7. KURDISH DIASPORA POLITICS, 1990-2004

The Turkish case in the previous chapter showed how specific political opportunities in Turkey affected migrant organisation-building in the Netherlands. It also illustrated how third country transnational ties and the use of supranational opportunity structures have been especially relevant for groups excluded from political participation in their homelands. This chapter continues this line of analysis for (self-identifying) Kurds living in the Netherlands. It focuses on the impact of the political climate and opportunity structure in Turkey, new Dutch and European opportunity structures, and third country and ethnic transnational ties on Kurdish diaspora politics.

The following section sketches the growth of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey in the 1970s up to the 1980 coup. The subsequent sections describe the strategies of two illegal Kurdish political parties in Turkey and in exile, and those of legal pro-Kurdish and Kurdish parties in the 1990s. Thereafter the chapter focuses on the mobilisation of the PKK in Europe, the organisation which dominated the ‘Kurdish question’ in Turkey and Kurdish activities in the Netherlands in the 1990s. The final section examines how two Kurdish parties in exile and two legal Kurdish parties in Turkey were represented by migrant organisations in the Netherlands and Europe between 2002 and 2004, and how they are embedded in the organisational network in figure 4.3.

The growth of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey in the 1970s

The Turkish Workers Party (TİP) was the first legal party to recognise Kurds in 1970. This led to its closure by the constitutional court and the prosecution of its leaders for encouraging activities to divide the country (Ahmad 1993: 311). Kurds had been prominent in Marxist groups in the 1970s and were engaged in street fighting with extreme right youths (Poulton 1997: 212). This period saw the founding of two important Kurdish parties, the Socialist Party of Turkish Kurdistan (PSKT) and the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK). Their leaders had roots in the workers party TİP and the student movement Dev Genç, respectively (see appendix F).

The PSKT saw Turkey as colonising the Kurdish people. It desired independence for the Kurdish nation but remained open to a federal solution. In any case, the Kurdish question should be solved by democratic means.249 The Marxist-Leninist PKK was equally opposed to the ‘Turkish imperialism’ that prevailed in ‘Turkish Kurdistan’ (Güney 2002: 123). It aspired to a united and independent socialist Kurdistan (including the Kurdish regions of Iraq, Iran and Syria) through a ‘national democratic’ revolution (White 2000: 142). The PKK strategy was to mobilise

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destitute social classes, uprooted small-town youths and poor peasants against landlords and traditional chiefs cooperating with the central government in Ankara (Taspinar 2005: 95). For the PKK the intensity of Kurdish national feeling was accentuated by the loss of spoken Kurdish among its founding members (McDowall 1996: 419).

The 1982 constitution contained specific provisions to strengthen cultural and political suppression in the southeastern provinces mainly inhabited by Kurds. These provisions completely prohibited the spoken and written use of the Kurdish language and were based on one of the founding principles of the Turkish nation-state, the ‘denial of Kurdish ethnicity and cultural identity’ (Taspinar 2005: 96-97).

After the 1980 coup PSKT leader Kemal Burkay went into exile in Sweden. Most PKK leaders managed to flee Turkey after the coup; Öcalan settled in Damascus. With the help of the Syrian government he established training camps in the Beqa’a Valley where Syrian and Palestinian officers trained his guerrillas. The PKK continued its activities on Turkish soil from Syria and through Iraqi Kurdistan. The Iran-Iraq war, which started in 1982, had an important effect; the Iraqi side of the Iraqi-Turkish border came under the control of Mahmut Barzani’s Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK), which allowed the PKK to operate from the areas it controlled (Zürcher 2004 [1993]: 316). By the mid-1980s the PKK had become a professional organisation comprising a party proper, the Kurdistan National Liberation Army (ARGK) and its political wing the Kurdistan National Liberation Front (ERNK) (Poulton 1997: 230). The PKK also established educational programmes as well as women’s, student and youth sections (Özcan 2006: 198).

While political liberalisation was slowly gaining ground in the rest of Turkey, the government introduced martial law and a state of emergency in the majority of Kurdish provinces in 1986. An agreement between Ankara and Baghdad allowed Turkish forces to cross the border freely in case PKK forces took refuge in Iraqi territory. Turkish forces made no distinction between the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and PKK camps. This strained PKK-KDP cooperation in 1987 (Taspinar 2005: 100) and led to the PSKT renouncing the PKK’s ideology and strategy, which it labelled pure terrorism (Van Bruinessen 1998). The PSKT unsuccessfully united with various patriotic Kurdish forces in the anti-PKK alliance Tegeria Rizzariya Kurdistan (TEVGER, Kurdish Liberation Movement) in 1988. Though TEVGER was strengthened by defections from the PKK leadership, its leadership remained restricted to Kurdish communities in Europe (Zürcher 2004 [1993]: 314).

**Illegal Kurdish parties in the 1990s**

The two most important illegal Kurdish parties in the 1990s were Öcalan’s PKK and the Kurdistan Socialist Party (PSK, the successor of PSKT) under Burkay’s leadership. It was the PKK that dominated the Kurdish question in Turkey in the 1990s. The
military’s Spring Operation in 1992 was part of the ‘solution’ for the ‘Kurdish problem’ President Öal had announced earlier that year. Its aim was to defeat the uprising among Kurds protesting against the government’s policies, state terrorism and torture in the southeast. The protests, which began on a large scale in 1990, erupted after clashes between the PKK and Turkish troops and showed growing local sympathy for Kurdish nationalist aspirations. The PKK’s guerrilla wing ARGK claimed this broad support made the creation of ‘liberated zones’, where the PKK would be the sole political authority, imminent. Turkish troops had already started cross-border raids to hit PKK bases in Iraq, while the Turkish authorities suppressed all manifestations of Kurdishness. PKK activities nevertheless intensified in severity and scope and began to paralyse the southeast (White 2000: 164-166). In response the Turkish military began evacuating Kurdish villages in the southeast (for the Turkish scorched earth policy see Barkey & Fuller 1998: 133-156).

In 1998 Turkey issued an ultimatum to Syria: remove the PKK and expel Öal or risk military attack. Öal ordered his fighters out of Syria and left the country while Turkey and Syria reached an agreement on total opposition to the PKK. On the run seeking asylum and diplomatic protection in several countries, Öal was eventually kidnapped in Kenya and brought back to Turkey where he was detained (White 2000: 186).

After his arrest Öal remained the PKK leader from prison and urged the party to withdraw its fighters and seek a democratic solution (Taspinar 2005: 105-111). The majority of full-time guerrillas remained in the camps in northern Iraq (10,000 in early 2000). In 2002, the PKK – just before it was added to the EU list of terrorist organisations, and arguing that it had ceased its activities – renamed itself the Congress for Freedom and Democracy in Kurdistan (KADEK). KADEK installed itself in Brussels and termed its new strategy a democratic policy struggle (Cline 2004: 327). Since 2003 there have nevertheless been several breaches of the ‘ceasefire’. KADEK, unable to rid itself of the PKK label, dissolved in 2003 and founded the Peoples Congress of Kurdistan (KONGRA-GEL). KONGRA-GEL has maintained its guerrilla fighters in northern Iraq.

At the time of research, the KONGRA-GEL (the successor of the PKK and KNK, see next section) had an office in Brussels and its headquarters in the mountains of the Kurdish part of Iraq. Its administrative board comprises 30 members, 12 of whom reside in Europe. The whole congress counts 300 members working in various commissions. Leaders in Iraq develop activities on the ground, whereas the European desk has a diplomatic function: to introduce the party to the EU and to put the Kurdish question on the European agenda during negotiations for Turkish EU membership.250

250 Interview with PKDW, KNK and KONGRA-GEL founding member and member of the KONGRA-GEL administrative board and Foreign Affairs Commission, Hengelo, 27 April 2004.
The PSK works mainly from abroad, cooperating with organisations in Turkey and clandestinely spreading its publications there. The party declined to participate in the Kurdish Parliament in Exile, arguing that it was formed by the PKK and DEP without consulting other Kurdish groups (Kirişçi & Winrow 1998: 148). But when Öcalan asked for asylum in Italy in 1998, Burkay urged the Italian prime minister to give him refugee status. This seemed to indicate that years of competition between the PKK and other Kurdish movements was waning (Van Brinissen 1998).

Pro-Kurdish and Kurdish parties in the 1990s

Historically, Kurds in Turkey are represented in political parties and organisations that range from those promoting Turkish nationalism to illegal ones advocating a separate state. The workers parties TİP and İP, the Islamist FP and social democratic SHP have all taken up the Kurdish question in that they want it solved. Other parties such as the extreme right MHP, the social democratic DSP and conservative DYP deny there is a Kurdish question to begin with, arguing instead that the problem is one of terrorism (Kirişçi & Winrow 1998: 141-151). The political parties that took up the Kurdish question in the 1990s can be divided into legal Turkish parties, and legal and illegal Kurdish parties.

Mainstream and pro-Kurdish parties taking up the Kurdish issue continuously face threats to be banned and their deputies imprisoned (see family tree in appendix F). Seven Kurdish SHP parliamentarians were expelled from the party in 1989 for attending an international conference on the Kurdish question in Paris (Taspinar 2005: 102). In response they established the pro-Kurdish People’s Work Party (HEP), which merged with the SHP for the 1991 elections. When taking their oath in parliament, however, several former HEP politicians switched to the Kurdish language and displayed the PKK’s colours. Soon thereafter they left the SHP to re-establish the HEP, which was itself banned in 1993. The HEP was succeeded by the Democratic Party (DEP), whose leadership was divided on whether to support the PKK. More radical deputies such as Hatip Dicle and Leyla Zana declared the PKK was a political rather than a terrorist organisation and demanded a political solution to the Kurdish question. In 1994 six DEP deputies of Kurdish origin were arrested and sentenced to 15 years imprisonment. Shortly thereafter, the DEP was closed by the constitutional court for ‘making provocative statements against the Turkish Republic’ (Güney 2002: 124-125). A number of DEP parliamentarians sought refuge in Europe and founded the Kurdish Parliament in Exile (PKDW) in 1995. Other DEP members set up the People’s Democracy Party (HADEP) and the Democracy and Change Party (DDP).

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The DDP was short-lived. Its programme was seen as undermining the territorial integrity of the state and the unity of the Turkish nation, and the party was shut down in 1996.\textsuperscript{252} The DDP was succeeded by the Rights and Freedoms Party (HAK-PAR) in 2002, which advocates a democratic and civil resolution to the Kurdish issue and its associated violence. As the party aims to reach a solution via the EU, Turkish EU membership was one of its main concerns in the 2004 elections.\textsuperscript{253} The party blames the Turkish government for ignoring positive alternatives (such as itself) and focusing solely on the PKK: ‘The PKK and the Turkish Republic are in full agreement on non-settlement of the Kurdish issue. Under this frame, the Turkish Government does not allow development of any Kurdish opposition other than PKK.’\textsuperscript{254} HAK-PAR urges European governing institutes to help them out of their isolated position.\textsuperscript{255} The party also maintains good relations with Kurdish leaders in Iraq.\textsuperscript{256}

HADEP turned down Öcalan’s call to join the Kurdish Parliament in Exile (Kirişçi & Winrow 1998: 148) and managed to survive until 2003 by formally keeping its distance from the PKK. But after his arrest in 1999, Öcalan claimed the PKK had financially contributed to HADEP and nominated candidates for elections; in return HADEP had trained militants for the PKK (Güney 2002: 126). HADEP was succeeded by the Democratic People’s Party (DEHAP). Öcalan, however, remained a source of inspiration especially within DEHAP youth education programmes, given in Diyarbakir and at DEHAP headquarters in Ankara.\textsuperscript{257} While DEHAP cannot officially be part of KONGRA-GEL (the illegal successor of the PKK), DEHAP members explained that individuals can be.\textsuperscript{258}

In national elections in the 1990s and around the beginning of the millennium, HADEP and DEHAP enjoyed little success and were unable to pass the threshold (Güney 2002: 128). In contrast to general elections, there is no threshold to pass in local elections; all parties regardless of their size can win mayoralties and seats on municipal councils (Kurdistan Observer 2004). In the southeast HADEP and DEHAP did very well. In the 1995 and 1999 elections in Diyarbakir they won 46.3 and 62.5 percent of the votes respectively (Güney 2002: 128). In 2005 DEHAP announced its merger with the Democratic Society Party (DTP), founded by former DEP deputies Zana and Dicle who had been released from prison in 2004. Despite

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\textsuperscript{253} Interview with HAK-PAR vice-president, Ankara, 15 December 2004.


\textsuperscript{256} Interview with HAK-PAR vice-president, Ankara, 15 December 2004.

\textsuperscript{257} Interview with instructor of DEHAP political youth education program, Çarklıh, 26 March 2004.

\textsuperscript{258} Interview with SHP campaigners and employee of NGO in solidarity with prisoners, Diyarbakir, 27 March 2004.
electoral losses in the 2004 municipal elections, DEHAP/DTP has mayoralities in 55 municipalities, mainly in southeastern provinces.259

**PKK mobilisation in the Netherlands and Europe in the 1990s**

The PKK started mobilising migrant workers in Western Europe in 1978; a ‘Europe Bureau’ to organise fundraising activities was founded in 1981 (Argun 2003: 123). The European Bureau recruited guerrillas and staff members among highly skilled second-generation migrants and young labourers. These Kurdish migrants were connected in a dense network of workers and student organisations, publishing houses and information bureaus such as the Kurdish Information Centres (KIC) (Van Bruinessen 2000: 13; Argun 2003: 123). KICs, which existed in several European countries, lobbied for an independent Kurdistan and functioned as mouthpieces of the PKK (NRC 1999a).

The KIC in the Netherlands, which existed from 1992 to 1999, was established to inform the Dutch public about the Kurdish people and the conflict in Turkey. Another motive for its creation, as its former chairman explains, was to improve the negative image of Kurds: ‘There were a lot of prejudices about Kurds. People saw us as terrorists.’260 To provide a more positive, and in their view realistic, picture of the Kurdish question they published the magazine *Koerdistan Nederland* between 1993 and 1999. The Kurdish migrant federation FED-KOM took over the functions of the KIC when the centre dissolved. By this time the political wing of the PKK, the ERNK, had built strong networks with branches in Western European and non-European countries with a Kurdish population (Özcan 2006: 198). The European migrant confederation KON-KURD and its national member organisations such as FED-KOM were part of the ERNK (NRC 1999a). Through KON-KURD the PKK is linked to the Turkish/Kurdish organisational network in figure 4.3.

Throughout the 1990s political events in Turkey directly affected the activities of Kurdish organisations in Europe and the Netherlands, resulting in numerous demonstrations, hunger strikes and sometimes clashes with Turkish nationalists (see chapter 3). In the newspapers it was mostly the KIC that acted as the spokesperson for the Kurdish community in the Netherlands. In response to the previously mentioned Spring Operation in 1992, PKK followers in the Netherlands protested in front of the Turkish consulates in Deventer and Rotterdam; their aim was for the Dutch government to oppose Turkish military action against the PKK in eastern Turkey and to support an independent Kurdistan. In different cities in the Netherlands groups of Kurds attacked Turkish companies such as Turkish Airlines.

As in Turkey, celebration of the Kurdish New Year *Neuraz* in the Netherlands has come to symbolise the Kurdish struggle against Turkish repression. *Neuraz*

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260 Interview with former KIC chairman in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, 9 March 2004.
assumed this function after the armed uprising of the PKK in 1984 (Gambetti 2004). During *Neuroz* in 1992, Öcalan called Kurds to join in mass uprisings. The festivities thus became the day for protests and rallies by the PKK to secure maximum publicity (see also Yanik 2006). Through the 1990s the PKK’s mouthpiece in the Netherlands, the KIC, was prominent in the Dutch media around *Neuroz*.

In 1993 the Turkish authorities declared a policy of ‘total war’ to solve the Kurdish problem, a response to the PKK’s announcement that it was returning to terrorism after the government had declined its invitation to negotiate a political solution. Heavy fighting and the military’s orders to inhabitants to leave their villages triggered an exodus from Kurdish areas (White 2000: 169-172). Kurdish villages in the mountains were now destroyed in an effort to cut off the PKK from its bases of support (Zürcher 2004 [1993]: 318). These events led to protests by PKK supporters in many European countries. Whereas the protests turned violent in other countries, they remained relatively peaceful in the Netherlands. In the words of the KIC spokesman:

Problems in Germany arose after the people’s uprising in Kurdistan was suppressed. Kurds reacted against the Turkish Consulate or threw stones. Even Molotov cocktails were thrown in some countries... then some panic in Europe evolved. Germany’s attitude towards the Kurds was tough [...] in the Netherlands Kurds were free. In Germany the police raided Kurdish organisations, this never happened in the Netherlands. [Radical actions, LN] depend on the policy, not on the Kurds. [...] There is plenty of room for protest [in the Netherlands, LN].

The KIC spokesman thus argued that terrorist and violent actions were unlikely in the Netherlands as the open political arena provided sufficient space for democratic action, for instance petitioning the Dutch parliament on the ‘genocide’ in Turkey, referring to the 50 Kurdish villages that had been reduced to ashes (NRC 1993).

Over the years the PKK grew more involved in lobbying in Europe, supporting the establishment of the Kurdish Parliament in Exile (PKDW). As previously mentioned, the PKDW was an initiative of former parliamentarians of the Kurdish party DEP after it was banned in 1994. Some DEP parliamentarians were sentenced; others sought refuge in Europe. One of these refugees, Yaşar Kaya, became chairman of the PKDW, which came to function as a ‘travelling’ parliament with a permanent seat in Brussels. The PKDW aspired to represent Kurds in exile in Europe, Australia and Canada and to find a political solution to the armed struggle in eastern Turkey (Trouw 1995). The parliament had 65 seats apportioned among different

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261 Interview with former KIC chairman in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, 9 March 2004.
262 Interview with FED-KOM chairman, Amsterdam, 9 March 2004.
organisations in exile such as the ERNK (the largest faction with twelve seats), the PKK (three seats) and the DEP (nine seats). The Parliament in Exile was central to placing the Kurdish question on the European political agenda.

The PKDW’s inaugural congress took place in The Hague in 1995 and was co-organised by the KIC. The former KIC chairman explains:

In Turkey Kurdish parliamentarians were expelled, some fled…. In Europe a large group of Kurdish intellectuals found refuge, and were exploring the possibilities for a civil administration. On the military side there was of course the PKK, they dominated everything. But they [the parliamentarians in exile, LN] were looking for alternatives, it was their idea to form a Parliament in Exile and I organised it. So the idea was launched, but in which country do you install such a Parliament? In most countries there was a legal problem. […] We had Kurdish Information Centres all over Europe… also in Brussels. But we said the Netherlands is suitable…. According to Dutch law it was just a conference, organised by the KIC. In fact it was the installation of the Parliament in Exile. […] After the inauguration the PKDW established an office in Brussels, because it’s the capital of Europe.264

The KIC spokesman thus pointed to the favourable political climate for Kurdish nationalists in the Netherlands. Compared to other European countries where PKK-affiliated organisations were active, the Dutch policy on Kurds and its judicial system appeared the most accommodating. This put relations between Turkey and the Netherlands under pressure; relations were frozen and the Turkish ambassador was temporarily recalled (Trouw 1995; Can & Can-Engin 1997: 72). In this period KIC activities were closely monitored by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the minister directly questioning the centre about the activities that had sparked Ankara’s protest.265

It was not so much the lobbying of the Kurdish movement that placed the issue on the Dutch political agenda. Rather, Dutch politicians responded to confrontations between Turkish and Kurdish groups, which they saw as a threat to security and public order. This was particularly the case after violent clashes between Turks and Kurds in different Dutch cities in 1997 (for Deventer, see Kuiper 1998). Verhagen, a Christian Democratic member of parliament, argued that the confrontations between

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264 Interview with former KIC chairman in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, 9 March 2004.

265 Ibid.
the two groups were ‘a threat to national security… it is unacceptable that this conflict plays out on Dutch territory’ (NRC 1997c). According to him, the conflict entered the Netherlands when the PKDW was allowed to install itself in the country (see also chapter 4); Minister of Interior Affairs Dijkstal likewise argued that the Netherlands had no intentions ‘to import Turkish problems’. He vowed to take strict measures if the violence continued (ibid.).

The KIC explained in the Dutch media that ‘there are only tensions between the Kurds and the Turkish state’ and that the Turkish state is organising anti-Kurdish actions in the Netherlands (NRC 1997b). According to a KIC spokesman, Turkish migrants were being used by Ankara to obstruct Kurdish activities in the Netherlands:266

The lobby of the Kurds against the Turkish state was so strong… the Turkish state had to do something. What could they do? So they started to mobilise Turkish associations, the Turkish community here… they used the Left Kemalists [followers of the ideology of Kemal Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, LN]… were actually more used for lobbying activities… in bureaucracy, because they are well educated, and the rest on the streets [Grey Wolves, LN]. During my lobby activities I was more bothered by the … Kemalists than by the Grey Wolves… You don’t have to meet them necessarily in person, but their opinions… everywhere!267

Massive PKK mobilisation took place in the winter of 1998 prior to the detention of Öcalan in early 1999. The PKK Central Committee appealed via the internet to Kurdish patriotic people around the world, urging every Kurd in ‘Kurdistan’ and abroad to take democratic action to stand up for their leadership (PKK 1998 cited in White 2000: 181). Protests occurred in over 22 cities in Europe, including the Netherlands (Böhler 2000; Gunter 2000: 851). A member of the PKK Central Committee stated in a Dutch newspaper that it was hardly surprising that Kurds could mobilise so quickly: ‘people are obliged to follow instructions given by the party’. He further emphasised that people needed to act in an organised manner and individuals were not allowed to undertake solo actions (NRC 1999a). A member of the ERNK (the political wing of the PKK) stated that the PKK and the ERNK were very well organised in the Netherlands and could count on broad support from Kurdish migrants:

266 For the role of the nationalist party MHP in the ‘anti-terrorist’ activities of the Turkish intelligence service against Kurds in Turkey and Europe and the attitude of other political parties in Turkey in this period, see Henri J. Barkey and Graham E. Fuller, *Turkey’s Kurdish Question* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1998).

267 Interview with former KIC chairman in the Netherlands, Amsterdam, 9 March 2004.
People who are active in the Kurdish social-cultural organisations [FED-KOM affiliated, LN] are political engaged. They do not belong to the militant, radical heart of the PKK, but they do show up at PKK activities… we organise a protest action in one day or less (Ibid.).

In the same newspaper article the KIC chairman explained that these social-cultural associations are indirectly linked to the ERNK through membership in the confederation KON-KURD. According to the KIC chairman and the ERNK member, the organisational structure – a small underground centre in combination with public associations – allows the ERNK to mobilise hundreds of people with just a few phone calls (Ibid.).

On the diplomatic level, the PKDW merged into a new body, the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK). The KNK was also inaugurated in the Netherlands, this time in Amsterdam. Initiated by the PKK, the KNK included a wide range of Iraqi and Iranian parties and sought to represent all parts of Kurdistan. The Turkish capture of the PKK leader Öcalan in early 1999 contributed to a new sense of unity between Kurds from different countries and of different political signatures (Van Bruinessen 2000). The KNK had 174 members representing 29 organisations and parties (NRC 1999b). But in the end, the KNK remained a mostly Turkish-Kurdish organ.

**Representation of Kurdish parties in the Netherlands, 2002-2004**

The two most important legal and two most relevant illegal Kurdish parties, DEHAP and HAK-PAR and KONGRA-GEL and PSK, respectively, are represented and supported by migrant groups in Europe. DEHAP recently moved its European office, which functions as a ‘diplomatic information centre’, from Germany to Brussels. The party maintains no institutionalised ties with the confederation KON-KURD (in which a PKK wing is represented) and its member organisations. DEHAP representatives do, however, attend KON-KURD and its member organisations’ events, especially during election time. In these campaigns DEHAP officials ask European Kurds with dual nationality to vote and to advise their relatives in Turkey to vote for DEHAP.

In 2002, ten airplanes were charted for DEHAP voters in Europe (ANP 2002). In the Netherlands the DEHAP solidarity committee – established by the Kurdish migrant federation FED-KOM and the leftist workers organisation DİDF – organised

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270 Interview with DEHAP vice-president, Ankara, 10 December 2004.
271 Interview with Özgür Politika journalist, Amsterdam, 19 May 2004.
a one-day trip to vote at Istanbul’s airport (Üger 2002: 10). Most supporters simply cast their ballots; others helped to fundraise and campaign. The cooperation between DIDF and FED-KOM mirrored EMEP’s participation under the DEHAP banner (see figure 6.1). During the election campaign the two federations organised several meetings to underline Turkish-Kurdish fraternity, while EMEP’s leader was invited for another joint meeting. FED-KOM also asked its members to convince their Kurdish relatives in Turkey to register in the city where they reside. Due to internal (often forced) migration from small villages to large cities, a significant number of Kurds are not registered and hence do not have a right to vote.

During the 2004 local elections FED-KOM sent delegations to DEHAP in eastern Turkey to monitor proceedings. All parties were allowed to have their own observers at polling stations; observers from Europe were thought to be especially important. In total 14 delegations from Europe were sent to the SHP’s coordination point in Diyarbakır (DEHAP joined the SHP in these elections) through contacts with Kurdish and human rights organisations in Europe. Finally, DEHAP also organised festivals, sometimes hosted by FED-KOM, to spread the party’s ideas and raise money. DEHAP advises Kurds to integrate in receiving societies; at the same time, the party wants its supporters to know that ‘they are not alone in Europe’; once in power, DEHAP claims, it will facilitate their return.

KONGRA-GEL claims that KON-KURD organisations are no part of the congress. However, Kurdish organisations in Europe such as FED-KOM’s local member organisations assist in organising outreach activities. Local FED-KOM member organisations give room to KONGRA-GEL information evenings where interested youth can embark on a career as a guerrilla. KONGRA-GEL also provides socio-cultural trainings in the Netherlands; military trainings, in contrast, are held in the country of origin. Finally, Europe is important for the organisation’s finances: during festivals, but also through door-to-door collections, considerable sums are raised each year.

KOMKAR supports the Kurdish party HAK-PAR. In 2003, 40 HAK-PAR members, who also were committed to the PSK, were arrested in Diyarbakır. In response KOMKAR in the Netherlands and Europe contacted national parliaments and human rights organisations, leading to their release. While HAK-PAR was only competing in Diyarbakır’s local elections in 2004, it organised meetings in Europe

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272 Interview with DEHAP vice-president, Ankara, 10 December 2004.
273 Interview with DIDF chairman, Amsterdam, 15 July 2004.
274 Interview with DEHAP chairman in Diyarbakır, Diyarbakır, 30 March 2004.
275 Interview with coordinator of election delegations and SHP chairman in Diyarbakır, Diyarbakır, 30 March 2004.
276 Interview with DEHAP chairman in Ankara, Rijswijk, 16 May 2004.
277 Interview with PKDW, KNK and KONGRA-GEL founding member and member of the KONGRA-GEL administrative board and Foreign Affairs Commission, Hengelo, 27 April 2004.
278 Interview with KOMKAR chairman, The Hague, 16 April 2004.
preceding them; its campaign was supported by KOMKAR and the HAK-PAR branch in Germany.279 The PSK secretary general, living in exile in Sweden, is occasionally invited to the Netherlands by KOMKAR to lecture on Turkey’s accession to the EU and on the position of Kurds there (KOMKAR 2002: 12). The PSK does not have an official branch in the Netherlands, though it is occasionally represented by KOMKAR’s chairman (Ibid.: 20). In line with the PSK, KOMKAR did not support the Kurdish Parliament in Exile because it was created by the PKK. The federation joined the Platform of Kurds in Europe (KPE) instead. Since 2004 the KPE unites 34 European Kurdish organisations and political parties in exile, including the PSK. The platform urges the EU not to accept Turkish membership until the Kurdish nation and identity are fully acknowledged.280

Conclusion

What does the Kurdish case tell us about the evolution of transnational ties among migrants engaged in diaspora politics? First, it appears that especially the PKK institutionalised ties and activities in the diaspora in the 1980s and 1990s. Its methods resembled those of other Turkish organisations excluded from political participation, as well as those of the Turkish state described in the previous chapter. Mirroring findings in the Turkish case, a strong ideology combined with a nationalist programme facilitated the creation of networks spanning numerous countries with strong leaderships appointed from above. Through ties with migrant organisations, illegal parties are well embedded in these organisational networks.

While the pattern of transnational political ties has proven highly stable over time (the frequent changing of organisations’ names notwithstanding), the relative calm in southeastern Turkey in the 2000s has changed the way actors based in the Netherlands employ them. While the emphasis in earlier periods was on direct action (often below the radar of host state governments), Kurdish actors in the Netherlands have recently begun lobbying the Dutch government. Turkey’s probable accession to the EU gives leverage to their claims.

The new strategy points to an important development: though Kurds continue to feel excluded from Dutch political opportunities created specifically for migrants (for instance the IOT, see chapter 4), they are beginning to make creative use of general political opportunity structures. In comparison to other European countries, the Dutch system has been the most open to Kurdish migrant activities, swelling the diaspora in the country. These links to the Dutch government, which inevitably took time to bear fruit, are an important channel of transnational political influence for

Turkish-Kurds living in the Netherlands. As such, they are a viable alternative to other, more ‘direct’ forms of political action.

Finally, transnational mobilisation along ethnic lines to put the Kurdish question on national, supranational and international agendas has been ascendant. Turkish-Kurds in the Netherlands as well as European diaspora leaders are increasingly concerned with the ‘general Kurdish question’. It is, however, impossible to isolate this development from highly context-specific factors, in particular the US-led war in Iraq and the subsequent growth of Kurdish autonomy there. References to the ‘general Kurdish question’ may reflect the opportunities perceived by some Kurds to work towards a pan-Kurdish solution in the region – an unthinkable step in earlier decades.