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Yazar(lar) / Writer(s)

Turgay DEMİR

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Research Center for Defense Against Terrorism and Radicalization Association

Adres/Address: Beytepe Mah. Kanuni Sultan Süleyman Bulvarı

5387. Cadde No:15A D:58

06800 Çankaya/Ankara

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IS THE PYD A CONTINUATION OF THE PKK? AN IDEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPTS OF DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM AND DEMOCRATIC AUTONOMY

Turgay DEMİR*

ABSTRACT

Since the early stages of the Syrian civil war (summer of 2012), there has been a question whether the PYD (Democratic Union Party/Partiya Yetikiya Demokrat) in Syria is identical to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party/Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan) in Türkiye. This is mainly because of the ideological links and organizational similarities between them. This article scrutinizes the ideological relationship between the PYD and the PKK by approaching the topic from an academic perspective. By tracing the PYD's concept of democratic autonomy and investigating its relevance to Abdullah Öcalan's concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation, the paper analyzes and compares the ideologies of the PYD and the PKK. Consequently, the article argues that the PYD embraces and implements Abdullah Öcalan's concept of democratic confederalism under the names of democratic autonomy or self-governance and attempts to concretize the concept of democratic nation as the main indicators that PYD is an ideological continuation of the PKK in Syria.

Keywords: *Democratic Confederalism, Democratic Autonomy, PYD, PKK, Syrian Civil War.*

PYD PKK'NIN BİR DEVAMI MI? DEMOKRATİK KONFEDERALİZM VE DEMOKRATİK OTONOMİ KAVRAMLARININ İDEOLOJİK BİR ANALİZİ

ÖZET

Suriye iç savaşının ilk aşamalarından, özellikle 2012 yılı yazından itibaren, aralarındaki ideolojik yakınlıklar/bağlar ve örgütlenme yapılarından kaynaklı benzerlikler dolayısıyla Suriye'deki Demokratik Birlik Partisi (PYD) ile Türkiye'deki Kürdistan İşçi Partisi'nin (PKK) aynı örgütler olup olmadıkları sorusu tartışılmaktadır. Bu makale meseleye akademik bir perspektiften yaklaşarak bu örgütler arasındaki ideolojik ilişkiyi irdelemektedir. Makale, PYD'nin demokratik otonomi adını verdiği kavramın ideolojik yaklaşımının izlerini sürüp bu yaklaşımın Abdullah Öcalan'ın demokratik konfederalizm ve demokratik ulus adını verdiği ideolojik yaklaşımlarla ilişkisini sorgulayarak karşılaştırmaktadır. Karşılaştırmanın sonucunda makale, PYD'nin Abdullah Öcalan'ın demokratik konfederalizm konseptini benimsemekle kalmadığını aynı zamanda Suriye'de "demokratik otonomi" veya "öz yönetim" kavramları aracılığıyla onu uygulamaya koyduğunu ve aynı zamanda Öcalan'ın demokratik ulus kavramının pratiğini gerçekleştirmeye çalıştığını ortaya koymaktadır. Buradan hareketle makale PYD'nin ideolojik olarak PKK'nın Suriye'de bir devamı olduğunu iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Demokratik Konfederalizm, Demokratik Otonomi, PYD, PKK, Suriye İç Savaşı.*

* Dr. Öğretim Üyesi, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan Üniversitesi, Uluslararası İlişkiler Bölümü, turgay.demir@erdogan.edu.tr, ORCID: 0000-0001-6526-0784

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INTRODUCTION

The Syrian Kurds have had some unprecedented opportunities following the outbreak of the Syrian conflict and since the summer of 2012 such as having a de facto autonomous administration (Gunter, 2014, p.1). Particularly following the withdrawal of the Syrian government forces from northern parts of the country in July 2012, the PYD took the control over the region because of possessing armed forces like the YPG (People's Protection Units/Yekineyen Parastina Gel) (Savelsberg & Tejel, 2013, p.191). Those developments have brought the PKK, its ideology and its policies into the Syrian civil war, mainly due to its ideological impacts on the PYD. Since then, scholars have been investigating the relationship between the PYD and the PKK as the PYD is the Syrian affiliate of the PKK (Gunter, 2014).

There are two types of studies approaching the relationship between the PYD and the PKK in the existing literature. The first type is mainly based on research of Western scholars and some regional ones who tend to defend that the PYD is a Syrian Kurdish party; and therefore, it should be considered as a distinct organization from the PKK (Kaya & Lowe, 2017; Paasche, 2015). Although these scholars accept an ideological intimacy between the PYD and the PKK, they emphasize some reasons and indicators for such a distinction. First of all, the PYD has never been listed as a terrorist organization by Western countries like the PKK (Paasche, 2015, p.78), which was designated by the US and European Union countries (Gunter, 2000). Second, those parties operate in different contexts and/or geography. While the PKK functions in Türkiye, the PYD operates in Syria, particularly in the chaotic atmosphere of the civil war (Kaya & Lowe, 2017, p.280). Third, in spite of the fact that there is an ideological intimacy between those organizations, as underlined by its leading officials, the PYD is an autonomous actor operating in Syria, which was not controlled by the PKK (Kaya & Lowe, 2017, p.280). Fourth, the PYD tries to increase its legitimacy among the Syrian Kurds and needs international support for its model of governance that leads the PYD to act as a Syrian Kurdish party and downplay its relationship with the PKK (Kaya & Lowe, 2017, p.276, 280). Finally, the PYD operationalizes something that the PKK has never experienced, which is being a party of government on a chunk of territory (Kaya & Lowe, 2017, p.281). Such an experiment urges the PYD to govern

many people and work with other political parties, ethnic/religious groups and different movements (Paasche, 2015, p.78).

The second type of studies perceive the PYD and PKK quite identical. They are mainly research of Turkish scholars who approach the relationship between the PYD and PKK from the perspectives of politics and terrorism. While analyzing the PYD-PKK relationship politically and calling the PYD as a “terrorist organization”, those studies rightfully address human resources, organizational and structural affiliation of the PYD as a Syrian subunit to the PKK’s body of Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) in discussing the attempts of the PYD to have a political organization in Syria (Çalışkan, 2020), the YPG as a proxy actor in the US foreign policy (Erol & Çelik, 2018), the role of terrorist organizations in identity building (Demirel 2017) and the PYD-PKK’s strategies during the Syrian civil war (Kerman & Efeğil, 2017). The PYD was established by the Syrian remnants of the PKK in 2003 (Gunter, 2014). This reality has also been accepted and demonstrated by Western scholars. For instance, Kaya & Lowe (2017, p.279) address the similarities between the military organization of the PYD and the PKK. While the PKK operates as a political party and its military activities are conducted by the HPG (People’s Defense Forces), a military unit for the men, the PYD acts like a political party and its main military unit is the YPG, a military unit for the men (p.279). Additionally, the PKK has a YJA-STAR (the Free Women Units) as a military unit for the women, the PYD has the YPJ (Yekineyen Parastina Jin, Women’s Protection Units) (Knapp et al., 2016). Thus, the perspectives of those second type of studies can become more understandable if we closely look at the PYD’s party program. According to the PYD’s party program (2013), the PYD “considers the leader of The Democratic Communities Union of Kurdistan [KCK] as its leader [the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan], and declares the People’s Congress of Kurdistan ‘KONGRA GEL’ as the supreme legislative authority of the people of Kurdistan”. These are the bodies of PKK, which help demonstrate the organizational similarities of the PYD with the PKK. Even those organizational points indicate the necessity of an ideological scrutiny between the PYD and the PKK, and the importance of this paper, since those organizations were established in accordance with the ideological concepts of the PKK and mainly its leader Abdullah Ocalan. Accordingly, one side attempts to provide the PYD as a distinct organization from the PKK,

another one strives for indicating that they are identical and both are terrorist organizations.

Bringing an alternative perspective to those debates, especially through comparing the ideological concepts of the PYD and the PKK, would be a significant and leading approach that would also provide a strong ground to those debates from an academic perspective. Aforementioned studies are significant in terms of approaching the relationship between the PYD and the PKK from different perspectives. They also have a common understanding regarding the ideological similarities between the PYD and the PKK. However, there has not been any analyses of the ideological concepts of the PYD and the PKK. When such an analysis is completed, it would be possible to indicate and address to what extent the PYD is an ideological continuation of the PKK although the PYD attempts to downplay its relations with the PKK (Kaya & Lowe, 2017, p.280). Such an analysis would clearly demonstrate that the PYD operates the PKK's, particularly its leader Abdullah Ocalan's concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation and it would clearly address the practical implementations of the PKK's concepts by the PYD in Syria. Although there have been some attempts to show Ocalan's ideological impact on the PYD administration in Syria through the concepts of gender equality or jineology (Tank, 2022), there is a need for holistic approach that has to focus and explain the entire details of the PKK's concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation provided a ground for the PYD's concept of democratic autonomy. Such an ideological ground can be seen through the explanations of the representatives of the PYD and PKK, and through the official documents of the PYD and its administration in Syria as well as the practical implementation of the PYD in Syria. Therefore, instead of engaging in the debates whether the PYD is the same as the PKK or it is distinct from the PKK, this article provides a new perspective, it creates an ideological ground for the aforementioned debates and approaches such a relationship from an ideological viewpoint. It traces the PYD's ideology (democratic autonomy) and elaborates its relevance to the PKK, more specifically Ocalan's ideological concepts (democratic confederalism and democratic nation) by addressing those points through the official documents of the PYD and by providing some practical examples from the daily implementations of the PYD administration in north and east Syria. Therefore, it asks the following questions:

- To what extent the PYD can be assessed as an ideological continuation of the PKK?
- What are the main ideological and practical indicators for assessing the PYD as an ideological continuation of the PKK?

The paper, thus, aims at comparing and contrasting the ideological concepts of those organizations, which would reveal the ideological dimension of their relationship. To do so, the article will begin by providing the details of methodology. After that, Ocalan's ideological concepts for the PKK will be examined. Then, the article will trace the PYD's operationalization of the PKK's ideological concepts in north and eastern Syria under the name of democratic autonomy or Rojava project. The paper will conclude by discussing the implications of the findings for the broader research on the PYD.

1. METHODOLOGY

The article is mainly based on the analysis and comparison of the documents of the PKK and the PYD. Such an analysis included three types of documents. The first type was the textbooks of Abdullah Ocalan, *Democratic Confederalism* (2011) and *Democratic Nation* (2016) that were written for the followers and sympathizers of the PKK. In the early stages of the Syrian conflict, the co-chair of the PYD at the time, Salih Muslim (quoted in KurdWatch, 2011), declared that Ocalan's model of governance was the best one and the best solution for the Kurdish question in Syria. Therefore, the PYD began preparing the Kurdish society to internalize such a model of governance under the name of democratic autonomy. Those explanations indicate that the PYD follows and aims to operate the ideas of the PKK leader Ocalan. Therefore, to better understand and explain the concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation, and to indicate the relationship between those concepts and the PYD's concept of democratic autonomy, it was necessary to examine Ocalan's aforementioned textbooks, *Democratic Confederalism* (2011) and *Democratic Nation* (2016). They were also important resources to indicate the PKK's influence on the PYD and its policies (Kaya & Lowe, 2017). As a result of this analysis, the section titled "Abdullah Ocalan and The Making of Democratic Confederalism" was written. In this section, the PKK's concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation were explained either

through direct quotes or through paraphrasing the sentences from those texts as well as adding inferences of the author.

The second type of documents were the official documents of the PYD such as its party program (2013), the Social Contract of Rojava (2014) and the Social Contract of Democratic Autonomous Administration of the North and East Syria Region (2023). The reasons for choosing those documents for the analysis can be explained like below. First of all, the PYD had been functioning its model of governance in the north and eastern Syria since the early stages of the Syrian conflict through those official documents. Secondly, those were ideal and significant documents to indicate how the ideological concepts and premises of Ocalan were located in the documents and were put into practice by the PYD leadership in Syria. As a consequence of this analysis, the section named “The PYD and Democratic Confederalism” was written. In this section, the article discusses and compares the conceptual similarities between the democratic confederalism and democratic nation of the PKK, and democratic autonomy of the PYD, particularly by indicating the practical implementations of the PYD. To demonstrate such points, either direct quotes from the official documents of the PYD or inferences of the author from those documents were applied.

The third type of documents included the outlets of the PKK-PYD related media such as Fırat News Agency (ANF News) through which the explanations, speeches and interviews of the PYD representatives and the leading figures of the PKK such as Murat Karayılan and Cemil Bayık were reached out. Such an analysis helped indicate how the PYD operates Ocalan’s ideological concepts in its administrative and military units as well as in its institutions for education. Those outlets also demonstrated how the PYD and, to some extent the PKK, attempted to advertise its model of governance to the world.

While reading and analyzing the aforementioned documents, some direct quotes were used to express specific terms. Except this, analysis were written by paraphrasing the analyzed points and addressing the inferences of the author. When it is seen necessary, and to prevent any misunderstandings especially regarding the concepts of Ocalan, paraphrasing were applied by skipping the direct quotes. In terms of those points, this research has also some limits. Particularly, when explaining the concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation, there is a need for direct quotes from

Ocalan. However, applying those quotes regularly could cause some misunderstandings and could be seen like reflecting the points of Ocalan, a confirmed terrorist that could have risked the content of the research and the life of researcher. As underlined, such limits were attempted to avoid through paraphrasing and inferences of the author. Ultimately, the article argues that it is very significant to show the ideological relationship between Ocalan's concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation, and PYD's concept of democratic autonomy that were put in practice in the north and eastern Syria.

2. ABDULLAH OCALAN AND THE MAKING OF DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM AND DEMOCRATIC NATION

In the early stages of the Syrian conflict, the PYD co-chair at the time, Salih Muslim said that they would be following Ocalan's ideological concepts in Syria under the name of democratic autonomy:

“There is a reason that we apply Apo's [Abdullah Öcalan's] philosophy and ideology to Syria: It offers the best solution to the Kurdish problems in Syrian Kurdistan. We have put forth a project: ‘democratic autonomy’.” (Quoted in KurdWatch, 2011)

Through the underlined philosophy and/or ideology of Ocalan Muslim referred to the concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation. Ocalan wrote the textbooks of *Democratic Confederalism (2011)* and *Democratic Nation (2016)* that provides new concepts to the PKK sympathizers for forming a new society and administration. The PYD has been practicing those concepts in the north and eastern Syria since the summer of 2012 (Gunter, 2014). This part of the article will address the concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation. The concept of democratic confederalism is mainly based on Murray Bookchin's concept of libertarian confederalism (Knapp et al., 2016; Gunter, 2014). Democratic confederalism is a non-state administration or a democracy without a state or a state-like authority (Ocalan, 2011, p.21). It seems that in here Ocalan makes a distinction between a state and a democracy to justify his new concept of democratic confederalism. According to Ocalan (2011, p.21), states are based on power and their priority is to administer. Therefore, states utilize coercion in a legitimate meaning. However, democracies are constructed on a collective consensus and their priority is to govern, which appeal to direct elections and voluntary participation (Ocalan, 2011, p.21).

As a model of democracy, democratic confederalism is open to different political groups. Its characteristics include flexibility, multi-culturalism, a stand against monopolism and consensus that embraces ecology and feminism (Ocalan. 2011, p.21).

Additionally, Ocalan (2016) argues that he develops a new type of Kurdish nation by calling it “democratic nation” as an alternative concept to the nation of nation-states. In this regard, the concept of democratic confederalism would provide a ground for forming heterogeneous societies as an alternative to the homogeneous societies of nation states (Ocalan 2011). Such an argued transformation from nation to Ocalan’s democratic nation needs self-governance or autonomy as a necessary pre-condition for forming those aforementioned societies (Ocalan, 2016, p.21). We can infer from those explanations that a heterogeneous society is one of the main principles of Ocalan’s new model of governance. This is because Ocalan (2016, p.23) believes that the homogeneous society is mainly based on centralism, rigid political boundaries, particularly a single language, culture, religion and history. Ocalan (2011, p.23) argues that those criteria prevent societies like groups clans, tribes and communities that have federal qualities. So, the mindset of Ocalan’s democratic nation is based on the “consciousness of freedom” and “solidarity” among communities or individuals that share “similar mindset through their own will” (Ocalan, 2016, p.24). In this way, Ocalan (2011, p.23) believes that society will rely on its original meaning. The former empires embraced this strategy for their internal government through employing divergent type of self-administrations, such as self-administrations for “religious authorities, tribal councils, kingdoms, and even republics” in the different parts of their administrative structures (Ocalan, 2011, p.23).

Another argument Ocalan advocates is linguistic freedom for the heterogeneous societies/communities under this new model of governance. He opposes the idea that a state and a single language are necessary elements to become a nation. He argues that there is no need for a state and a single language or dialect to become a democratic nation. His democratic nation and democratic confederalism model perceive different languages and dialects as a “richness” (Ocalan, 2016, p.26). It appears that Ocalan considers the situation of Kurdish societies within four different countries of the Middle East. It is highly difficult to harmonize those societies to form a

united Kurdish state due to the cultural, linguistic and even dialectical differences (McDowall, 2004). It also seems that Ocalan aims two points through those claims. First, he wants to convince outsiders that his democratic confederalism and democratic nation have no problem with the nation-state system as long as the nation-state system does not impose anything to his model of governance. Secondly, he opens a space for the principle of “peaceful coexistence with other ethnic/religious minorities” to amplify that his alternative model is highly inclusive and democratic.

Ocalan also argues that education will play a central role in forming his ideal nation and/or transforming the Kurdish one into a democratic nation and functioning confederalism. In practice, this premise requires opening schools (Ocalan, 2016). These schools will teach “intellectual and emotional education” and create argued active citizens to become a nation in the context of Ocalan’s new model of governance (Ocalan, 2016, p.29). These schools will also explain the existing structures of societies and their codes in this century by considering the historical developments with regard to the modern society (Ocalan, 2016). Ocalan (2016, p.29) believes that through these schools, the new society will internalize freedom and equality and will be respectful towards differences within the public sphere as well as the moral and political life of society.

Transformation of societies through education is a theoretical part of the creation of the argued active citizens. For the practical part, the active participation in a policymaking process plays a crucial role. However, Ocalan’s envisaged active citizens do not only participate in policymaking processes but they also need to defend their nation, society and system actively in the context of self-defense. This is because Ocalan (2011, pp.28-29) believes that self-defence is a necessary mechanism to protect identities, capability of democratic decision-making and political nature of Kurds against internal and external interventions. Ocalan (2016) also argues that self-defense is a matter of existence for the democratic nation of Ocalan. We can infer two implicit contexts for self-defense as social and military from the textbooks Ocalan. While social self-defense is for the protection of identity, political awareness, right of decision-making and democratic nation, military one considers the protection of territory and administrative units against the perceived threats. However because of opposing to the nation-state system, Ocalan defends that there should not be a military

monopoly for the armed forces. Instead, the armed forces should be under the control of democratic institutions (Ocalan, 2011, p.29).

Self-defense mechanism is not only for the men but also for the women under this new model of governance. His explanations regarding women give us some hints about how Ocalan's new society or new nation approaches to the status of women. Ocalan (2011) describes the nation-state system as a patriarchal one, which exploits women as a cheap labor and tool for the production of men and continuity of this patriarchal system. His new society, on the other hand, envisages that as the "most oppressed and suppressed segment of society", women should have knowledge regarding their history. Women should construct their organizations/institutions, which will open a space for their existence and representation in each area of life (Ocalan, 2016, p.56). Accordingly, Ocalan (2016) argues that women can and should form their own defense forces. Consequently, the argued active citizenship in the context of self-defense against the perceived internal or external threats is important from two perspectives. First, it seems that Ocalan attempts to raise ideological consciousness regarding the argued active citizenship of his democratic nation in the context of his new model of governance. Secondly, Ocalan prepares his followers/sympathizers for potential external interventions of nation-states against his new model of governance and society. While the latter appears to be developed for protecting Ocalan's system against nation-states, the former one aims at creating conscious Kurds as argued active citizens in accordance with Ocalan's premises. In this way, Ocalan also opens a space for the argument of equality of men and women or gender equality amongst the Kurds.

Ocalan's new model of governance separates policy-making from administration, which implements policies. Ocalan tries to connect his political system and new administration with the societal structure of his new society and nation. This is because democratic confederalism is a "political Ocalan (2011, p.26) believes that in this type of self-administration all groups and cultural identities under this administration can express their voices. This system is built on confederal networks and it envisages a participatory democracy (Ocalan, 2011). Since Ocalan (2011, p.28) is highly critical about the nation-state system, he defends that only confederal networks or equally strong networks can provide a basis to nation-states. This confederal structure requires federative units and each federative units

play a role as “germ cells of participatory democracy” (Ocalan, 2011, p.27). Depending on the situation, these units can be combined and be associated into new groups and confederations (Ocalan, 2011, p.27). In this way, Ocalan (2011, p.27) argues that the system creates a “continuous democratic process”. For decision-making, local level is the central level. Thus, even the villages and urban neighborhoods need confederal structures (Ocalan, 2011, p.27). Therefore, when confederal networks from local to global level become operational, all types of “social and political groups”, “religious minorities”, and “intellectual tendencies” will straightforwardly participate in decision-making process to express themselves (p.26). Under this administration the aforementioned groups/societies express their opinions through local meetings, general conventions and local councils. Ocalan (2011, p.26) believes that this societal structure, which reflects the principle of peaceful coexistence with other ethnic/religious minorities, will encourage forming different and diverse groups by advancing the political integration of the society as a whole. This is because society in this new model of governance is central tool of social expression and participation. In this way, Ocalan (2011, p.26) thinks that the system will politicize society and politics will become a daily routine. Ocalan (2016; 2011) also thinks that this new political culture and politics help to create argued active citizens theoretically and practically. Consequently, the argued active citizens not only participate in policymaking process but they also actively defend their system through the mechanism of self-defense.

Ultimately, Ocalan (2011, p.32) plans that democratic confederations will not be restricted in one particular area. Instead, they will be transnational structures/organizations. Such a premise opens a space for Ocalan’s umbrella organization of KCK (Kurdistan Communities Union), which envisages connecting Kurdish confederal networks in Türkiye, Iran, Iraq and Syria. As seen, the PKK leader Ocalan strives to form a new nation and a model of governance/administration. Ocalan’s new ideology and its concepts, democratic confederalism and democratic nation, which are prepared for the PKK, have serious impacts on the PYD, the Syrian affiliate of the PKK. According to its representatives, the PYD functions democratic autonomy as a model of governance in northern Syria, which is guided by the writings of Ocalan (Muslim quoted in KurdWatch, 2011). Therefore, the next section will demonstrate how the concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nations are located in the official documents of the PYD and

how the PYD functioned such a model of governance in the north and eastern Syria as a democratic autonomy project since the summer of 2012.

3. PYD AND DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERALISM

This section concentrates on the main ideological and practical indicators showing to what extent the PYD is an ideological continuation of the PKK. First, the PYD was established by the Syrian remnants of the PKK in 2003 (Gunter, 2014, p.105). Second, the PYD's party program (2013) states that it "considers the leader of The Democratic Communities Union of Kurdistan [KCK] as its leader [the PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan], and declares the People's Congress of Kurdistan 'KONGRA GEL' as the supreme legislative authority of the people of Kurdistan". Third, those points also indicate the organizational similarities between the PKK and the PYD. For instance, the KCK was found in 2004 as a new coordination body of the PKK (Akkaya & Jongerden, 2011, p.150) and all those organizations are parts of the complicated structure of the PKK with their military wings formed in accordance with the concept of democratic confederalism (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2013, pp.165-66). As underlined in the previous section, the envisaged confederal networks were designed to connect the confederal administrations in Türkiye, Iran, Iraq and Syria. Accordingly, the PKK in Türkiye, the Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistan/Free Life Party of Kurdistan (PJAK) in Iran, the Partiya Çareseriya Demokratik a Kurdistan/Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (PÇDK) in Iraq and the PYD in Syria were established to represent those ideological networking of Ocalan's KCK (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2013, pp.165-166). The PYD also had a branch of KCK in charge until the summer of 2011. This branch, the KCK-Rojava, was abolished in July 2011 (Savelsberg & Tejel, 2013, p.212). In 2005, the co-presidency of women was embraced by the PKK (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2013, p.165) and the PYD has been implementing the co-presidency and/or dual leadership in Syria (Kaya & Lowe, 2017). In terms of organizational similarities, the PKK and the PYD had also guerilla organizations. For example, the PKK has the HPG (Hezen Parastina Gel/People's Defense Forces) for the men, and the HRK (Hezi Rojhelati Kurdistan/Force of Eastern Kurdistan) operates in coordination with the PAJK (Partiya Azadiya Jin a Kurdistan/Party of Free Women in Kurdistan) and YJA-STAR, (the Free Women's Units) for women (Jongerden & Akkaya, 2013, pp.165-166). Similarly, the PYD has the YPG (Yekineyen

Parastine Gel/People's Protection Units) for the men (Kaya and Lowe, 2017) and the YPJ (Yekineyen Parastine Jin/Women's Protection Units) for the women (Gunter, 2014). Fourth, although they deny the existence of organic ties between the PYD and the PKK, the leading figures of the PYD, Salih Muslim (quoted in KurdWatch 2011; ANF, 2013b), and the PKK, Murat Karayılan, (ANF, 2024a) accept that there is an ideological intimacy between them in following and operating Ocalan's opinions. Finally, the leading figures of the PYD and the PKK use the same terminology by calling the happenings in north and east Syria as a "Rojava Revolution" (Muslim quoted in ANF, 2013b; Abdullah quoted kurdishquestion.com 2016; Karayılan quoted in ANF, 2015a).

The Syrian conflict started through the protests against President Bashar al-Assad in March 2011 and it brought some significant opportunities for the Syrian Kurds, particularly for the PYD in operating concepts of Ocalan (Demir, 2023a). The PYD had a de facto autonomous administration through the Kurdish Freedom Movement in the early stages of the conflict. It also opened schools and culture centers. As underlined by Salih Muslim, the co-chair at the time, their aim was to transform the Kurdish society in accordance with Ocalan's argued democratic nation through "culture, institutions, structure, organization" in towns and cities of northern Syria (KurdWatch, 2011). With the start of the Aleppo battle between the opposition and regime forces in July 2012, the conflict turned into a civil war (Kusilek, 2019, pp.2-3). The Syrian government forces withdrew from the Kurdish-populated region for the protection of central areas (Gunter, 2014). Kurdish parties filled the remaining authority and security gaps in the region (Allsopp, 2013), and the PYD took the control because of its armed force, the YPG (Savelsberg & Tejel, 2013). By the end of the summer of 2012, the PYD managed to gain control over the vast majority of northern Syria including Afrin, Kobani and Amuda (Kusilek, 2019).

The PYD established an umbrella organization and a local assembly named the People's Council of Western Kurdistan (PCWK) with its executive and legislative branches (Gunter, 2014). The PCWK is also a PKK's institution (Savelsberg & Tejel, 2013, p.191). This umbrella organization included the Western Kurdistan Democratic Society Movement or Tevgara Civaka Demokrat (TEV-DEM) with local and civil structures (Kaya & Lowe, 2017), the Yekitiya Star, the Union of Families of Martyrs,

the Education and Language Institution, and the Revolutionary Youth Movement of Western Kurdistan (Allsopp, 2015). Those organizations commenced operating as argued civil society associations to transform the Kurdish society through education and strong organizational structures in accordance with Ocalan's concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation (Knapp et al., 2016). The unofficial status of the PYD administration in northern Syria continued until the Constitutive General Council of the Joint Interim Administration was announced as a result of a conference in November 2013 (KNK, 2014). Then, the PYD's cantonal administrations declared the acceptance of the Social Contract of Rojava in January 2014. In the following process, especially after the formation of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) as a result of the alliance between the PYD and some Arab components in the region, and the establishment of councils under the name of Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) in the Arab majority regions, the federation system was declared in 2017 (ANHA 2024). Then in September 2018, the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) was announced (ANHA 2024). Officials of this administration generally bounded and operated Ocalan's democratic confederalism, and Arab members have also been forced to learn the concepts of Ocalan and his model of governance (Knights & Wilgenburg, 2021). In December 2023, the Social Contract of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of the North and East Syria Region (2023) was announced (ANF, 2023c) as a redrafted version of the Social Contract of Rojava (2014). From now, the practical indicators of the ideological intimacy between the PYD and the PKK (between the concepts of democratic confederalism, democratic nation and democratic autonomy) will be addressed by quoting from the related documents of the PYD and from the explanations of the leading figures of the PYD and the PKK.

The first practical indicator is the PYD's argument and implementation of peaceful coexistence with ethnic/religious minorities that is based on Ocalan's idea of heterogeneous society. Ocalan (2011) argues forming a heterogeneous society that is based on mutual recognition of communities and peaceful coexistence with all ethnic/religious minorities as the real and historical meaning and reflection of a society. The first paragraph in the introduction of Social Contract of Rojava (2014) refers to this point and harmony of other ethnic/religious groups as "Kurds, Arabs, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Arameans, Turkmen, Armenians and Chechens,"

(para 1, p.1). The introduction section of the new social contract (2023) also refers to the harmony of ethnic/religious groups through the statement “We, the daughters and sons of North and East Syria – Kurds, Arabs, Syriac Assyrians, Turkmen, Armenians, Circassians, Chechens, Muslims, Christians and Yazidis [...]” (para 1, p.1). The article 15 of the new contract (2023) also underlines the consolidation of the “values of coexistence in accordance with the principles of a democratic nation” (Article 15, para 6, p.3). The pro-PKK/PYD activists also argue that Kurds, Yazidis, Syriacs, Arabs, Armenians, Chaldeans, Turkmen and Chechens support this autonomous administration and appreciate working with the PYD-affiliated TEV-DEM movement in practice, particularly in Derik (Knapp et al., 2016). Although Derik has been used as a strategic place in the context of the Public Relations campaign of the PYD for advertising its model of governance to the outside world (Demir, 2023b, pp.86-87), the main point here is the practical indication of Ocalan’s concept of democratic confederalism through an argued principle of peaceful coexistence with ethnic/religious minorities by the PYD. The member of the KCK Executive Council and the PKK Executive Committee, Murat Karayılan, also demonstrated the PKK’s support to the PYD’s democratic autonomy project by emphasizing Ocalan’s premise of coexistence with ethnic/religious minorities. For Karayılan, Syria has a cosmopolitan atmosphere to operate Ocalan’s model of governance and the capture of Tel Abyad was important for the concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation:

“The liberation of Gire Spi [Tel Abyad] is [...] an important gain for the democratic revolution of all peoples in Syria including Kurds, Arabs and Assyrians. Rojava revolution is framed by the Democratic Nation Perspective put forth by the Leader Apo, and its prototype can be found in Cizir Canton. Arab people are attracted to the Democratic Nation formula that has brought to life in Cizir Canton for the past two years. This means there is viable ground for the formula to take root in all across Syria.” (ANF, 2015a)

Likewise, following the capture of Raqqa from ISIS in the fall of 2017, to show the PKK’s support in, Karayılan stated the following points in his message:

“The great sacrifice, heroism and fraternity displayed in Raqqa constituted a striking example for the democratic nation approach. Kurdish, Arab and Syriac young men and women shed their blood for

a joint cause and with this, building of a democratic and free life on the basis of fraternity of people and mutual respect with the perspective of the Democratic Nation has become much more probable.” (ANF, 2017f)

The introduction of the former Social Contract (2014) continues to express Ocalan’s viewpoint regarding the creation of a new society and nation under this new model of governance. The free will of individuals and communities are key elements for Ocalan’s democratic nation (Ocalan 2016). Those people would be conscious of freedom and solidarity through the right of self-governance in addition to the coexistence with other mosaics of this new society (Ocalan, 2016, p.21, 23). Thus, the former Social contract (2014) expresses “spirit of reconciliation, pluralism and democratic participation” for the creation of such a nation and it underlines the transformation of societies as a “transitional phase from dictatorship, civil war and destruction, to a new democratic society where civic life and social justice are preserved” (para 3, p.1). All those points demonstrate how the PYD located Ocalan’s ideological concepts in its official documents and also display the PKK’s explicit support to the PYD’s autonomy project in Syria.

The second practical indicator is the PYD’s argument and implementation of freedom of languages that is based on Ocalan’s argument to provide freedom of using languages for all ethnic/religious minorities through his new administration. For instance, Ocalan (2016) denies the idea of a state and a single language/dialect to become a nation. He argues that his model of governance perceives “different languages and dialects as a richness” (Ocalan, 2016, p.26). The PYD’s Party Program (2013) and the Declaration of The Political Resolution (2011), emphasize the freedom of using other languages in relation to the principle of peaceful coexistence with ethnic/religious minorities. Accordingly, the PYD’s Party Program (2013) underlines that Kurdish children will be able to learn the Kurdish language in schools. The Declaration of The Political Resolution (2011) underscores “*the use of mother tongue and education and learning in mother tongue and publication*” as a component of the collective democratic freedom. By considering structure of the Jazira region, the Article 9 of the former Social Contract (2014, p.2) allows the use of Kurdish, Arabic and Syriac as official languages for teaching and learning. The article 7 of the new Social Contract (2023, p.2), however, declares “Arabic, Kurdish, and Syriac are official languages in the areas of the Democratic Autonomous

Administration” within the entire north and east Syria. The article 6 of the new contract (2023, p.2) also underlines the freedom of using the mother tongue to organize and conduct daily affairs in the entire region. Those practical implementations are also supported by the institutions of the PKK as part of the argued “revolution” in north and east Syria. For instance, the so-called education committee of the KCK celebrated the Kurdish Language Day on 15th May 2023 by stating that “Happily, the Rojava Revolution is leading the quest of all languages and voices to live freely in their mother tongue as a true cultural revolution.” (ANF 2023b).

The third indicator that the PYD operates the ideas of Ocalan is the role of education in forming a new society in Syria. As addressed in the previous section, education plays a central role for transforming Ocalan’s society. Ocalan (2016) argues that his model of governance will need schools to create active citizens, and provide a substantial ground for Kurds to become a democratic nation (p.26). Accordingly, the co-chair of the PYD at the time, Asya Abdullah, underlined that the PYD had established special and general public academies to teach Ocalan’s new concepts for the members of the PYD administrations as well as societies in there. Through those schools, the PYD aimed to provide lessons over the culture of democracy and self-governance. Additionally, it organizes seminars, panel discussions, public meetings to assess progress and political situation (ANF, 2012b). The Article 91 of the previous Social Contract (2014, para 2-3, p.14) refers to the importance of education in this new society by rejecting any nationalist or chauvinistic principles. The article 98 of the new Social Contract, on the other hand, establishes an Education and Learning Council including the “representatives of the University Council, the Education Authority, the Curriculum Foundation, the Language Foundation, the Teachers Union, representatives of the teaching staff, research and study centers, genetics committees, representatives of the communes and peoples’ councils and representatives of the Student Union” to create an education strategy for developing the nation’s mentality over democracy (2023, para 8-9, p.20-21).

Education is a key and theoretical part in creating Ocalan’s argued active citizens for the concept of democratic confederalism. Therefore, the PYD redesigned the education system in the region since the summer of 2012 (Bengio, 2020, p.363). The new textbooks for primary/secondary

schools and universities were prepared in accordance with Ocalan's concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation (Allsopp & Wilgenburg, 2019, p.110). Additionally, the academies that function as education centers for people of the region attempt to raise awareness concerning the self-governance, new administration, society, and citizenship. They focus on the subjects of self-defense, women, youth, ecology, security and/or public order, economy, urbanization, law and justice, sociology, history, language, literature, and diplomacy (Knapp et al, 2016, p.181). The Celadet Bedirkhan Academy for Kurdish Language, History and Literature, established in 2013 to train Kurdish teachers and create new education system. Therefore, it is one of the typical examples of those academies. Particularly its program for teachers mirrors the ideological impacts of Ocalan. This is because the Kurdish language teachers need to study "Kurdish history and literature, the history of assimilation, pedagogy, Democratic Nation ideology and women's science (Jineoloji)" in accordance with the textbooks and teachings of Ocalan (Knapp et. al, 2016, p.179).

The textbooks of primary and secondary schools in the PYD-controlled areas include ideological instruments of the PKK leader Ocalan (Espinosa & Ronan, 2022; Bengio, 2020; Dinç, 2020). For instance, some elementary school books include quotes from Ocalan regarding the importance of the Kurdish nation and Kurdish language (Bengio, 2020, p.370). Terms such as oppression, history of the Kurds' oppression and threats to the PYD administration are taught in these levels in accordance with Ocalan's writings (Espinosa & Ronan, 2022, p.7). Since 2015, four public universities have been founded, Afrin University (2015), Rojava University (2016), Kobane University (2017) and al-Sharq University of Raqqa (2021), in the north and east Syria (Rojava Information Center, 2022, p.4). Their education is also based on Ocalan's concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation. The Rojava University, for example, emphasizes that it is built on the "ideas of Democratic Nation, as expounded by Kurdish philosopher and imprisoned Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan" (Rojava Information Center, 2022, p.6). Additionally, the Faculty of Languages and Social Sciences of the Rojava University has a Department of Jineoloji (Women's Science), which provides courses in accordance with Ocalan's writings over women (Rojava Information Center, 2022, pp.11-12).

The fourth indicator is the implementation of the participation in the policymaking processes and mechanism of self-defense for men and women. While education is a theoretical part for creating the argued active citizens, Ocalan (2011) underlines that participation in the policymaking and self-defense are practical parts for becoming the argued active citizens in his new model of governance. Therefore, the term self-defense becomes the essential part of Ocalan's argued democratic nation and model of governance to protect "identity", "political awareness", "democratization" and "right of self-governance" (Ocalan, 2016, p.32; 2011, p.28-29). Ocalan (2016) defends militarist consciousness to protect his model of governance against potential threats, particularly against neighboring nation-states, Syria, Iraq, Iran and Türkiye. Accordingly, the YPG, as the transformed version of the People's Youth Units (YXG), became the main defense unit for the PYD's administration and its society in the summer of 2012 (Knapp et. al., 2016). The article 15 of the former Social Contract (2014, para 3, p.3) authorizes the YPG as the only military force for the defense of cantons against the internal and external threats. Since its establishment, the YPG has been operating Ocalan's premise of self-defense to defend the PYD administrations against the nation-states, such as Syria, Iraq, Iran and Türkiye (Ocalan, 2016). However, starting from the summer of 2013, the YPG argues that it began defending the Kurdish autonomy against the Islamist groups such as some elements of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) until the Kobane siege (Al-Tamimi, 2013) and against ISIS since then (Knapp et al., 2016). While the previous social contract (2014) emphasized the YPG as the only military force for the self-defense of this model of governance, interestingly, there is no mention of the YPG in the new social contract (2023). The article 111 underlines the Community Protection Forces, Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), Women's Protection Units (YPJ) and Internal Security Forces (Asayish) as self-defense mechanisms for this administration. Although the new social contract does not mention, the SDF consists of the YPG, YPJ and some Arab forces in the region (Barfi, 2016). Accordingly, the Arab members need to learn Ocalan's teachings, particularly the concept of democratic confederalism before joining the SDF (Knights and Wilgenburg, 2021). Those aforementioned points are also closely related to the PKK's concept of revolution since Murat Karayılan expressed that it requires an organized society, guerrillas as an organized

defense units and self-defense of the combination of civilians and military organized within this society (ANF, 2022b).

Ocalan (2016) underlines the necessity of the right of self-defense for women. In this regard, the YPJ (Women's Protection Units/Yekineyen Parastina Jin) was founded in April 2013 (Knapp et al., 2016). The Social Contract of Rojava (2014) did not refer to women's defense units. However, the article 111 of the new social contract (2023) demonstrates the YPJ as one of the self-defense units of the administration in north and eastern Syria by emphasizing that they are legitimate forces and autonomously organized within the SDF. The new contract also indicates the role of women in the internal security forces, Asayish, by differing from the previous one. Accordingly, the fifth indicator is the PYD's implementation of Ocalan's opinions regarding women in the region. Ocalan (2011) has an argument of liberating women from the perspective of nation-state and creating an environment for them to become argued active citizens. The former Social Contract (2014, para 8, p.4, Article 27) emphasized that women have a right to participate in political, social, economic and cultural life and "men and women are equal in the eyes of the law" (2014, para 9, p.4 Article 28). Accordingly, there are women organizations working with the TEV-DEM with an argument of having more conscious women over this new society, system and argued active citizenship in decision-making processes. The Kongreya Star, the Women's Education and Research Centers, the Young Women's Movement, the Syrian Women's Association, the Syriac Women's Association, the Kurdish Women's Press Association, and the Foundation of Free Women in Rojava are some of them (Knap et al., 2016). There are also women councils in the districts of Arab neighborhoods and villages where the large Kurdish population lives. Women in these institutions have some activities such as reading books, discussing topics, doing some educational work, particularly the political education as a crucial part of the new system and society. They also publish newspapers and have some courses like using computer, learning language, sewing, the first aid, children's health, culture and art (Knapp et. al, 2016).

The new social contract (2023, para 5, p.1) also puts forward the women as a "fundamental pillar" of the new system. Compared to the previous one, the new social contract has more mention of women in accordance with the writings of Ocalan. The article 25 guarantees freedom

and rights of women in society and underscores gender equality (Social Contract 2023, para 7, p.4). While the article 50 stands any types of violence against women and sees them as a crime (para 10, p.6), the article 51 underlines women's right of equal participation in all areas of life as well as in the mechanisms of decision-making regarding their lives (para 11, p.6). The aforementioned implementations of women are also located in the new social contract. For instance, article 110 of the new contract (2023) underscores the establishment of the Women's Council of North and East Syria that organizes and educates women and works to build confederal system for women in the region (para 8-18, p.24). Similarly, the article 117 provides a basis to found Women's Social Justice Council (para 5-7, p.29). The PKK also supports those implementations of the PYD. The Executive Committee member of the PKK, Murat Karayılan underscored that "Rojava Revolution" indicated the leading role of women that had brought a change in the region (ANF, 2015b). The PKK and the PYD's leading figures also called the happenings in north and east Syria as a "revolution" led by women (ANF, 2012a).

The sixth indicator was the PYD's implementation of the dual leadership. As emphasized by Ocalan (2016; 2011), his new administration is based on the dual leadership, which provides women a role to play. Accordingly, the previous social contract expressed that the Legislative Assembly (Social Contract 2014, para 2, p.7, Article 47) and the entire bodies of the Judicial Council (Social Contract 2014, para 6, p.10, Article 65) should be consisted of at least 40 % of either sex. Particularly within the section of general rules, the Article 87 of the former contract reiterated that all bodies of this administration should consist of at least 40 % of either sex (Social Contract 2014, para 8, p.13). The new contract (2023), on the other hand, specifically emphasizes the "system of co-chair-ship" (article 24, para 6, p.4) and increases the portion of representation of women to 50 % in all councils of the region (article 78, para 7, p.10) and in the People's Council of North and East Syria (article 91, para 14-15, pp.16-17). Such a dual leadership covers all the administrative and military units of the region. For instance, there were the YPJ in parallel to the YPG. In the context of the Syrian civil war, the PYD used mechanism of self-defense against jihadist groups as external threats, particularly against ISIS since the Kobane siege. In this regard, efforts of women militias against ISIS captured the attention among the Western audiences (Enzinna, 2015; Albayrak & Corker, 2014).

The SDF also implemented such a dual leadership. Its inner circle, named the General Command, is consisted of co-chairs of the military units, Mazlum Kobane Abdi as a YPG commander and Newroz Ahmed as a YPJ commander (Knights & Wilgenburg, 2021, p.119). Additionally, the Women's Councils in north and east Syria represent the dual leadership in the administrative bodies. Points regarding the dual leadership of Ocalan can also be seen in institutions for education. Some elementary school books in the region specifically focus on theoretical and practical aspects of dual leadership. For each class, male and female chairs/presidents are elected and teachers encourage girls and boys to share their leadership positions (Bengio, 2020, p.371). Universities of the region have also councils to organize students and operate Ocalan's concept of democratic confederalism by having co-chair system in their university councils in compatible with Ocalan's ideological aspect (Rojava Information Center, 2022, p.7).

The seventh indicator of how PYD operates the ideas of the PKK and Ocalan in Syria is regarding the organizational scheme of the PYD cantons that is entirely based on Ocalan's concept of democratic confederalism. The articles between 4 and 12 in the former Social Contract (2014) described the administrative structure of the PYD cantons. Sticking to self-governance and confederal networking of Ocalan, the governance consists of the Legislative Assembly, Executive Councils, Municipal/Provincial Councils, High Commissions of Elections and Supreme Constitutional Courts (Social Contract 2014, para 2, p.2, Article, 4). The former contract did not explicitly separate policymaking and administration as underscored by Ocalan. However, the Legislative Assembly (Social Contract 2014, pp.6-7, Articles 45 - 53) acts like a body for policymaking, and the Executive Council (Social Contract 2014, p.9, Articles 55 - 61) and the Municipal/Provincial Councils (Social Contract 2014, para 1, p.10, Article 62) are responsible for administration. There are 22 bodies under the Executive Council, which regulate different functions like foreign affairs, defense, education, economy and social affairs (Social Contract 2014, para 8, pp.14-15, Article 95). Qamishli, Afrin and Kobane are administrative centers for Jazira, Afrin and Kobane cantons respectively as expressed by the Article 5 of the Social Contract (2014, para 3, p.2). The article 54 led canton governors to be responsible as other administrators (Social Contract 2014, para 2, pp.8-9). Similar to Ocalan's principle, the Article 7 established confederal networks in all "cities, towns and villages in Syria" (Social Contract 2014, para 5,

p.2). Article 8 underlined that whole “Cantons in the Autonomous Regions are founded upon the principle of local self-government. Cantons may freely elect their representative and representative bodies [...]” (Social Contract 2014, para 6, p.2). Additionally, cantons may have “their own flag, emblems and anthem” (Social Contract 2014, para 9, p2, Article 11). However, they cannot “interfere in the domestic affairs of other countries” (Social Contract 2014, para 8, p.2, Article 10).

By differing from the previous one, the new contract (2023) emphasizes that ANNES is based on the principles of democratic confederalism (Preamble, para 6, p.1) and democratic modernity (Article 3, para 3, p.2) that are concepts of the PKK leader Ocalan. The new contract (2023) also keeps the status of cantonal administration (Article 11, para 2, p.2) and village, neighborhood, town, city and cantons are kept as main administrative units (Article 47, para 6, p.6). However, the new social contract (2023) extends the organizations of those administrative units and details their tasks. In this regard, communes (Articles 75-76) and people’s councils (Articles 77-79), neighborhood councils (Articles 80-81), town councils (Articles 82 – 83), city councils (Articles 84-87), people’s council in cantons (Articles 88-90), people’s democratic council in north and east Syria (Articles 91 – 96) are established. Additionally, the new contract (2023) concretizes other operating units in the region such as Education and Learning Council (Article 98), Council of Culture and Enlightenment (Article 99), Council of Families of Martyrs, Wounded, and Prisoners of War (Article 100), Environment Council (Article 101), Council for Social Affairs and Workers (Article 102), Law Council (Article 103), Health Council (Article 104), Council of Economy and Agriculture (Article 105), Council on Foreign Relations (Article 106), Council of Religions and Beliefs (Article 107), Youth Council (Article 108) and Women’s Council of North and East Syria (Article 110), and Women’ Social Justice Council (Article 117).

In practice, the commune consists of up to 200 households in a street and/or in a village (Knapp et al., 2016, p.87). People meet each month or in two months to discuss their priorities and participate in the policymaking process. The neighborhood covers seven to thirty communes. In the countryside, village community composes of seven to ten villages. The coordinating board represents the communes (Knapp et al., 2016, p.87). The

district includes a city and villages between seven to twenty villages as well as the coordinating boards of neighborhood and communes. The district's coordinating body is the TEV-DEM. Movements, political organizations or parties, NGOs participate in the council system to ensure the broader representation (Knapp et al., 2016). At the top, there is the PCWK that consists of district councils. In addition to them, each body has commissions named as eight areas. These areas are women, defense, economics, politics civil society, free society, justice and ideology (Knapp et al., 2016). All those administrative units, as shown above, were extended to the Arab majority areas following the establishment of the SDF and MSD (Syrian Democratic Council) (Kusilek, 2019) and they were concretized by the Social Contract (2023) of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of the North and East Syria Region.

The impacts of Ocalan can also be seen in the institutions in education that function as bodies preparing people for the future of the PYD administration. Classes in the primary and secondary schools are organized in accordance with Ocalan's concepts through textbooks (Bengio, 2020, pp.371-72). Student meetings provide chances for students to bring and share their ideas/critiques with their peers and also to convey such ideas/critiques to school administration. Through weekly meetings between school administrators and students elected by their classes, students operates Ocalan's concept of democratic confederalism (Espinosa & Ronan, 2022, p.13). Similarly, universities in the region operate such administrative principles to prepare new members for the future of this administration. In this regard, student councils and committees consist of men and women for the organizational skills of students. In universities, departments have their student councils, and the representatives of students (from bottom to up) regularly meet the academics. Such councils also organize meetings, discussions to lead the students participate in the decision-making process according to the concepts of Ocalan as potential active citizens (Rojava Information Center, 2022, p.7).

As shown above, the PKK supports the PYD since it puts Ocalan's ideas into practice in north and east Syria through an experiment of governance as underlined by the leading PKK figure Murat Karayılan (ANF 2017h). Such a support can be seen through following examples. During the ISIS' siege of Kobane, the KCK Executive Council, the PKK's Executive

Committee member Murat Karayılan and the Kurdistan People's Initiative attempted to mobilize Kurds in Türkiye to go to the border of Kobane for supporting the ones in northern Syria (ANF, 2014a). Karayılan also stated that the PKK militias had gone and supported the YPG in Kobane during the siege through which they managed to prevent its fall to ISIS (ANF, 2017e). Similarly, when the YPJ militia, Arin Mirkan, sacrificed herself not to be a prisoner of ISIS and killed ISIS members in the fall of 2015, Karayılan had praised her effort as an exemplary achievement for resistance (ANF, 2015d). During the Türkiye's Operation Olive Branch in Afrin, the leading figures of the KCK, Murat Karayılan (ANF, 2018b) and Cemil Bayık (ANF, 2018c) declared their support to the PYD there. While Karayılan tried to mobilize ethnic/religious minorities in the region (ANF, 2018b), Bayık (ANF, 2018c) underscored that such an operation took place since Ocalan's ideas were put into practice there which requires a strong resistance. Another interesting point is that the support and the solidarity of the PYD Cantons with the PKK. In November 2018, the US embassy in Ankara announced a bounty on helping the capture of three leading figures of the PKK Murat Karayılan, Cemil Bayık and Duran Kalkan (Anadolu Agency, 2018). The Council of Martyrs' Families in north and east Syria, a body in PCWK, organized a demonstration to protest this US decision (ANF, 2018d). Similar protests were organized in Kobane (ANF, 2018e), Qamishlo (ANF, 2018f) and Ayn Isa (ANF, 2018g). Similarly, when the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) held its meeting in Brussels, the PYD representative Şerwan Hesen condemned the US decision over three leading figures of the PKK (ANF, 2018h). The US embassy in Ankara renewed its decision over the bounty on those leading figures of the PKK (Anadolu Agency, 2021). Following this decision, the members of the Emergency Committee for Rojava, consisting of the President Meredith Tax, the Secretary Debbie Bookchin and Executive Director, Özlem Göner wrote a letter to the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to revoke this decision (ANF 2021a). This letter had a characteristic to show the PKK's influence on and support to the SDF which says "the Kurdish fighters, including military leaders trained by the PKK, were key to the SDF's struggle against ISIS" (ANF, 2021a). Additionally, since July 2012 the PYD representatives have been lobbying in the Western countries to receive political support by emphasizing Ocalan's principles of "peaceful coexistence with other minority groups", "linguistic freedom for people", "gender equality" and "grassroots democracy" and by arguing their

model of governance would be a role model for the entire Middle East.¹ All those points not only indicate the ideological intimacy between the PKK and the PYD but also their support to one another when they perceive it is necessary.

4. CONCLUSION

The article has attempted to answer the questions to what extent the PYD can be assessed as an ideological continuation of the PKK and what the main ideological and practical indicators are for assessing the PYD as an ideological continuation of the PKK. In addition to organizational similarities and discursive manners on calling the developments in Syria as a “revolution”, findings of this article demonstrate that there are seven practical indicators showing that the PYD is an ideological continuation of the PKK. They are the PYD’s implementations in Syria such as peaceful coexistence with ethnic/religious minorities, freedom of languages, role of education through academies, culture and language centers to shape the society, the participation in the policy-making processes and in mechanism of self-defense for men and women, status of women in the society, dual leadership and organizational units and their schemes in north and east Syria that is based on Ocalan’s organizational scheme. Those ideological points had been located in the official documents of the PYD such as its party program (2013), and in the official documents of the cantonal administrations in the region like the Social Contract of Rojava (2014) and the Social Contract of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of the North and East Syria Region (2023). Those concepts had been operated by the PYD leadership in the areas that are controlled by the PYD and affiliated organizations, especially under the name of democratic autonomy in accordance with the PKK leader Ocalan’s concepts of democratic confederalism and democratic nation. Accordingly, the findings of the article provide that the PYD established political bodies, divergent movements, schools, academies, universities or local teaching centers to teach Ocalan’s concepts even in the Arab majority areas depending on the ongoing developments in the context of the Syrian civil war.

¹ For more details, see Demir, T. (2023). *Syrian Kurds, The Democratic Union Party (PYD), and The Strategic Framing of The Civil War: Selling The New Model of Governance*, Lexington Books: Lanham Maryland, pp.81-89.

The findings of this article to, a certain extent, support the idea that the PYD operates something that the PKK has never experienced before, which is a governance on a territory by putting Ocalan's ideas in practice (Kaya & Lowe, 2017). Because of such an experiment, the leading figures of the PKK such as Murat Karayılan and Cemil Bayık supported the PYD's model of governance through their explanations and/or through the actions of the divergent bodies of the PKK. The PKK's support to the PYD and its model of governance had been seen during the following events; the ISIS' siege of Kobane (2014-2015), Türkiye's Operation Olive Branch (2018), and Operation Peace Spring (2019) in a discursive manner or through human resources and mobilization of the PKK militias and/or sympathizers in other Kurdish-populated countries. However, interestingly and distinctively, findings of this article show that the representatives/officials of the PYD and people living in the cities under the control of the PYD including some in the Arab majority areas supported the PKK and its leading figures. This was especially a case when the protests were organized against the US decision on putting the bounty on the capture of three leading figures of the PKK, Murat Karayılan, Cemil Bayık and Duran Kalkan in November 2018 and April 2021. Through such findings, this research demonstrates the PYD's support to the PKK, and the PYD and its officials' solidarity with the PKK and its leading cadres.

When it comes to the question raised at the beginning, to what extent the PYD is an ideological continuation of the PKK, findings of this article explicitly indicate that the PYD puts Abdullah Ocalan's ideological concepts, democratic confederalism and democratic nation into practice in north and east Syria under the names of democratic autonomy or self-governance. It is quite clear that the PYD's concept of democratic autonomy or its democratic autonomy project is an ideological continuation and a practical implementation of the PKK's democratic confederalism and democratic nation. By providing a detailed analysis and comparison between the ideological concepts of the PYD and the PKK, the paper has developed an alternative academic perspective to the debates over the relationship between the PYD and the PKK. Such a perspective would also be helpful to address the debates around the shared links and human resources of the PYD and the PKK in the context of terrorism by providing an ideological ground. Such an ideological analysis also indicates that even the PYD operates in Syria and that it can be accepted as a Syrian organization by some experts

(Kaya & Lowe, 2017; Paasche, 2015), The PYD is bound and loyal to the complex organizational structures of the PKK that was formed as a result of the ideological changes in the PKK within the 2000s. Although the PYD has to act like a Syrian organization due to the needs for legitimacy among the Syrian Kurds and an international support (Kaya & Lowe, 2017), this paper demonstrates that the PYD follows the ideological concepts of the PKK through different names and supports the PKK cadres. Right now, because of the pragmatic and/or conjectural necessities, especially due to the threat of ISIS, Western scholars might not focus on more specific ideological details between the PYD and the PKK. However, when the threat of ISIS disappears and the pragmatic need for the PYD because of the YPG will not be needed anymore, an ideological relationship between the PYD and the PKK would become more significant particularly for the debates over terrorism. In this regard, this paper has a potential to be a point of reference even to those studies since it scrutinizes ideological similarities/aspects and more importantly the daily and/or routine implication of those ideological aspects/similarities. Additionally, following the establishment of bodies such as the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) and Syrian Democratic Council (SDC) in the fall of 2015, the PKK's model of governance had been extended to the Arab majority areas. Therefore, there is a need for further research analyzing how the PKK's model of governance managed to find a chance to be implemented in the Arab majority areas and what were the main factors behind accepting such a model of governance by people in those areas.

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