barrier, while also contributing to their employment, success in education and increasing their social communication skills. Leyla states that the French lessons she took contributed a lot to her educational life and that the French lessons provided by the Kurdish Cultural Center contributed greatly to this. She is currently continuing her master's degree in Paris.

*In the Kurdish cultural center, music instrument courses and folklore lessons are held, as well as French language courses for Kurds. When I first came here, I took a French language course. These courses were very important for me to adapt to French society much more easily. Most courses were provided free of charge, and symbolic fees were paid for those that were not free. In general, the Kurdish Cultural Center made an incredible contribution to my adaptation to France, both in terms of language and socialization.*

One of the Kurdish organizations aim to minimize the problems that Kurds in the diaspora experience, there are some differences regarding the contributions of the Paris Kurdish Institute and the Kurdish Cultural Center to the diaspora. The Kurdish Institute is an organization that generally carries out academic studies, cultural activities, and undertakes the mission of preserving the Kurdish language and literature. One of the points where the Kurdish Cultural Center differs from the Paris Cultural Center is that it assists Kurds with immigration procedures (especially asylums). In addition, the institute does not provide French language courses, but instead provides language courses in different dialects of Kurdish. Apart from courses such as folklore or music education, institute prefers to organize seminars, conferences, concerts or film festivals in order to protect and develop the Kurdish language and literature. For example, in October, a conference on the Kurdish diaspora was held with academics and politicians from many parts of the world. The Kurdish film festivals they organize every year also serve this purpose. These different approaches of these two organizations complement each other in supporting the social integration of the diaspora in France.

*Here, the Kurdish Institute is trying to do its best regarding integration, but unlike the Kurdish Cultural Center, the Institute has a slightly more diplomatic mission. The position of the Kurdish Cultural Center is very different from the institute. It is a completely political organization and a political platform. They have no connection with the academy. They are trying to mobilize the Kurdish mass. Two organizations with different missions.*

Although these are the differences between the two organizations in terms of social context, the power of the Kurdish Cultural Center to organize and manage large organizations may seem a little weaker than the institute, but the fact that the institute receives funds and donations from different states and institutions may have an effect on this. Another important activity of the institute is that it provides scholarships to a certain number of Kurdish students every year. However, these scholarships are given to the Kurds of Turkey, Syria and Iran because the representatives of the Iraqi Kurds from the Iraqi Regional Kurdish Administration are in France.

### **3.3: Political Mobilization and Activism within Kurdish Diaspora**

It is obvious that it is very difficult for us to estimate the real population of Kurds in Europe, and in addition, according to Khayati, it is equally difficult in France because they apply to the French state authorities as Iranian, Iraqi, Turkish and Syrian citizens. However, for over 60 years, a sizable population of Kurdish immigrants has called France home. They are a very diverse population, spread throughout many different regions of France, and just as varied as they were prior to coming here. When did Kurds first start migrating to France? It is known that the Kurds first came to France in the 1960s. The French government was looking for foreign workers in the 1960s, and in line with the agreement they made with the Turkish government, 15 thousand Kurds came to France along with the Turks. The number of Turks was around 30 thousand. The majority of them settled or were settled in the Alsaca-Lorraine region (Bozarslan, 1998). Kurds and Turks who came to France in those years were generally employed in construction works and restaurants (Khayati 2008).

However, the first generation of political Kurdish refugees in France arrived following the political upheavals in Iran, Turkey, and Iraq in the 1980s. This group possessed strong political awareness and intellectual capital, which were valuable assets that enabled them to pursue higher education or carry on with their political involvement in the new society. This refugee group's defining characteristic was their familiarity with the concept of national struggle. Despite being

dispersed throughout France; Kurds are slightly more densely populated in the east. They may be regarded as part of the first wave of Kurdish immigrants to France, having come from Kurdish villages in southeast Turkey. But it is certain that Kurdish diaspora in France is dominated by Kurds from Turkey. However, it is known that in places where Kurds migrate, they generally concentrate on a certain part of the city where Kurds have already settled in order to avoid integration problems. In addition, it is possible to encounter the same lifestyles of Kurdish communities in Brittany and Normandy. In the Paris region, the Kurdish population, who live mainly in suburban areas, face social exclusion like other ethnic groups and struggle with it, while at the same time establishing their own diaspora associations and organizations (Khayati, 2008).

The war that happened between the PKK and Turkey was the reason for the Kurdish population's political migration to France in the 1980s. Eventually, the Kurds made their way to Europe during this time, fleeing from burning and destroyed houses as well as murders that were unsolved. considering this information, Khayati claims that the conflict between the PKK and Turkey was the reason behind the arrival of the first political refugees in France in the late 1980s. Although initially limited, the population of these Kurds would later start to rise in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In 2001, there were 5344 Kurds requesting political asylum from Turkey; by 2002, that number had increased to 6600. Although the number of Kurds leaving Turkey rises annually, between 1980 and 2002, over 50,000 Kurds settled in France (Mohseni, 2004).

As mentioned above, people who lost their homes and land had the difficulty of establishing a life elsewhere. These people frequently struggle with the psychological and emotional effects of being displaced, which is made worse by the real difficulties of starting over in a new place. The stories of a Kurdish young man who is currently studying Kurdish language and literature in France are first-hand evidence of these experiences:

*In the 1990s, villages were evacuated and burned, and we had to leave the village where I grew up. However, the state and authorities did not show us anywhere to go. We set out as a whole village and all my relatives started to migrate towards the west of Turkey, to Istanbul, Izmir and Mersin, and many of them never returned to their homeland.*

Another important aspect is that Kurds used their political and familial networks when they immigrated to Europe, which allowed them to settle countries like Germany, Sweden, France, and

the Netherlands (Baser 2013). Because Kurds made use of their social and political networks in the new countries they went to. For this reason, they were able to adjust quickly and overcome obstacles throughout this migration. The south of France was the Kurds' primary destination in this instance. (Khayati, 2008). These assertions are supported by Ahmet's comments made during the interview.

*I first came to the South of France because my uncle lived there, and it was easier for me. It was a region where Kurds lived intensely. At that time, political Kurds mostly stayed in the south, while economically minded ones preferred to go to the North of France.*

Apart from that talking about Kurdish organisations in France as one of the most successful organisation is 'the Kurdish Institute of Paris' holds a significant amount of influence over the activities of the Kurdish diaspora. It was established in February 1983 by intellectuals and artists of Kurdish descent. The Kurdish Institute describes itself as independent, secular, and non-political. It is composed largely of scholars and experts from the West. Its objectives include preserving and advancing Kurdish literature and language as well as contributing to and preserving Kurdish history and cultural heritage. Additionally, supporting in the integration of Kurdish immigrants in Europe is another reason to look for solutions to Kurdish problems.

They host numerous conferences and seminars on Kurdish literature, politics, culture, and social life in addition to their artistic and cultural initiatives. The institute is divided into five departments: information, human rights, art, language and literature, sociocultural activities, and social sciences. The Institute has continued its publication since its founding, actively publishing a magazine every month that contains information about Kurds and Kurdish geography. Furthermore, the Paris Kurdish Institute supports the academic endeavours of Kurdish students in France by providing a set yearly financial budget for a limited number of Kurdish students. Hundreds of Kurdish students have received scholarships from the Kurdish Institute to date, and 45% of the scholarship holders are women. (Kurdish Institut de Paris)

While the Paris Kurdish Institute is structurally successful, its board of directors includes representatives from the French Ministries of Culture, National Education, Internal Affairs and Social Affairs. In addition, the board of directors, which consists of 12 people, also includes Kurdish academics and intellectuals from Western countries such as England, Sweden, Germany, France and the USA. It is worth mentioning that, according to the Kurdish institute, some of its

financial support comes from donations, while the rest comes from different ministries in France, as well as the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Swedish International Development Agency, and the Swedish Olof Palme International Center (Kurdish Institut de Paris). In general, the Kurdish diaspora has actively carried the Kurdish issue to transnational levels, both locally and regionally, under the management of EU and UN authorities, and this makes them Europeanized (Hasimi 2013)

The Kurdish diaspora in France has established other associations in addition to the Paris Kurdish Institute. The first of these, known as the Kurdish Cultural Centre (Ahmet Kaya Cultural Centre), was founded in 1993 in the Paris region where there is a high concentration of Kurds. It is possible to state that their goal is to denounce and stop the discrimination and various forms of human rights violations that the Kurds have been exposed to. By maintaining contact with French human rights organisations and state and government officials, this association hopes to raise awareness of the Kurdish conflict.

Moreover, the Kurdish Cultural center aims to “alert the international community to the situation of the Kurdish people”, mainly by participating in meetings of the United Nations Human Rights Commissions, the Council of Europe and the European Union parliament. It is also tasked with informing the French public about the cultural activities of the Kurds, for example by publishing magazines and reports, as well as organizing seminars and conferences (Khayati, 2008). Kurdish organizations' participation in these and similar meetings and conducting lobbying activities can be effective. By increasing the awareness of European organizations about the Kurdish issue, for example, pressure can be put on Turkey regarding human rights (Kelly 2002). In addition, the Kurdish diaspora plays a very effective role in Turkey's entry into the European Union, and after the European Union takes this concern of the Kurds into consideration, Turkey faced many difficult experiences in the field of diplomacy (Baser, 2013).

Apart from this, it is claimed that there are a total of 26 associations, large or small, belonging to the Kurdish diaspora in France. One of these big associations between them is the Fédération des Associations Kurdes en France (FEYKAKurdistan), which was founded in the early 1990s, and its name was changed in 2014 to Kurdish Democratic Council in France (CDF-K). They identify themselves as it follows:

*''As provided for in its statutes, the mission of the CDK-F is to help bring together the members of the Kurdish community, to safeguard and improve the language of the latter, its identity and its values, to defend its freedoms, its social, cultural, economic and political rights, while respecting those of other communities and universal values, ... Since its creation in 1994, the CDKF has been working to make the Kurds, their culture, their language and their political situation known in each of the countries that divide Kurdistan. ''*

CDF-K is the primary Kurdish representative organisation in France and engages in national campaigns to uphold the rights of the Kurdish people and object to all forms of discrimination against them. It therefore represents the French political creation in this role. At the political level, it primarily works to increase public knowledge of and support for the democratic confederalism project that the Kurdish movement is currently trying to implement in Rojava (Western Kurdistan, Syria). CDK-F also aims to be a bridge between Kurds and other communities living in France. Finally, CDF-K states that they are part of the European Kurdistan Democratic Society Congress (KCDK-E), a network of Kurdish associations in Europe (Kurdish Democratic Council in France).

It is worthwhile to bring up the European Kurdistan Democratic Society Congress at this time. The headquarters located in Charleroi, Belgium, KCDK-E, also known as KON-KURD until 2014, is a confederation of European Kurdish associations. Numerous European nations have member federations; certain associations in Australia and Canada are also members of the federation. KCDK-E is the biggest organisation of Kurds in exile. Its membership is primarily made up of Kurds from Turkey. The PKK is currently included on the lists of terrorist groups by numerous European nations. (Khayati, 2008). The fact that this organisation is perceived as the political front of the PKK in Europe is one of the main questions it has faced. The name of PKK's front line has never been able to be forgotten by KCDK-E, which has never lost its PKK party line. Also, obviously, he is also part of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe. it is "trans-state" in that it includes at least one member from Iraqi Kurdistan and seeks to strengthen the representation of other parts. Finally, it is transnational in that its permanent offices are located in Belgium and are concentrated in different European countries, including the Netherlands, Denmark, Russia and Italy. it acts as the diplomatic representative of the Kurds as well as Kurdish Institute of Paris and has established contacts with many parties and personalities in Europe. (Bruinessen 1999). According to Bruinessen, who continues with other influential Kurdish organizations in the world, and states that, one of the most significant organisation for Kurds in the nation's capital, the Washington Kurdish Institute serves the same purposes and is in the position of the Kurdish lobby. Kurdish human rights organisations based in London and Bonn have successfully drawn attention to Turkey's treatment of

Kurds from both domestic and international organisations. As a result, the European Commission on Human Rights has repeatedly condemned Turkey and put pressure on the nation from international organisations like Turkey. has opened. The Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe

On the other hand, the organised activity of the European Kurdish diaspora is commended, which is another significant detail worth mentioning. Political perceptions of the Kurdish diaspora as the "best organised diaspora community" in Europe are based on a number of studies, including one by Bahar Başer. This ability to organize is of course thanks to the associations and institutes they have established, and this enables them to feel a strong sense of Kurdish identity. The reason behind the success of the Kurdish diaspora in being well organized can be shown that although they come from Turkey, Iraq, Syria, and Iran, they act towards a single goal. For instance, for the first time the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey, Syria and Iran all participated in New Year (Nevruz) events together, and this made a collective Kurdish identity more evident and contributed to their progress towards a single goal (Sheyholislami, 2011). In addition, the Kurds' involvement in activism and social organization, such as establishing associations or gathering in various organizations and meetings, as soon as they set foot in Europe, it can be seen is one of the reasons of their success as well.

Even though the Kurdish diaspora is regarded as one of the best organised in all of Europe, disputes and issues may arise within it. Social affiliations and political disagreements are frequently the root causes of these divisions. These divisions often arise from political differences and social loyalties. For example, the political lines of the Kurdish Cultural Center and CDFK can be considered the same. Both associations organize their infrastructure through the PKK and the organizations supported by the PKK. generally, any deeds or undertakings that are indicative of the PKK's political ideology. Although the Paris Kurdish Institute is described as independent and apolitical, some claim that, at least in some years, it was backed by the majority of Kurdish political parties other than PKK. Another claim is made by PKK supporters that the head of the Kurdish Institute in Paris, while meeting with French officials, shared information about PKK that was inappropriate or should not be given to (Khayati 2008). Even though there are some disagreements within the diaspora, as mentioned before, all diaspora Kurds can have the ability to act together when the time comes. For example, after the attack on the Kurdish Cultural Centre on December 23, 2022, which caused the death of three Kurds, they all acted together in protests, commemorations, and some events that would last for days.

### 3.4: Political Pressures and Diaspora Dynamics: The Kurdish Response to Erdogan's Policies

Kurds, who are constantly encountering policies of exclusion and othering, are forced to experience a lack of a sense of belonging. It is another reason in which the repressive policies they have faced increase the Kurds' feelings of nationalism. In addition, many scholars agree with that Kurds are one of the most organized diasporas among the others. The reason is that the sense of nationalism exists strongly in the Kurdish diaspora.

One of the contributions of nationalism to the diaspora can be expressed as the Kurds feel themselves together and meet around a common identity. In particular, the Kurds, who are away from their own homeland, can bring feelings of nationalism to the forefront because they are likely to enter into an identity concern. They can also feel the feeling of remembering and protecting their identities (Alinia & Eliassi 2014). From another perspective, many scholars have studied on and concluded, and that the Kurdish diaspora contributed to the spread and strengthening of Kurdish nationalism (Alinia 2004; Eliassi 2013; Emanuelson 2005; Hassanpour 1998; Khayati 2008; Wahlbeck 1999)

Other than this, identity confusion is not a phenomenon observed in diasporas. Kurds in the diaspora feel obliged to protect their language, and cultural identity because of Erdoğan's policies. The diaspora in France is one place where this awareness of preserving Kurdish identity is very apparent. Rojbin says the following. "Undoubtedly, Erdogan's policies in Turkey increase the feelings of nationalism in the diaspora. Despite such assimilation and oppressive policies, those who have strived to preserve Kurdish identity in Turkey continue to do so in the diaspora. After experiencing these policies, the Kurds in the diaspora not only protect their identity, but also find the opportunity to express it more clearly. The common theme in the answers I have received is the determination to protect their identities in Turkey under the Erdogan regime.

*While I was living in Diyarbakir, I always grew up feeling Kurdish. I always had information about the Kurdish issue, Kurdish history. I felt much more in Turkey's need to protect my Kurdish identity. When I talked to someone who is not Kurdish, I could focus on any details that the person said because it could be a fascist mentality underneath. In France, if a person asked that question 'where am I From' I always say Kurdistan.*

France is home to a large Kurdish population, which is because the Kurds in France have more freedom of expression. Because of this independence, the Kurdish people are allowed to live

their identities and cultural heritage publicly. As a result of France's freedom of expression, the Kurdish diaspora feels stronger and unity.

*Even the children of the people who came to France many years ago, preserve their own culture and language very well. I prefer a person who grew up in that assimilation policies in Turkey and feels that assimilation practices and fascism deeply and Thus, I can dominate the small details of the Kurdish identity, and it makes me better understanding the Kurdish identity here.*

Here's another statement of how Kurdish identity is maintained in Turkey and the diaspora:

*I have always felt like a Kurd. I was born to a Kurdish mother and father. This was the same in Turkey and here in France. Almost no one in my village spoke Turkish. I have never felt like I belonged to another culture. That's why I sometimes say, Kurdish is my mother tongue, Turkish is my stepmother's language, and French is my language of choice.*

Regarding the identity argument, it is also important to take into account the French that the Kurdish diaspora communicates with. According to Khayati (2008), the French have a strong sense of identity and a natural urge to maintain their cultural norms. But as is evident, Kurds in France have no trouble expressing who they are and expressing their identities. This indicator shows us that it is a result of the value France attaches to multiculturalism and individual freedom. In other words, the French do not pursue a policy such as Turkification, which the Turks applied and mandated to the Kurds. As a result, it increases the Kurds' motivation to adapt to French society and also increases the integration process. For example, as seen in this example, a family came to France to keep their Kurdish identity alive.

*Thanks to my father, I learned the Kurdish identity and language. He was constantly talking to us about this when we were in Turkey. He always told us 'that we should be proud of our Kurdish identity and that there was nothing to be ashamed of.' That's why I always protected my Kurdish identity. My father was doing legal politics in Turkey. However, after a while, we had to leave Turkey suddenly because it was impossible for my father to stay in Turkey anymore. That's why we had to come to France right away and in a illegal way because we did not have option.*

It is valuable to share the responses I received from the people I contacted and interviewed for my research on this subject. Firstly, it is important to note that both the Paris Kurdish Institute and the Kurdish Cultural Centre speak Kurdish as their first language and preference. I am of Kurdish descent, and I think that Turkey's assimilation practices are to blame for my poor Kurdish

language skills. But because none of the people I reached out could not speak Kurdish with me because of my basic Kurdish, and the first things I always got back was, "This is a shame," and "How can you not know Kurdish as a Kurd?" This may be taken as criticism, of course, but in my opinion, Kurds' natural desire to stand by their language and identity is the source of these actions. Lack of knowledge of one's original tongue is thought to diminish cultural identification for some diaspora communities. As a Kurd, not speaking Kurdish at a good level may cause the diaspora to not be welcomed, but for them, language is perceived as the most important issue that strengthens identity and belonging.

In addition, Kurds can be more active and determined in terms of protecting and promoting their cultural identity and language against Erdogan's policies. As Leyla said, "Our purpose in coming to France is to live and keep our identity alive." In addition, the Kurds' response to Erdogan in practice can generally be street actions and protests. This can happen after any decision against the law or action against the Kurds in Turkey. The biggest proof that the diaspora stands against Erdogan and leaders like Erdogan can be shown as the increase in the number of Kurdish organizations and some formations over the years.

*There has been a project on Kurds in Turkey for 40-50 years. The oppressive policies applied to the Kurds during the Ottoman period, Atatürk's period, or the Republic period remained the same and never changed. Even though the leaders change, the policies of the Turkish state remain the same. Erdoğan is just another leader who is currently implementing these policies.*

On the other hand, while Erdogan's Turkey's hate speech and policies against the Kurds in Europe continue, its constant coverage in the Turkish media pits Kurds and Turks in the diaspora against each other, and sometimes these events can turn into violence. As if it is not enough for the government to continue these policies within Turkey, continuing these policies in the Kurdish diasporas in Europe and it may have dangerous consequences. The impact of this extends to international organizations and Kurds may be subjected to discrimination. What Ahmet said proves these claims.

*Previously, for example, it was not easy to hang signs in Kurdish in Kurdish restaurants in France, and even the attackers raided the restaurant. But now such events are happening, but not as much as before, because the Kurdish population in France is much higher than before. For example, you can take part in an international festival in France as an artist, as long as you do not say that you are Kurdish. If you tell them, there will be discrimination and it will be*

*very difficult for them to accept you to the festival. And I can give you dozens of examples that have already happened. This is both because of foreigners and probably because there are Arabs and Turks among the organizers. They are allergic to Kurds. For example, let's say they accept you, they try to write you as a Turkish artist in the advertising posters of festivals or events, not with your Kurdish identity.*

Erdogan's language and tactics make it clear that his government considers Kurds or Kurdish activists living abroad as potential targets. While we must acknowledge that Turkish intelligence services are tracking Kurds who have left Turkey, Kurdish activists and political enthusiasts are increasingly becoming targets, not just in the region of Kurdistan but also throughout Europe. One interpretation of these policies, which have Erdoğan's backing, is to intimidate the Kurds in the diaspora in order to keep them from mobilising.

*Erdogan is still trying to control the Kurds here. There is a policy that to turn France into an intelligence center against the Kurds. There is a policy of spying. For example, here in France and other parts of Europe, Turkish agents follow some Kurds and threaten their families and make certain demands. There are many examples like this in France, which we witnessed. For example, the uncle of an 18-year-old child was martyred in Turkey, but the child was not a politicized child at all. Turkish agents went after the child here.*

In Erdogan's Turkey, there are many human rights violations and many unlawful arrests that should be included within the scope of freedom of expression. These policies affect everyone living in Europe, whether they are activists or not, and they cannot escape or ignore Erdogan's policies. Kurds may face numerous challenges because they are under constant surveillance by the Turkish government.

Another effect of Erdoğan on the diaspora is, for example, a man goes to Turkey with his family, but they arrest him at the airport. The reason is that there is a photo on his social media, and they are arresting this person for making terrorist propaganda. However, the man went to the cultural center to commemorate a funeral and behind the photo was a person carrying the picture of Abdullah Ocalan. There are many examples like this that we can give it. For example, someone is arrested while entering Turkey because he shared a social media post about Selahattin Demirtaş.

On the other hand, due to pressure from Turkey during the Erdogan administration, the Danish courts closed the Kurdish television networks Nûçe and MMC. This occurrence appears to point to yet another example of Turkey's harsh foreign policies regarding Kurds and Kurdish media.

The Turkish government has consistently claimed that these channels were connected to the PKK in NATO and other international stages. Türkiye attempted to take advantage of the situation by using it as a diplomatic trump card against Denmark without hesitation. For example, for this reason, former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh vetoed Rasmussen's candidacy for NATO Secretary General. It is claimed that these meetings between Turkey and Denmark are also included in Wikileaks documents. Later, Denmark fulfilled Turkey's request and closed the channels. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs later officially announced that ‘they welcomed’ Denmark’s decision. These developments caused a great reaction in the Kurdish diaspora and were described as an attack on freedom of expression. Kurdish authorities would later move their media channels to Brussels, and they continue their service in Belgium.

As we can understand from here, Turkey follows the activities of the Kurdish diaspora in Europe very closely. Turkish officials are also using their diplomatic power to try to minimize the opportunities provided by European countries to the Kurdish diaspora. As can be understood from the fact that France and Erdogan have not had very good relations in the political arena lately, this situation does not upset the Kurdish diaspora. Of course, the fact that Turkey cannot use its diplomatic power in France for now does not mean that it cannot use it when governments change. When asked about the relations between Turkey and France, the common answer received from the interviews was that they were very satisfied with this.

*In my opinion, I would like the diplomatic relations between France and Turkey to get worse rather than get better. Erdogan's relations with France or the closeness it may establish may be more shocking than in other European countries because there is a bureaucratic lobby run by the Kurdish institute here. Municipalities have good relations directly with Kurdish associations, so because of that there may be political activity in France. The other day the minister of culture changed; she became a very right-wing woman from the Sarkozy era. A change there would change the system of the entire diaspora, for example it could affect the budgets or activities given to Kurdish associations.*

The consensus was the same in another response.

*The improvement in relations between Erdoğan and the French government means very bad days for the Kurdish diaspora. Because all our information can be shared with the Erdogan government, and this does not make us feel safe here. Living in France would be no different from living in Turkey.*

Aside with all of this informations, in 2013 there was an attack that greatly impacted and angered the Kurdish diaspora. A Turkish guy murdered three Kurdish women in the Kurdish Information Centre. Among those who murdered were Sakine Cansız, who was believed to have been the founding leader of the PKK and Kurdistan National Congress, Fidan Doğan, the president of the Kurdish Information Centre, and young Kurdish activist Leyla Söylemez. The attacker of this crime, which was planned and executed by a Turk at the Kurdish information centre, passed away while under arrest eventually. In addition, after living in Germany for a while, Sakine Cansız moved to France at Turkey's request to be extradited to Germany. Turkey was going after Sakine, who was allegedly one of the PKK's original members.

Furthermore, the Turkish Intelligence Agency (MIT) denied any involvement in the incident, although a Turkish news channel released the tape of a meeting between two Turkish spies and an individual believed to be a killer, as well as a paper titled "duty order." Speaking on behalf of one of the slain victims, the purported attorney said that during the proceedings, a court file demonstrated the killer's contact and affiliation with MIT. The case was closed in 2015 despite the lack of proof, with the statement that "Turkish agents may have been involved in this incident." However, after so many unanswered questions and the lack of any criminal action, the families of the dead requested a re-investigation in 2017 (New York Times, 2013).

*I think Erdogan gave the order for the attack that took place here in 2013. For example, during the investigation of this incident, when it was understood that the incident had a relationship with Erdogan, the case was immediately closed as a state secret. In other words, it has been proven that Turkey has a relationship with this incident. The court stopped the investigation as a state secret, this is very clear.*

Speaking about this occurrence, every Kurd I met with who was residing in Paris claimed that MIT and the Turkish government were behind this execution. Marches and demonstrations were planned in the wake of this occurrence. Kurds blamed Turkey for the event both during and after it happened, and they also urged the French authorities to provide more information. They also expressed dissatisfaction over the Kurds' lack of life security and France's inadequate protection of them.

Furthermore, as we can see here, Kurdish political activism and mobilisation in France gained up even more momentum after this 2013 tragedy. In terms of social movements, the harmed

societies typically become more politically aware and active following such incidents. Kurds in the diaspora continue to be politicised despite the fact that the Turkish state's deportation efforts raise security concerns for them. When considering this case from the perspective of collective action, we can see that Kurdish resistance and unity against threats and persecution have strengthened. Leyla's response, for instance, to these killings in France is as follows.

*We somehow escaped from Turkey's oppression and came here, and we are being killed here too. So for some reason, there is systematic oppression and massacres against the Kurds all over the world. In my opinion, this is not a coincidence and who is our enemy? The Turkish state, and Erdogan. Who else could be committing these actions?*

In 2022, another incident similar to the 2013 attack took place in areas dominated by Kurds. Three individuals in Paris were hurt and three people, including two ladies and a man, died in the incident. The dead were an activist, a Kurdish musician, and the person said to be running the cafe at the Cultural Centre. Due to the widespread impact of this attack, Kurds from several European nations began gathering in Paris. The crime, carried out by a 69-year-old Frenchman, happened in an area mainly populated by Kurds. After attacking the Kurdish centre, the attacker moved on to target the Kurdish restaurant and the Kurdish-owned barbershop. Kurds had many doubts about this occurrence, even if the French authorities claimed it was carried out for racist reasons. Kurds wonder why they've become the target of this attack given the large number of immigrant communities in Paris (France24, 2022).

Because of the incident that happened in 2013 and resulted in the deaths of three Kurds, the memories of those people were still extremely raw. Following the event, the Kurdish Democratic Council's spokesperson in France, Berivan Fırat, would release a statement saying, "We are not protected at all. In ten years, six Kurdish activists were slain in the heart of Paris." Following the tragedy, marches and protests that lasted for days were organised in Paris, gathering people from all across Europe. Slogans criticising Turkey and Erdoğan in particular saying that "Erdogan is the one behind this assault," as well as the French government for its inadequate protection of the Kurds, were carried out during these demonstrations. (Sabah, 2022) Following the tragedy, a lot of Kurds worried about their personal safety. In addition, one of the common points of the comments was that this incident was not so innocent and all the blame should not be attributed to an old racist man.

*This is actually something that feels very unsafe, because three women have already been murdered in the most central part of Paris during daylight hours. It feels incredibly unsafe to have such an attack after the previous incident. It doesn't make sense to me. It doesn't make sense for an 80-year-old man to go there and have someone drive him to the scene. Of course, since MIT was responsible for the previous massacre, for example, I think that man was trained and manipulated by MIT or DAES while he was in prison. In addition, the Kurdish cultural center had previously received many threats and reported them to the police and French authorities, and no protection was even sent. Afterwards, when I went to the Kurdish Institute, I was thinking about how I would protect myself in case of an attack. Even my mother told me to go to Paris and relax, but this also happens when I come here. If you are a Kurd, you are not safe wherever you go.*

Everyone seemed to be in agreement that Erdogan was either responsible for this incident or they weren't sure whether Erdogan was. One important point to note is that, even if we examine both theories, Erdoğan's supporters in the diaspora remain concerned. Erdoğan is the first name that springs to mind in a tragedy or execution. However, even if we presume that Erdoğan and Turkey have nothing to do with this occurrence, it is still important to talk about the reality that the Kurds living abroad are worried about him. This might come from how the Kurds are perceived and portrayed as a result of Erdogan's policies. Upon further examination, it is evident that Erdogan's actions affect the Kurds' daily lives. Kurds in the diaspora express concern about their safety when visiting the Institute or any other Kurdish organisation, which suggests that it has an impact on their day-to-day existence as well. As a demonstration, one of the responses was:

*For example, I remember that during that week, during that month, I had a bag that said Kurdish film festival. For example, I did not wear that bag because someone could actually take a gun and kill me because I am Kurdish.*

Another point that should be mentioned is that this incident caused thousands of Kurds to come together and act together. These and related incidents, as we have before underlined, strengthen the sense of nationalism and social consciousness. This conclusion is supported by Bilal's response to this subject.

*There is ambiguity (no clarity) in terms of protecting the Kurds here or attacks against the Kurds, and I don't like it. As I said, there is always risk, but this does not prevent you from thinking about it because you know that there are risks when you make your choice. In fact, these deaths personally enable me to be more active and contribute more to the Kurdish struggle.*

Consequently, such events in France or in different parts of Europe create a sense of anger against Erdogan and Turkey. When there is an attack or any diplomatic developments against Kurds throughout Europe, Kurds unite as a single body. The most notable instance of this is the current discussion around Sweden's admission in NATO and Erdogan's veto of that country. He wanted certain Kurds—who Erdoğan called terrorists—to be deported from Sweden and placed in Turkey. Erdogan intended to use Kurds in a political tool again. In the diaspora, these and similar incidents create greater anger towards Erdogan and, also encouraging an increase in Kurdish nationalism. Erdoğan and Turkey are not happy about the rise of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey and the diaspora. Meanwhile, Erdoğan's harsh actions are not having the desired effect on the Kurdish diaspora and may perhaps have the reverse effect. Furthermore, it strengthens the Kurdish identity and encourages the growth of solidarity networks and political activism.

## CONCLUSION

The study of the Kurdish diaspora in France is an important point to present a complex and multidimensional narrative, emphasizing the persistent resilience of the Kurdish community, the preservation of collective cultural consciousness, and political activism. This study examines in depth the socio-political and integration challenges faced by Kurds in France in terms of the historical context and their contributions and experiences both at home and in the host country.

Historically, the Kurds have been subjected to a constant policy of discrimination, expulsion, and systematic marginalization. While the formation of Kurdish diasporas progressed until the time of the Ottoman Empire, their diaspora formation continued at an even faster pace during the establishment of the Turkish Republic under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Due to Atatürk's strict policy of secularisation and nationalism, a policy of marginalisation, systematic assimilation, and destruction of minorities, especially the Kurds, was developed in the country. This systematic assimilation and other discriminatory measures adopted by Atatürk were continued by other Turkish leaders. In any case, this policy continued unabated and even intensified in Turkey under the Erdoğan government. Kurds began to migrate abroad rapidly under the Erdoğan government and had to establish a strong diaspora in some European countries. This long-standing policy of oppression and expulsion has shaped the collective identities and experiences of Kurds in the diaspora.

The immigration of Kurds to France took place in several waves at different times for political and economic reasons. The first Kurds to emigrate to France were generally intellectuals and students seeking better educational and employment opportunities. This wave of migration was followed by Kurds who emigrated in the 1970s and 1980s for political reasons and because of the increasing violence in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. Severe repression during these years, economic instability, and the difficulties caused by major earthquakes can be cited as further reasons that prompted a significant number of Kurds to migrate to Europe. The continued migration of Kurds to France and Europe also shows that the political and economic instability in their own country is gradually worsening.

The ability of Kurds to adapt in France shows that integration is very successful compared to other diaspora communities. Despite the language barrier, economic difficulties, and social discrimination that any diaspora may initially face, the Kurds have managed to form an organised community thanks to strong ties of solidarity. The Kurdish Cultural Centre and the Kurdish Institute in Paris played an important role in the formation of these strong networks. Thanks to the support of the Kurdish Cultural Centre and the Kurdish Institute in Paris in language courses, cultural activities, and immigration issues, the integration of Kurds in France has become easier. These initiatives by Kurdish organisations not only preserved their cultural identity, but also enabled them to actively participate in socio-economic and political life.

One of the most important characteristics of the Kurdish diaspora in France is that they are politically active. This activism, which is clearly felt in the diaspora, also plays an important role in the defence of Kurdish rights and in addressing the Kurdish question on the international stage. Activities such as protests against Erdogan's policies, strategic lobbying and participation in European Union commissions contribute to the geopolitical discussion. These activist efforts not only draw attention to the Kurdish question and strengthen loyalty to the homeland and Kurdish identity. To summarize, the Kurdish diaspora in France represents the collective Kurdish cultural identity, the preservation and strengthening of their culture and literature, and political activism. Despite these difficulties, Kurds in the French diaspora can keep abreast of developments in their homeland and continue their political work in this sense both in France and internationally.

When we talk about the impact of Erdogan, especially on the Kurdish diaspora, the first result is that Kurdish activism is increasing in intensity. The Kurds and the Kurdish diaspora have been greatly impacted by Erdoğan's policies and hate speech. Erdoğan's increasingly authoritarian stance is demonstrated by his use of the Kurds as a political tool in inter-state diplomacy, his military operations in Kurdish areas, the closure of Kurdish political organisations in Turkish politics, and the imprisonment of their leaders. Erdoğan's strategy has had a significant effect on the position of Kurds overseas as well as the geography of Kurdistan in the area. In the Kurdish diaspora, one of the most significant effects of Erdogan's oppressive, anti-human rights policies has been a rise in Kurdish nationalism, which has in turn helped Kurdish activism spread to new audiences. The Kurds are continuing and expanding their international lobbying efforts.

The results and indicators of this study go beyond Kurdish society and offer a different perspective to different diaspora groups and policymakers. Based on the experiences of the Kurdish diaspora in France, it can contribute to inclusive and supportive integration policies and encourage issues related to social harmony. Moreover, the political activism of the Kurdish diaspora in France has the power to influence the policies of both the home country and the host country, emphasising that the diaspora can be a bridge between cultures and countries. On the other hand, the increasing number of migration and integration problems in the world makes this study important and provides important information about the integration of immigrants, the preservation of their identities, and the protection of their rights.

Lastly, it is also important how the gender dynamic works in the Kurdish political organisation in France. Women influence not only activism but also human rights organisations, including leadership positions in political organisations both in Turkey and in other countries. At this point, it might be important to examine both the influence they have on Kurdish society and the difficulties they face in French society. Although it is a fact how important Kurdish women have been in political activism and the Kurdish struggle throughout history, the issue of gender intersection in the Kurdish diaspora in France deserves to be further researched. Research on how gender affects the roles and experiences of Kurdish women activists in the diaspora can provide us with deeper statistics and information.

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