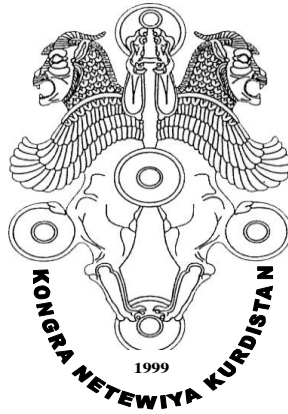# Kongreya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê - Kurdistan National Congress

KNK

Canton Based Democratic Autonomy of Rojava
(Western Kurdistan – Northern Syria)

**A Transformations Process
From Dictatorship to Democracy**

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Kurdistan National Congress (KNK)
Rue Jean Stas 41, 1060 Brussels, Belgium
www.kongrakurdistan.net
E-Mail kongrakurdistan@gmail.com
Telephone 0032 2 647 30 84, Fax 0032 2647 6849

Definition of the Kurdish Question in the Middle East

After the First World War, the modern system of nation-states emerged in the Middle East. The Kurds lost the semi-autonomous status that they had enjoyed during the Ottoman times. This process was engineered by the great European powers led by the UK and France. After the Second World War, the USA emerged as the most active Western power in the region. The nation-states of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria were created and recognized by the League of Nations.

The lands comprising Kurdistan include parts of eastern Turkey, northern Iraq, north-western Iran and northern Syria, which are inhabited mainly by Kurds. The 45 million Kurds lived on their ancestral lands of Kurdistan for many thousands of years. Under the control of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, the division of Kurdistan into four parts continues. Since 2003 Iraqi Kurdistan has enjoyed federal status within Iraq, but still over 40% of the land of South Kurdistan remains under the control of the Baghdad government; in particular the area around the oil rich city of Kirkuk.

No national and democratic rights are given to the Kurdish people as a whole. Kurdistan still generally suffers from war and faces attempts at annihilation and extermination. The Kurdish nation has been occupied and divided. This unjust action led to a historical tragedy for the Kurdish people. Over decades, the states of Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq have cooperated and used forced cultural assimilation, forced emigration, massacres and genocide, in the last 90 years, to assimilate and eliminate the Kurdish nation, but they have failed to accomplish their colonial aims.

Syria

The population of Syria is 23 million and consists of Sunni Arabs, 4 million Kurds, 3.5 million Alawi, 2.3 million Christian, 1.2 million Druze, seculars and other minorities living on a large area of 77,000 sq. miles.

The current political map of Syria was drawn in accordance with international agreements between the two main imperial powers (Britain and France), including the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), the Cairo Conference (1920) and the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Accordingly, both Syria and Lebanon and the western part of Kurdistan (Rojava) were placed under the French mandate immediately after the First World War. France's aim was to establish a client, Arab nation state.

As for Syria, it is a multicultural, diverse and pluralist country and, therefore, the nation state cannot be strictly imposed on this country. The nation-state project in Syria contrasts with the reality of the diversity and plurality that have existed in the country since the pre-Roman era. After independence (17 April 1946), successive governments ruling Syria have represented and served the interests of the ruling class and the colonisers, i.e. the French – the latter's objective was to build an anti-democratic nation state. Most successive governments – the Government of Shukri al-Qwatli, the Government of United Arab Republic and lastly the Ba'athist Government followed a nationalistic policy through manipulating nationalist sentiments.

The Ba'ath Regime

The chauvinist nationalist mentality deepened further with the rise of the Ba'ath government, but this does not mean that chauvinism did not exist prior to that. On the contrary, the roots of the chauvinist mentality have been present since the mandate era. The most prominent example of this mentality is found in the Government of the United Arab Republic in the era of Gamal Abdel Nasser. In that era, the government pursued racist chauvinist policies – similar to those of the Ba'ath government – against the Kurdish people. After the collapse of the union with Egypt in 1961, the new government continued the same policy against the Kurds, which reached its peak in the Project of Mohammed Talb Hilal (Head of the Political Security Division in Jazira, 1961-62).

The Assad Policy

The Assad family has been in power in Syria since 1970, when army officer Hafez al-Assad assumed the presidency in a military coup. In 2000 the power was passed to Bashar al-Assad, who maintained the main characteristics of the Assad state: reliance on the ruling one-party system of the Baath Party, army and intelligence apparatus, and Syria's leading business families. With no peaceful transfer of power since the 1950s, change can seemingly happen only through a military coup or a popular uprising.

Although Syria is nominally led by the Baath Party, real power rests in the hands of a narrow circle of Assad family members and a handful of security chiefs. A special place in the power structure is reserved for officers from Assad's minority Alawite community, who dominate the security apparatus.

KURDS IN SYRIA

1. Dêrik - 2. Tirbe Sipyê - 3. Qamishlo - 4. Amûdê - 5. Dirbêsyê - 6. Serê Kanyê - 7. Tel Ebyed - 8. Kobanê
9. Ezaz - 10. Efrîn.. ● Cîhê Ko kurd lê dijin. ..Siedlergebiete der Kurden.. **11. Hasaka**

The Kurdish People are the second largest ethnicity in Syria consisting of four million of the total population. The Kurds have been living on their ancient historical homeland and have actively contributed to the liberation and building up the modern republic of Syria. Successive Syrian governments after independence in 1946 have denied the legitimate national rights of the Kurdish people and their contributions to achieving independence.

Repression on Kurds in Syria

As for the Kurdish people in Western Kurdistan (Rojava), the terms of Mohammed Talb Hilal's project has become sacred. As a result of its Arabisation policies during the 1960s and 1970s, the

Ba'th regime created the so-called Arab-belt from the Jazeera region in the northeast of Syria to the northern Kurdish city of Kobani in an attempt to break the continuity of the Kurdish region. Since 1963, successive regimes were fully committed to the implementation of this racist project, which aims at the Arabisation of Kurdish regions, the displacement of the Kurdish community and the melting of Kurdish society in the pot of Arab nationalism. We can summarise the 'special war' that has been fought by the nation state in Syria against the Kurdish people since 1962 as having the following effects:

- Stripping large segments of the Kurdish people of their Syrian citizenship and classifying them as foreigners in their own homeland in accordance with the ill-fated 1962 Census.
- The conversion of all fertile lands in the Kurdish region into public property under the name of a 'land reform policy', and housing the Arab tribes in those areas after forcing the Kurds to migrate by depriving them of property ownership, especially agricultural property. In so doing, the Ba'ath Party tried to create enmity between the Arabs and the Kurds to destroy the historical foundations of the Arab-Kurdish brotherhood.
- Changing the names of all Kurdish cities and villages and replacing them with names that are not historically related to the region, e.g. Tirbespi was initially changed to the White Graves and then later to Qahtanih. The main objective of this policy is to Arabise and change the demographic features of the region.
- The settlement of Arab tribes, whose lands were affected by flooding, in Kurdish areas
- The creation of many obstacles that limit the Kurdish presence in the Legislative Council, local administrations, the army and other important government and public offices.
- Classifying both the Kurdish language and culture as a threat to state security. The regime has adopted systematic security measurements to prevent the Kurdish people from speaking their mother tongue in public and in schools, in order to impose the Arabic language and culture on the Kurds.
- Extracting natural resources in Kurdish areas in order to benefit the state and the oligarchs, depriving the Kurdish people of their revenue, as is happening in the oil and natural gas fields of Rimelan, Weidieh and Krachuk.
- Treating the Kurdish issue as a security threat and signing regional agreements against the Kurds, such as the secret Syrian-Turkish-Iranian agreement against the Kurdish Freedom Movement and the Syrian-Turkish agreement of Adana in 1998. In addition, imprisoning, detaining and prosecuting hundreds of Kurds on trumped-up charges, such as an "attempt to cut off part of the Syrian territory and annex it to a foreign state" and other fabricated charges.
- Applying exceptional laws against the Kurds in addition to other extraordinary laws which existed under the previous government, such as Law 49 on Property Rights and other laws.
- Preventing the Kurdish people from celebrating their own festivals, such as Newroz.
- Preventing the Kurds from supporting and communicating with their brethren in other parts of Kurdistan.
- The Kurds in Syria have been subjected to racist and discriminatory policies such as the exceptional census 1962 which initially resulted in more than 150,000 (now increased to more than half a million) Kurds being stripped of their Syrian nationality identity, thereby depriving them of their basic human rights.
- The Arab Belt which resulted in the seizure of Kurdish agricultural lands (350km long and 15 km wide), and thousands of Kurdish land owners and farmers being forcibly driven from their own properties which were given to Arab settlers and farmers coming from Arab regions. The Baath regime launched a campaign to eradicate all Kurdish national identity including Kurdish cultural and social activities.

- Kurdish political leaders, human rights activists, academics and intellectuals were arbitrarily imprisoned and brutally executed or exiled.

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Exploration of Natural Resources of Rojava

Oil in Rojava

The Kurdish region is rich in water, oil and gas. Oil wells and gas are concentrated in the region of Jazeera (Canton of Cezire). But the Kurds could not take advantage of these resources because of the discriminatory policy of the Baath regime for decades. All the riches of the Kurdish region with agricultural wealth were transferred to cities like Homs, Damascus and Aleppo. The region also lacks factories, refineries and universities, which pushed the Kurds to mass emigration in the context of the "Arab belt" implementation policy in 1962 to expel the entire Kurdish population from the region of Jazeera (Cezire in Kurdish) along the Turkish border and replace them with Arabs.

Rimelan (Canton Cezire) has some 2-4,000 oil wells with a production capacity of almost 440,000 barrels a day. In Rimelan are 25 gas wells. The gas wells Syrian regime used to export 100,000 barrels per day to world markets after refining the crude oil in the refineries of Homs and Banias in the Arabic regions of Syria.

The British\Dutch Company Shell starting extracting oil from Rimelan in 1960. In 2010, before the Syrian events started, oil production had reached 90.000 barrels a day.

Middle East is the world's most water-scarce region, with only 1% of the world's renewable freshwater supplies and 5% of the world's population. Specific examples of tensions in the region include disputes among Iraq, Syria, and Turkey over the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.

Whilst the region of Cezire (Al Jaazira) get its water from the Tigris, the region of Kobane is crossed by the Euphrates River. For reason of forced migration of Kurds the Syrian regime took control over both rivers. With the regulation on the rivers, the regime cuts water to the Kurdish villages for preventing agriculture. Because of the water rich region of Rojava %60 of Syrian cotton and wheat come from Cezire and Kobane, as well as cotton. The industry of manufacturing was held in the Arabic region.

The Century of Kurds

The 20th century was one of the worst periods in the Kurdish people's history. Developments at the turn of the 21st century indicated the convergence of regional and international transformations together with the crystallization of a strong democratic movement in Kurdistan, which made the crucial difference between the two periods.

The position of the Kurds in the 20th century was that they were the ultimate victims of modern history and that they were passive actors under the manipulation of others. In the 20th century the

Kurdish issue was considered a domestic problem or matter of internal security where the international community and international organizations were reluctant to interfere.

With beginning of the 21st century the Kurds have been transformed from victims to pro-active players and catalysts for change in the region. Moreover, the Kurds have achieved the internationalization of their cause.

Democratic transformation in the Middle East will need recognition and resolution of the legitimate demands of the Kurdish people. The Arab Spring provides a new context for their challenge.
The role of Kurdish politics is inextricably linked to the democratic transformation of the Middle East and that its resolution cannot be underestimated in achieving full democratization in the wider region. The Kurdish perspective for democratic autonomy for the key states of the region namely Turkey, Iran and Syria can improve the democratic transformation. The Kurds constitute a significant proportion of the population in at least four crucial Middle Eastern states. Yet, a potential resolution would necessitate the prevalence of a rule of law that enshrines the rights and political, religious, cultural, and civic freedoms in the entire Middle East. Democratic transformation in the Middle East will need a recognition and resolution of the legitimate Kurdish demands.

Syria After 2011
The Syrian civil war grew out of a popular uprising against the regime of Bashar al-Assad in March 2011, part of the Arab Spring uprisings in the Middle East. The brutal response of the security forces against initially peaceful protests demanding democratic reform and an end of repression triggered a violent reaction. An armed rebellion to the regime soon took hold across Syria, dragging the country into a full-scale civil war. Since mid-2012, the fighting has expanded across the capital Damascus and the commercial centre Aleppo.

But at the root of the conflict was anger over unemployment, decades of dictatorship, corruption and state violence under of the Middle East's most repressive regimes.
Syria's geographical position at the heart of the Levant make it a pivotal country in the eastern part of the Arab world.

Syria's strategic importance has turned the civil war into an international contest for regional influence, with both sides drawing diplomatic and military support from various foreign sponsors. Russia, Iran, the Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah, and to a lesser extent Iraq and China, are the main allies of the Syrian regime.

Regional governments concerned about Iran's regional influence, on the other hand, back the opposition, particularly Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, EU and USA. The calculation that whoever replaces Assad will be less friendly to the Iranian regime is also behind the US and European support for the opposition.

Turkey's and Iran's Interest on Syria
A main result of the Arab Spring was the loss of the Arabic hegemony in Middle East. The uprising of the people for more democratic rights and liberties was a clear sign that the ideology of pan Arabism as a form of Arabic hegemony cannot survive anymore.

Since the Sykes-Picot agreement 1916 and particularly after WW I two parts of Kurdistan has come under the control of two Arab states. Southern Kurdistan (Iraqi Kurdistan) was ruled for decades by the Ba'ath regime of Iraq. Western Kurdistan (Northern Syria) known as Rojava was under the control of the Ba'ath regime of Syrian regime.

In 2003 after the fall of the Saddam regime, Iraqi Kurdistan gained autonomy in the new federal Iraq. Today the Kurds got their own parliament, government, and bilateral relations on the international level. South Kurdistan becomes a de facto state in the region.

After the Syrian war started in 2011 the Kurds of Rojava (Northern Syria) prepared themselves to gain their freedom from the Ba'ath regime. In a silent revolution, starting from 19 July 2012 the Kurds in Rojava (Northern Syria) took over control.

In January 2014 the Kurds together with the other components of Rojava declared their democratic autonomy by creating the cantonal system.

This new situation was understood by Turkey and Iran as a serious threat. On the other hand it is a new challenge for both however to change their pan Turkist and pan Persian strategy towards Kurds and other components of the countries or to face a collapse of the state like in Syria, Egypt, Libya etc. Both countries have seen the freedom of Kurds in Iraq and Syria as a threat to their own ideology of denial and annihilation. Because both countries also have a serious internal Kurdish problem. Turkey has a Kurdish population of 25 million, whilst in Iran there are approx 12-15 Million Kurds. The Kurds in Turkey have achieved after 40 years of a profound freedom struggle to force Turkey to implement radical democratic changes, by demanding constitutional recognition of their identity. In Iranian Kurdistan the people keep silent, but are ready for an uprising against the Mullah Regime. Iranian Kurds have potential of defence including political parties and a well organised civil society.

Turkeys and Iran are competing to gain their formal control by the Arabic hegemony ruled Iraqi Kurdistan and Rojava. For that purpose, Turkey is using its economic relation with Southern Kurdistan, particularly with the KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party) to get more control over Iraqi Kurdistan and Iraqi government. Turkey is using the alliance with Sunni forces to put pressure on the Shia Iraq.

In opposition Iran is supporting the Shia Iraqi regime and the Syrian regime to ensure the power of Shia regimes in Middle East.

Iran's support for the Syrian regime is one of the key elements safeguarding the survival of Syria's embattled president Bashar al-Assad. The relationship between Iran and Syria is based on a unique convergence of interests. In particularly the regional alliance between both regimes is particularly to counter the US influence and Western hegemony. Their common aim is to ensure the survival of the oppressive system of state.

Some people erroneously assume that because Assad's family belongs to Syria's Alawite minority, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, its relationship with Shiite Iran must be founded on solidarity between the two religious groups.

For the isolated regime in Tehran, a friendly government in Syria became a vital strategic asset, a springboard for Iran's expansion into the Arab world and a counterweight to Iran's chief regional foe, the US-backed Saudi Arabia.

Attacks in Westkurdistan (Rojava Kurdistan)
Since these revolutionary developments occurring in Rojava (Western Kurdistan- North Syria,) with the declaration of Democratic Autonomy in January 2014, certain forces have reacted to halt the people of Rojava gaining status. Turkey has been significantly aggravated by these developments, as it believes the gains of the Kurds in neighbouring Syria will spark similar desires and actions among its very own strong Kurdish population. It is for this reason that while during

the silent revolution not a single bullet was fired, in the past few months violent clashes have occurred between the People's Defences Forces (YPG) formed by the Kurdish people and armed gangs that are openly funded and logistically supported by the Turkish state. This is an explicit attempt by the Turkish state to destabilise the predominantly Kurdish populated region.

Attacks by Al Qaida, ISIS

The Declaration of Democratic Autonomy of Rojava made the attitude of involved foreign forces clear. Since the declaration of the Democratic Autonomy, ISIS and different groups of Al Qaida have carried out a new wave of attacks. The foundation of Democratic Autonomy in Rojava is a struggle based upon the principle of self-defence to prevent massacres against the Syrian people, the death of human beings, the destruction of cities, forced migrations, looting and pillaging.

The attacks against the Kurdish model of solution made it abundantly clear that all those forces, which are arguing to fight for the freedom and democracy for the people of Syria are neither sincere nor honest.

It is seen that those who claim to fight for Syria's freedom are not fighting for freedom. They are fighting in the service of foreign powers and they empower certain political forces in Syria. The goal of the attacks in Rojava is install the Islamic State of Iraq and Sham (ISIS) in the lands of Syria. It is seen that those who say they are fighting against the regime in Syria are connected to the regime.

Because as well as Turkey and Iran, the Syrian regime are also not happy with the autonomy declared in Rojava.
It becomes clear that since the declaration of Democratic Autonomy the gangs reduced their attacks against the regime but multiplied military offensive against the newly established democratic autonomous Cantons of Rojava.

Saudi Arabia for example, which until today supported these forces openly, declared them recently as terrorist groups. Saudi Arabian statement came after these forces were not able achieve any result. Their plans remained unresolved. Surrounding countries and in particular Turkey continue to support these forces.

Without the support of foreign powers, it will be impossible for the gangs to cross borders to Rojava. A short look on the ID's of the gang member's shows citizens of European Union countries, Egyptians, Tunisians, Afghans, Chechens, Azeris (Azerbaijan), Iraqis and Turks. By answering the questions how did they come to Syria/Rojava? How did they cross the border and with what was the goal they are fighting for against Rojava Kurdistan? It has been ascertained that the fingerprints of many foreign powers can be found on these attacks.

The Syrian Opposition

The opposition remains fractious and deeply divided, unable to agree much apart from the need to end Assad's rule. On the political front, alliances have been formed to gain international recognition. But they have been weakened by power struggles, a lack of support from grassroots, the rebels and limited financial and military assistance.
Iran and Russia have propped up the Alawite-led government of President Assad and gradually increased their support, providing it with an edge that has helped it make significant gains against the rebels in the past year. The Sunni-dominated opposition has meanwhile enjoyed varying degrees of support from its main backers - Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and other Arab states along with the US, UK, Germany and France.

The armed rebellion has evolved significantly, with as many as 1,000 groups commanding an estimated 100,000 fighters. Secular moderates are outnumbered by Islamists and jihadists linked to al-Qaeda, whose brutal tactics have caused widespread concern and triggered rebel infighting.

Geneva Conferences on Syria

With neither side able to inflict a decisive defeat on the other, the international community long ago concluded that only a political solution could bring an end to the conflict in Syria.
However, a number of attempts by the Arab League and the UN to broker ceasefires and start dialogue have failed.
Then, in May 2013, the US and Russia began work to convene a conference in Switzerland to implement the 2012 Geneva Communique, a UN-backed international agreement that calls for the establishment of a transitional governing body in Syria formed on the basis of mutual consent. The talks, which became known as Geneva II could not improve any efforts towards a solution to the Syrian conflict. They broke down after only two rounds. The UN special envoy Lakhdar Brahimi blamed the Syrian government's refusal to discuss opposition demands and its insistence on a focus on fighting "terrorists" - a term Damascus uses to dismiss all opponents of Mr Assad. Up until now the meetings of Geneva taking place have not pursued a real solution to the civil war in Syria. A very complicated civil war has broken out in Syria, Regional countries and international powers have lost control of the fighting. The Geneva II meeting taking place in January 2014 was working to bringing the fighting back under control. That is to say the efforts were not directed towards a solution but to brining the war under control. Furthermore not one word was spoken by the Kurds at the Geneva conferences.

The Kurdish Perspective

For years the international powers turned a blind eye to the regime in Syria. With the outburst of the recent conflicts in most parts of Syria, international attention has sharply focused on this previously unnoticed country. However, the Kurds still remain unnoticed. At the outset of the violence, most of the country was ravaged by armed conflict; however, the predominantly Kurdish North was relatively calm. The Kurdish people were not in favour of an armed struggle in Syria and especially not in favour of foreign intervention. What they wanted was a democratic Syria in which they could express themselves as Kurds. To this end, on the 19th July 2012 the Kurds of Syria carried out a silent revolution, in which not even a single bullet was fired. Kurds stormed administrative buildings and declared their own democratic administration. This was an expression of the will of the people, as no outside force supported this effort. The Kurds of Syria are now administering themselves through what they are calling 'Democratic Autonomy'.

The Kurdish Third Way as an alternative

The Democratic Union Party (PYD)

As the third party to Syria's civil war the PYD has played a historic role by improving alternatives to war as well organising the grassroots for the right to self-determination. The PYD is not at the side of the Assad regime nor the opposition. PYD called itself as the party of the third way.
The Democratic Union Party (Partiya Yekitiya Demokrat - PYD) with its wise strategy and the support of the Kurdish people of Western Kurdistan has become a major power player in the Syrian conflict. The PYD was founded in 2003. As an illegal organisation, hundreds of its members were arrested and many of its leaders executed by the Syrian Baath regime. The party led the Kurdish uprising in 2004 and about 2000 of its members were arrested. By 2011, PYD has become the largest Kurdish party and is supported by the majority of Kurds in Syria.

If certain circles are in favour of a Syria in which no single force is dominant, then the position of the Kurds is pivotal. The Kurds have established themselves as a third force in Syria. They did not

side with either the current regime or an opposition completely lacking in democratic and liberationist characteristics. Both sides were deemed insufficient. Consequently, they are proving in practice that a third way is possible. In fact, they are extending their claim that without an alternative to these 'sides', the crisis in Syria cannot be overcome.

The Syrian President Bashar Assad has to come to a solution and the Baath regime will cease to exist, but a Syria in which political Islam will be sovereign will not be acceptable. In Syria, there will not be a single hegemony. It seems as if a democratic Syria in which all forces will coexist is inevitable. Political Islamists will not be side-lined as they were by the Baath regime, but they will also not be the primary power holders. A democratic reconciliation that will enable the coexistence of all ethnic, religious and social sections of the community will materialise. In this system, the Kurds, Arabs, Armenian, Assyrians and all other ethnic and religious communities will be able to express themselves and organise their societal affairs. Sunni Islam will also be able to express itself freely without the need for the establishment of its own hegemony.

This reality will make components of Syrian society minorities like the Kurds, Alawis, Christians a fundamental basis of democratisation in Syria. The Kurds have already proven this. Therefore, their very situation demands of them to be a force for democratic change. A Syria in which political Islam is not the hegemonic power is something that the Alevis can support. This option will also be strongly advocated by the Armenians, Assyrians, Ezidis, not to mention Women's organisations and democrats.

However, the Kurds will be party to the third way solution in Syria. The Kurds will have their status and freedom accepted. In a democratised Syria their current gains will be protected; because for a Syria that wants to adopt the third way, this is imperative. If certain circles are in favour of a Syria in which no single force is dominant, then the position of the Kurds is pivotal. The moderate seeming opposition in Syria are in essence nationalists, hence its conservatism in regards to Kurdish rights. However, even they are in no position to reject the rights and freedoms of the Kurdish people. This is because the rejection of the rights of the Kurdish people is only possible in an authoritarian hegemony; the circumstances in the region, however, no longer allow for any such hegemony.

Preparation for the Democratic Autonomy - Founding of the Interim Administration
As a result of the alarming situation summarized in this document, the components of Rojava/Western Kurdistan began holding meetings to find a solution to the continuing lack of security in the region. The gathering and meetings, which occurred over a period of 6 months, resulted in a conference that was held on 12 November 2013, with the attendance of 86 delegates, representing 35 different parties and civic and social organizations. The gathering was composed of delegates from Kurdish, Arab, Assyrian and Syriac communities. Thus, the Constitutive General Council of The Joint Interim Administration was declared.

The following are the names of the political parties and organizations that took a part in the founding meeting: Syriac Union Party; Syriac Youth Union; Syriac Cultural Association; Syriac Women's Union; Syriac Academics Union; National Coordination Committee; Syrian National Bloc; Arabic National Commission; Communist Labor Party; Kurdish Leftist Party; Kurdistan Democratic Party; Kurdish Democratic Left Party; Kurdish National Democratic Gathering in Syria; Kurdish Peace Democratic Party; Kurdistan Liberal Union; Kurdish Syrian Democratic Party; The Star Union of Kurdish Woman; Syrian Women's Initiative; Human Rights Activists of Western Kurdistan; Civil Peace Committee; Democratic Union Party (PYD); Shoresh Organization of Women; Management of the Diplomatic Relations of Western Kurdistan; People's Council of Western Kurdistan; Kurdistan Democratic Party in Syria; Organization of the State for the Society and Citizenship; Sarah Organization for the Elimination of Violence

against Women; Syria's Future Youth Gathering; Communist Party of Kurdistan; Movement of Democratic Society; Supreme Kurdish Council; Center of the Strategic Studies; Kurdish Students confederation; Revolutionary Youth Movement; Young Woman Revolutionary Movement.

By the second meeting of the delegates on 15 November 2013, a body was formed, consisting of 60 members, representing the three regions of Jazira, Afrin and Kobane, to follow up and full fill this project of democratic autonomy. The function of this body is to form committees to prepare the following:

1-Committee for drafting the joint interim administration's constitution
2- Committee on the comprehensive social convention
3- Committee for electoral system

DEMOCARTIC AUTONOMY OF ROJAVA

Democratic Autonomy Rather Than Nation-State and Homogeneity in the Middle East
For the achievement of democratization and enduring peace with Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, Abdullah Öcalan suggested overcoming the idea of nation states as the source of social and political division in the Middle East. He described his idea as follows: "The nation-state aims at creating a single national culture, a single national identity, and a single unified religious community. Thus it also enforces a homogeneous citizenship. The notion of citizen has been created as a result of the search for such homogeneity. Democratic autonomy is a flexible, multi-cultural, anti-monopolistic, and consensus-oriented. In the frame of this kind of self-administration an alternative economy will become necessary, which increases the resources of the society instead of exploiting them and thus does justice to the manifold needs of the society."

Administration of Self-ruling: Democratic Autonomy
The first and foremost advocate of the idea of democratic autonomy was and is the Kurdish People's leader Abdullah Öcalan. In 2007, Öcalan defined democratic autonomy as being a means to "express the situation of the Kurdish people regarding their approach to those outside of their

community and to enable internal democratisation, as a force against internal backwardness within Kurdish society," as "not being opposed to the state", "not seeking to form a state", "respecting present borders and state structures", "being a means of enabling local interests to be represented within the state" and, finally, as "being a structure that would enable the Kurds to meet their own demands that would be operate in conjunction with existing state institutions."

In 2010, Öcalan further defined his vision of democratic autonomy as "not being based on ethnicity" and "not being limited to Kurdistan", "being intended to function in conjunction with the conception of a democratic nation", "being a system which substitutes centralized administration with local administration", "being a system which intends to fuse participatory democracy with representative democracy" and, lastly, as "being a form of self-governance that will allow the legal participation of individuals who will be able to mobilise and organise along the lines of ethnicity, religion, gender, class, etc."

Democratic Autonomy in Rojava
The priority for understanding of the Cantons lies in the understanding of the project of Democratic autonomy. This project is to be practised firstly in Rojava afterwards in the whole of Syria. In the Charter of the Social Contract of Democratic Autonomy it is written as such: This administration is a model of self-administration [Democratic Autonomy] in Syria, and is part of the future Syria which must be based on the system of political decentralisation, considering that federalism is the best political system for Syria, and that regulating the relationship between the locality and the Centre is practised on this basis.

Unity in Diversity
Democratic autonomy means a democratic homeland, made up of multi-lingual, multinational and multi-religious citizens, rather than a single ethnicity with one language and one religion. In Rojava Kurds, Arabs and Assyrians (Assyrian Chaldeans, Arameans), Turkmen, Armenians, and Chechens, who religiously follow Islam, Christianity and Ezidi are sharing a common homeland.

The relationship between the nationalities and religions is on the principle of fraternity, partnership and coexistence. Every individual or group has freedom of opinion, thought, conscience and freedom of expression, as long as they do not exceed the ethical community structure, do not endanger civil peace and do not aim at exclusion and hegemony.

Rights of Women and children
Women have the right to exercise themselves in political, social, economic, cultural spheres and in all areas of life. Women have the right to organise themselves, and eliminate all forms of discrimination on grounds of gender. Furthermore, the rights of children are protected, particularly preventing child labour that exploits them psychologically and physically, and prohibiting marriage at a young age are the red lines of the understanding of democratic autonomy.
The proportion of the representation of both genders in all institutions, administrations and bodies is of at least 40%.

Economic regulations
In the Charter of Democratic Autonomy, the issue of natural resources, economy and property is highlighted as follow:
"The economic system in the areas of self-administration [Democratic Autonomy] work in an equitable and sustainable global development based manner, based on the development of science and technology, which aim at ensuring humanitarian needs and a decent standard of living for all citizens, through the increase of production and efficiency, and by ensuring a participatory economy whilst promoting competition in accordance with the principle of Democratic Autonomy ("Each according to his/her work"), and preventing monopoly and applying social justice, ensuring

the shape of the national ownership of the means of production, and preserving the rights of workers and consumers, protecting the environment and strengthening the national sovereignty.

Land and public properties in the areas of Democratic Autonomy belong to the people and a law regulates how to manage and invest in them. Everyone has the right to own property and private possession is protected, and nobody is deprived of it, except in accordance with the law and it is not to be forcefully taken, except for the public benefit requirement, but under conditions of fair compensation if he/she leaves his/her property."

Cantons as a Model of practising the principles of Democratic Autonomy

It can simply be said that the Kurds of Rojava tried to find a model for their understanding of democracy. They have searched for a model for their democracy. So far the spirit of the philosophy of democratic autonomy is understood, it will be easy to understand the form, in which the democratic autonomy will be practised.

According to the definition of the dictionaries Cantons are small administrative division of a country or administrative district; administrative division; territorial division (a district defined for administrative purposes). The name is derived from the French language word *canton* meaning *corner* or *district*.

Cantons as a political and social self-governing model are important, because they offer the opportunity of direct democracy. For that reason the Cantons as micro level of a political administration on local bases offering the active participation of all individuals in decision-making processes.

Cantons as tool to overcoming centralism and autocracy

Furthermore, Cantons were as a solution the best option to overcome the centralisation policy of the Syrian Ba'ath party. Decentralisation of decision-making political and administrative organs was vital to the people's democracy. Since the Foundation of Syria any single decision by the country's centralistic government were made in the capital, Damascus and the local authorities act all according to the same directives. After Hafiz al Assad came to power in 1963 a single person took the main decisions. Syria faced a strict form of autocracy.

Due the Cantons citizens can either propose legislation of their own, or work to defeat legislation already approved by higher body.

In the Canton system, decisions are transferred to the lowest level possible. People are likely to be more directly involved in decision-making; the credibility of the system is increased. The same decision, discussed in a regional parliament, in municipalities may be far better accepted by the population than it would have been when taken in a far away capital.

Autonomy of the Cantons

Each canton in Rojava has its own constitution, its government, its parliament, its courts, its laws, and municipalities though they must, of course, be compatible with those of the Charter of the Democratic Autonomy of Rojava. The cantons enjoy a great deal of administrative autonomy and freedom of decision-making. They have independent control over their education systems and social services, and each has its own Asayhish (police) and People's Defence Forces (YPG) and Women's Defense Forces (YPJ).

As the key point is transferring decisions to the regions, cantons may play a key role in reducing conflicts between ethnical and/or religious groups as long as they live in separate regions. In Rojava, most people are convinced that federalism with three autonomous cantons does help to

reduce the dominance of any ethnic group, here the Kurds over Arabs, Assyrian, Chechens and allows rural and urban areas to set different priorities. That is why the Charter of the Social Contract does not mention the name of any ethnic group as leading power.

Population in the Democratic Autonomy of Rojava
The three Cantons become after the war in Syria as a place for refugees from the war areas. Currently the population of Rojava grows to nearly 4 Million.

Canton	Capitel	Since	Official Languages	Religion	Population
Cezire	Amude	21.01.2014	Kurdish Arabic Aramaic	Islam, Christians, Ezidi	1.5 Mio.
Kobane	Kobane	27.01.2014	Kurdish	Islam	1 Mio.
Efrin	Efrin	29.01.2014	Kurdish	Islam, Alawi, Ezidi	1.3 Mio.

Canton of Cezire:
The Cezîre Canton is biggest of the three cantons of Rojava. The canton recognizes three official languages and is shared amongst Arabs, Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, Chechens and adherents of Islam, Christianity and Ezidi.

Cantons of Kobane and Efrin
The absolute majority of the population in Kobane and Efrin are Kurds.
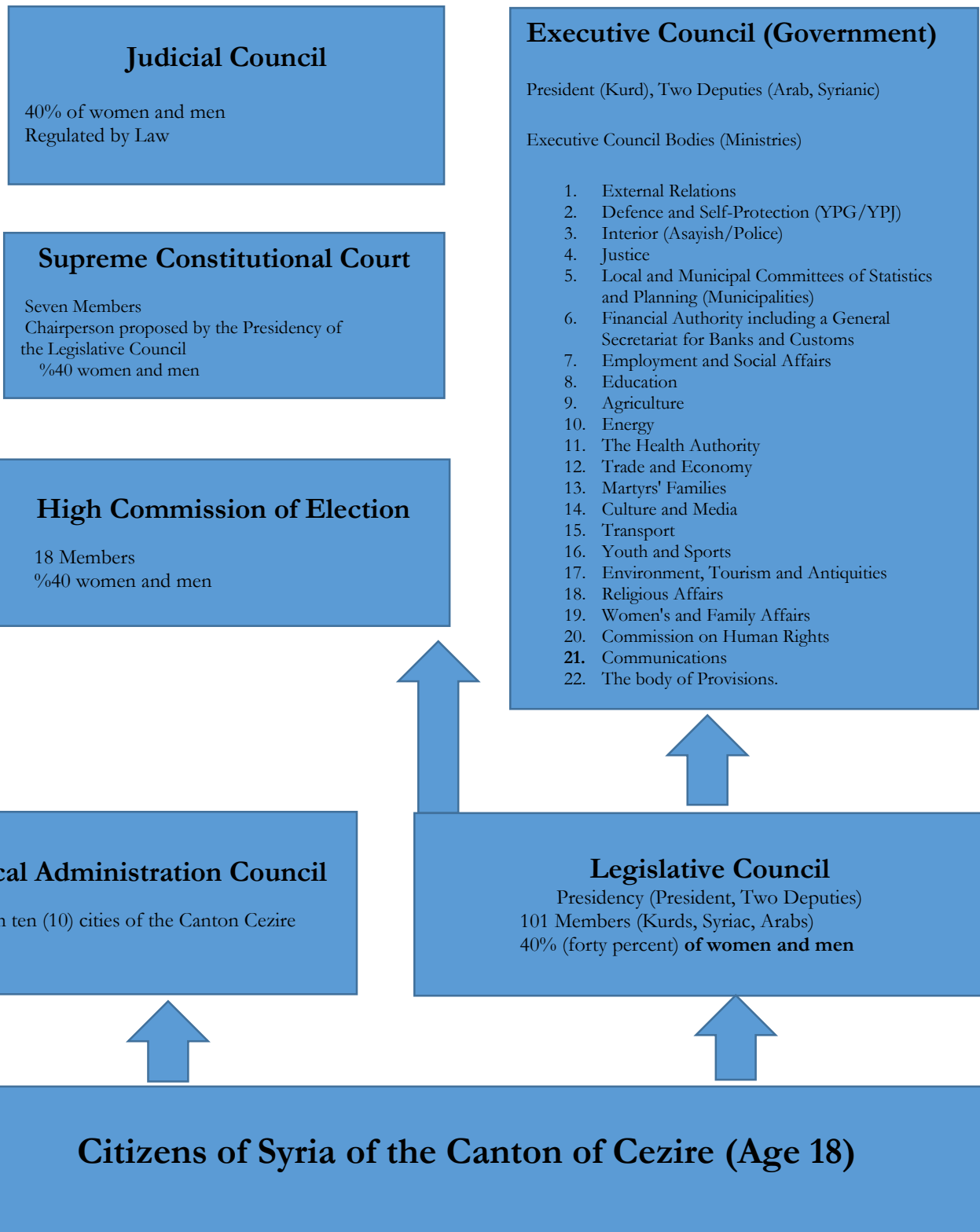
In Efrin Kurdish Alawis and Ezidis build up an important component amongst the Kurdish society. Since the war in Syria hundreds of thousands of Kurds and Arabs from Aleppo, Damascus and other Syrian Arab cities. The population is growing systematically, which causes serious problems of infrastructure. The main focus of these cantons is to solve this new challenge.

Cities in the Cantons of Rojava
Italic marked are the Arabic names

Canton of Cezire (*Al Jaziraa*)	Canton of Efrin (*Afrin*)	Canton of Kobanê (*Ayn Al Arab*)
Qamislo (*Qamishli*)	Efrîn	Kobanê (navend)
Derik (*Malikiyah*)	Reco	Rojhilatê Kobanê
Tirbespiye (*Qahtaniyah*)	Bilbil	Rojavayê Kobanê
Amûdê (*Amuda*)	Mabeta	
Serekanîyê (*Ras Al Ayn)*	Şerawa	
Dirbesîyê (*Darbasiyah*)	Cinderîsê	
Hesseke (*Al Hasakah*)	Şiyê	
Til Temir	Şera	
Girke Lege (*Mabada*)		
Rimelan (*Tahtani*)		
Cil Axa (*Jawadiya*)		

Structure of the Canton of Cezire

Judicial Council

40% of women and men
Regulated by Law

Supreme Constitutional Court

Seven Members
Chairperson proposed by the Presidency of
the Legislative Council
%40 women and men

High Commission of Election

18 Members
%40 women and men

Executive Council (Government)

President (Kurd), Two Deputies (Arab, Syrianic)

Executive Council Bodies (Ministries)

1. External Relations
2. Defence and Self-Protection (YPG/YPJ)
3. Interior (Asayish/Police)
4. Justice
5. Local and Municipal Committees of Statistics and Planning (Municipalities)
6. Financial Authority including a General Secretariat for Banks and Customs
7. Employment and Social Affairs
8. Education
9. Agriculture
10. Energy
11. The Health Authority
12. Trade and Economy
13. Martyrs' Families
14. Culture and Media
15. Transport
16. Youth and Sports
17. Environment, Tourism and Antiquities
18. Religious Affairs
19. Women's and Family Affairs
20. Commission on Human Rights
21. **Communications**
22. The body of Provisions.

Local Administration Council

In ten (10) cities of the Canton Cezire

Legislative Council
Presidency (President, Two Deputies)
101 Members (Kurds, Syriac, Arabs)
40% (forty percent) **of women and men**

Citizens of Syria of the Canton of Cezire (Age 18)

Efforts for Uniting the Cantons

The recent attacks on Kobane forced the Canton of Cezire, Efrin and Kobane to strengthen the solidarity and cooperation. For that reason the Executive Council members decided on an agreement regarding self-defense against the ISIS. On the agenda was to set up a coordination body for cooperation, which will work on uniting the Cantons.

Problems of Improving the Cantons

Map source: NASA/Microsoft, FRONTLINE reporting as of February 2014
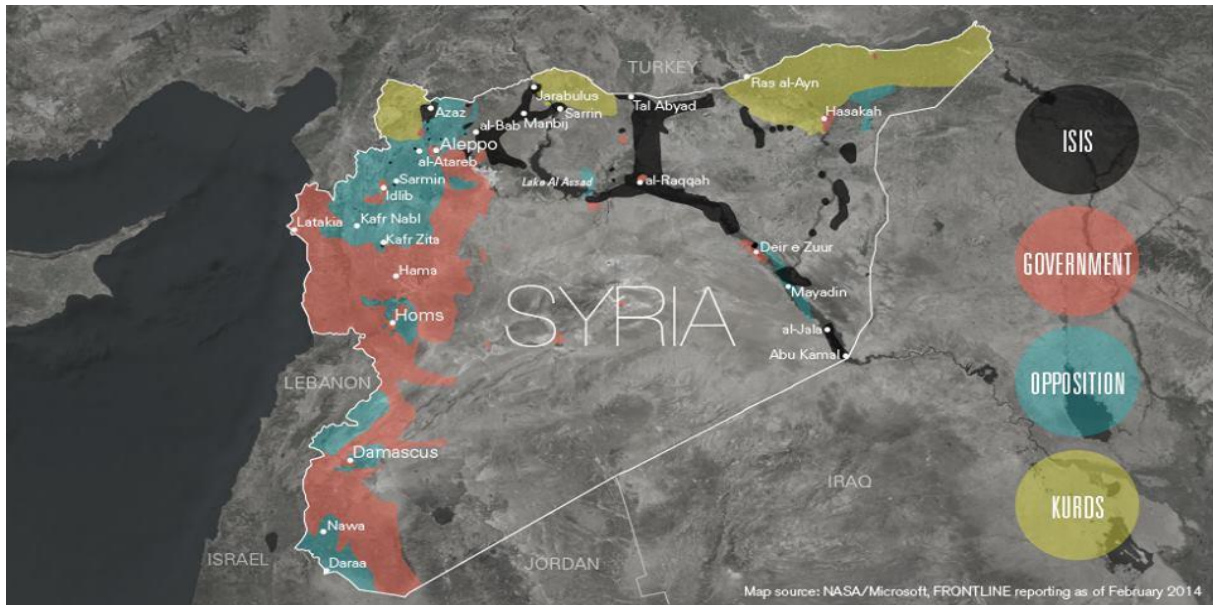
A look on the map above shows, that the gangs of ISIS, Government and Opposition occupy the main roads between the Cantons of Cezire, Efrin and Kobane, so that the links between the cantons are cut.

On a daily basis the Cantonal governments have to take steps defending their autonomy. For that reason, it is a real revolutionary act to insist on improving the system of democratic autonomy.

Problem of Holding Elections

It was decided to hold elections just a short time after the declaration of the Democratic Autonomy in January 2014. Unfortunately since the declaration of the Democratic Autonomy, Rojava became a target of intensified attacks. Nevertheless, the Cantons administration is now working to prepare for the election. Both the Executive Assemblies and the Legislative Assemblies of the three Cantons were chosen for a temporary period.

No matter how difficult the circumstances are in which Rojava exists, they will provide for the sovereignty of the people. The current Executive and the Legislative Assembly are assemblies not chosen by elections but by appointment. For this the High Election Council will without delay recommend that elections take place on time. The specific dates will be determined in the Legislative Assembly. There are certain difficulties as regards the elections. The determination of the borders of each canton, as well as the constituencies and the voting-registration need to be established and completed. If the preparations are not completed within four months the assembly has the authority to extend this period.

Problem in holding Census

Among the many difficulties surrounding this process of elections is the impossibility of holding a proper census and of holding elections in areas outside the control of the autonomous cantons.

The elections will be held in places under control of YPG forces. That is to say that the election can only take place in areas under cantonal administration. Some places are a part of Rojava but because they are not under our administration, it will not be possible to hold elections there. At the same time it is difficult to hold a census. Nevertheless the cantonal administrations will accept family registration. There are also some problems on this subject. As a result of the chauvinist policies that the Syrian Regime put in place, places of residency have been confused. For example despite the fact that a family lives in Hesseke it appears that they are registered in Amûde.

Political Problems amongst the Kurdish and Syrian Opposition

There are certain Kurdish parties who today think that the work towards Democratic Autonomy is the work of only one party – the Democratic Union Party (PYD). These parties were involved in the establishment efforts of Democratic Autonomy until just recently. Since the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) in Iraq Mr. Masoud Barzani is an opponent of the autonomy of Rojava, some Kurdish allies of KDP from Rojava are forcing a struggle of getting power. Nevertheless the administrations of Rojava had made several appeals to those to come back to Rojava and participate in the elections.

Some Kurdish nationalists criticised that Rojava's Charter of the Social Contract does not highlight the names of Kurds and Kurdistan. The aim of Democratic Autonomy of Rojava is not to replace the pan Arabic Ba'ath regime, in which a single ethnic and religious group was running the country by the ideology of one nation-one language-one flag. By using nationalist arguments, some wants to replace the regime, which caused an unbelievable dictatorship on all those, whose identity and political outlook was different. It cannot be right to make the Kurdish identity as the running power, since the Kurds experienced the racist and nationalist ideology of Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria in a very bloody war during the past century.

In general the majority of Kurdish political parties in the other three parts of Kurdistan support the Democratic Autonomy of Rojava. The Kurdish people in Kurdistan and the diaspora welcomed the declaration of the Democratic Autonomy.

Another opponent of Democratic Autonomy is a segment of the Syrian opposition and this is simply a continuation of the Baath regime's mentality. These groups are not on the side of the establishment of a democratic system that takes as its principal, the will of the people in the region.

In the same way as came out of Geneva 2, neither problems of the Kurds nor the Syriacs nor of other peoples of the region were on the agenda. This is not only an attitude against these people. It is against the democratic values desired by these people. But if they are defending the sovereignty of one nation, one language, one religion or one sect then of course they do not want to accommodate these democratic demands.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there are two wars in Syria. One is a conflict within the Syrian system; the other is a conflict of global ruling systems. The conflict within the system is a conflict that rides on which powers will be dominant in Syria for the foreseeable future; The Assad regime, the Free Syrian Army, Russia, China, Iran, USA, Europe, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar are all sides with vested interests in this conflict. The conflict of systems however, is between the global system and the people's democratic autonomy system. While the destiny of the Syrian situation is far from sealed, in the other Syria the Kurdish people are resisting against all attacks as they remain adamant to strengthen their newly established system of administration, which even at this early stage is quickly becoming a viable model for the demands of the people of the whole region.

Rojava is currently experiencing scenes of enormous conflicts and struggle in which counter powers could possibly unite with the intention of breaking the Rojava revolution.

The ongoing closure of border gates, those of northern (Turkey) and southern Kurdistan (KDP-Kurdistan Democratic Party) in particular, and AKP government's provision to the mercenary gangs with all kinds of military and logistic support aimed at breaking the resistance of the people of Rojava and trying to make them surrender.

The people of Rojava are not only facing obstacles in the transfer of their basic needs into their territory but are also being forced to migrate to areas seemingly preorganised and designed to facilitate their forced departure. The purpose of this insidious policy is to clear Rojava of Kurds.

The official recognition of the Democratic Autonomy will not just be to the benefit of Rojava, it will be a historical contribution for Syria and whole Middle East.