

**Baybasin: “ In the long term, an independent Kurdistan would serve as a valuable regional partner to stabilize the region, and it would set a strong example of successful democracy”**

Hüseyin Baybaşin, a Kurdish activist from Turkey, resumed by the Public Prosecutor in captivity, has evolved to one of the fiercest opponents of Turkish President Erdogan.

He initially conceived of the viability of an 'independent Kurdish region' - now Baybaşin is convinced that only an 'independent Kurdish state' can provide a workable solution to the problems faced by the Kurdish people. Each discussion with other Kurdish leaders with whom he is in close contact, pursues that idea. Hüseyin Baybaşin expresses his political position clearly on his [website](#).



Back in 2002 Hüseyin Baybaşin supported the current Turkish president and asked Kurdish people to vote in favor of Erdogan, who, as a fundamentalist, had his origins in the Islamic MSP party, but in 2002 was promising to resolve the Kurdish issue peacefully and reform the corrupt state system. Turkey, he said, would adhere to the Copenhagen Criteria (established by the European Council in in Copenhagen in June 1993) and the European Convention of Human Rights. But Erdogan did just the opposite. He directly violated human rights, exercised repressive methods against a vast array of political opponents and used the judicial apparatus as an extension of his hold on power. His long arm was extended abroad and included requests to Interpol to tackle his political opponents outside Turkey.

That same long arm of Turkey under a different administration had also come to reach Hüseyin Baybaşin when he was arrested on request of the Ciller government in the Netherlands. Since then, the Kurdish issue has become increasingly complicated.

With the help of the Kurds ISIS seems definitively defeated in a manner that presupposes credit for the Kurds in world politics. However, after the Kurds in Iraq expressed their will for independence through a referendum held on 25 September this year (2017), Iraq together with Iranian militia (Hashd al-Shaabi), has re-occupied the oil rich region of Kirkuk. The prospects for a free and independent Kurdistan seem further away than ever.

We asked Baybaşin some questions about the current situation in Turkey, concerning President Erdogan, the relationship between Turkey and ISIS, about the different Kurdish parties and their armed forces and about the recent developments in the region such as the

independence referendum, the boycott, the fall of Kirkuk and the potential force of a united Kurdish army.

## Turkey

Baybaşin: "In Turkey, the Kurdish language is still forbidden in formal use. Historical documents in the Kurdish language has been destroyed. Also old Kurdish tombs from before



1925 have been violated and cleaned, with Kurdish names and inscriptions on the tombstones being erased. Turkey is based on Pan-Turanism, a nationalistic ideology: one nation, one language, one flag, one religion: and that is Islam. Pan-Turanism was created at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and eventually led to the destruction of the Ottoman Empire."

"Turkey shows an increasingly authoritarian, nationalist extremist character and paranoid tendencies. It will gradually develop into a fascist state," Hüseyin Baybaşin predicts.

"Do not forget that Erdogan actually occupies a weak position in Turkey. Only a quarter of the population supports him. A lot of people are dissatisfied. The main reason behind this is that he causes chaos and has initiated a new war against the PKK. The relationship of Turkey with Europe and NATO is equally tense, as with the Arab countries. "

On NATO after the Cold War, Baybaşin comments: "NATO does not need Turkey anymore, but Turkey is still in need of NATO. Erdogan overrides his own fear as he opposes its claims."

On the Arabs Baybaşin comments: "They are traditionally hostile to Turkey, during the first World War, the Arabs chose the side of England and France, whereas the Ottoman Empire chose the side of Germany and Austria. "

### Concerning a future Kurdish state:

"There was a Kurdish entity dating from 4000 BC. in the form of independent, united kingdoms. Five hundred years ago, the Kurds joined the Ottoman Empire as one autonomous state of Kurdistan. This came to an end after the First World War. The Ottoman areas of control in the Middle East were taken from Turkey and divided among the conquerors, England and France. The new borders were drawn with a ruler. The Kurds were promised an autonomous region, which forms a large part of the current territory of Turkey. But eventually the new Turkey under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk did not cooperate and the promise was not met.

The Kurds have suffered historic persecution that is repeated over and over again in recent times. They feel abused and betrayed.

The same happened in Iraq: A dramatic highlight in attempts at Kurdish resistance was the genocidal Anfal campaign under the regime of Saddam Hussein. Military violence resulted in the deaths of tens of thousands of Kurds. Thousands of Kurdish citizens died after the notorious poison gas attack in Halabja. The Kurds were forced to flee to Turkey, who kept their borders closed, and to Iran and further abroad. Often they sheltered in the mountains.

Baybaşin observes about that past history: "The Kurds have been persecuted repeatedly, also in recent history. They feel abused and betrayed. "

## Turkey and ISIS

Turkey is rapidly developing into an Islamic country. Only a little remains of the secular state of Atatürk's legacy. This has been a long process that began with the establishment of the Islamic Nationalist Movement, *Milli Görüş*, long before Erdogan came to power. The *Milli Görüş* movement is especially active outside Turkey, and also in the Netherlands.

Since 2015, education in the Quran has been mandatory in all Turkish schools. More recently it Sunni Islamic fundamentalist extremist groups like Al Nusra and worst of all Turkey secretly supported ISIS.

Baybaşın continued: "An Islamic State where Sharia is the highest rule of law cannot become a member of the EU nor remain in NATO. In Turkey, Islamization has now advanced so far, that this is more or less the case.

"Turkey created ISIS" says Baybaşın and he sums up the facts: "ISIS militias were trained in Turkey until about 2009, and were supplied arms and supported by Turkey until 2015. Most IS leaders in Syria and Iraq spoke Turkish, as claimed by eyewitnesses. The narrow supply-corridor between Turkey and Syria may not be refurbished and certainly not by the Kurds. When that threatened to occur in September 2016, Turkey took the whole corridor (90 km wide) in one day without a stroke or push. This happened in mutual consultation to prevent the Kurds from controlling this access way. "

Baybaşın: "As a screen, Turkey has always been present in that corridor. ISIS pulled back spontaneously without firing a single bullet. That was never seen before. And thereafter, ISIS never actually surrendered or withdrew. Attacks in Turkey carried out by ISIS were revenge actions after Turkey changed its policy in 2015, Baybaşın believes. Turkey then joined the coalition and resumed bombing in northern Iraq. Cynically, it appeared clear that Turkey was only bombarding the PKK and not IS.

Baybaşın's reading of events finds further confirmation in the [Huffington Post](#):

*In fact, there is strong evidence (compiled by Columbia University) that Turkey has been "tacitly fueling the ISIS war machine." There is evidence to show that Turkey, as Near East Outlook recently put it, allowed "jihadists from around the world to swarm into Syria by crossing through Turkey's territory;" that Turkey, as journalist Ted Galen Carpenter writes, "has allowed ISIS to ship oil from northern Syria into Turkey for sale on the global market;" that Erdogan's own son has collaborated with ISIS to sell that oil, which is "the lifeblood of the death-dealing Islamic State"; and that supply trucks have been allowed to pass freely across Turkey in route to ISIS fighters.*

*There is also "evidence of more direct assistance," as Forbes puts it, "providing equipment, passports, training, medical care, and perhaps more to Islamic radicals;" and that Erdogan's government, according to a former U.S. Ambassador, worked directly with the al Qaeda affiliate in Syria, the al-Nusrah Front.*

On the refugee crisis, Baybaşın observes: "The war in Syria did not hurt Erdogan at all. For example, he blackmailed Europe using the refugee crisis. As long as the war in the Middle East continued, Erdogan only had to click his fingers and the flow of refugees would start again. A serious miscalculation by Europe. "

## The Kurdish parties

The Kurds still do not have their own state. They live in Turkey (25 million), Iraq (8 million, in an autonomous region), Iran (12 million) and Syria (4 million). Each country has one or more Kurdish political groups. There are political differences between the groups. It seems that this is especially the case in the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region, which has become an oil rich state in a short period of time.

These differences do not stand in the way of joint military action. The most important parties in Iraq remain the PUK and the KDP, the PYD and YPG in Syria and the PAK in Iran. The fighters come mainly from these parties. And in Turkey there is a strong militant PKK guerrilla force.

### How does Baybaşin see this power game?

Baybaşin: "In the autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan region, President Barzani's KDP is the largest and most powerful party and Barzani family members also occupy the most important posts. The second party is the PUK, that is more closely allied with Baghdad. The PUK formerly controlled and safeguarded Kirkuk. This party is also run by a single family. Their leader, Jalal Talabani, passed away just two weeks before the fall of Kirkuk. He was the first President of Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein. His son was Deputy Prime Minister of the Kurdish Regional Government led by President Barzani in northern Iraq. Talabani's widow has recently acted as spokesman for the party. There is yet another party in Iraqi Kurdistan, the Goran movement, which is less important to everyday politics and military action. " The KDP and PUK work well together, but are not always on the same page. According to Baybaşin, the differences are stimulated and exploited by Iran and Turkey. He says, "This is one of the causes for the loss of Kirkuk. "

In Turkey, the originally socialist militant PKK still has many followers. Since the end of 2014, the Turkish government has again entered into a state of war with the PKK. Of the other political parties in Turkey almost nothing remains. The pro-Kurdish, HDP, is now outlawed. The leaders and countless imputed sympathizers have been arrested."

Baybaşin adds further: "The most important Kurdish party in Syria is the PYD, with its military wing, the YPG (a sector being the well-known women's army, the YPJ). The YPG became famous for the battle for Kobani.



In Iran the most important Kurdish party is the PAK, led by Ali Qazi. Other parties are PJAK and KDP-Iran.

Female militias play a role in all the Kurdish parties. Kurdish women have always fought. They are highly emancipated and in the military share a similar vision to men. There is a Kurdish saying, "A lion is a lion." In other words, a lioness is as strong and fierce as a lion. Doesn't matter man or woman.

Baybaşin is convinced that despite the divisions,

the main Kurdish parties (KDP, PUK, PYD, YPG, PAK and PKK) will continue to work together.

### The opposing forces

In Lebanon and Syria, Hezbollah is highly active, a Shi'a militia supported by Iran. Hezbollah postulates Israel as its key target, which nation supports the Kurds. For Iran, it is a nightmare to have a united Kurdistan on its southern border, which is friendly with Israel. Hezbollah is therefore a pronounced opponent of the Kurds.

In Turkey, right-wing militias are very active such as the Grey Wolves (MHP). The group are right wing extremist nationalists, embracing violence, real fascists. They are also active outside Turkey and focused mainly against the Kurds.

Baybaşin: "So it's mainly down to Iran and Turkey. The recent crisis in Kirkuk shows that again. Iran now has 200,000 men under arms in Iraq. Iran threatened the PUK with serious military intervention shortly before Kirkuk was handed over. The Iraqi Kurds were visited in the eastern city of Sulaimaniyah by a commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC), General Qassem Solimani. A senior representative of the Turkish security services was also present. They jointly threatened the Kurds with the violent take-over of Kirkuk " The dialogue took place just a few days after US President Trump signed the nuclear weapons treaty which questioned Iran, referring to Iran's support for terrorism.

The PUK probably gave up the fight early on when confronted by the Iraqi-Iranian *force majeure*, although PUK leader, Talibani Jnr. explained things differently later on. He indicated that the decision to withdraw was only taken after the loss of 100 Peshmerga's and the threat to take the war into the city likely to result in many civilian casualties. Just exactly how Kirkuk was lost remains unclear, whether centred upon personal calculations, oil interests, or a combination of both, likely played a role. Aside from Iran, Turkey was also complicity. Amongst the Turkish forces agents of the Turkish secret service, MIT, were to be found.



The geopolitical changes seem to be definitive, but Kirkuk is a deceptive hiatus according to the well-informed weekly magazine *Die Zeit* online, that stated that the Kurds wanted to negotiate a compromise. Meanwhile, the number of Kurdish refugees fleeing from Kirkuk is estimated at some 165,000 people.

Baybaşin: "America has failed by staying aloof and that is worrying. It has

failed to keep Iraq under control. "US [commentators](#) warned Trump immediately after the referendum, that he had to choose the side of the Kurds. That did not happen, which created a free game for the Iraqis to take Kirkuk back - the very city from which they had fled in 2014 with their tails between their legs.

Iran's role is dubious. An Iranian spokesman stated that every Peshmerga fighter that resisted "would be treated the same as ISIS".

Faced with this statement, Baybaşın comments: "ISIS fighting with Iran is a bizarre joke (Sharia fighting with Sharia). The Iranian state ideology is based on Sharia, just like that of ISIS; for them, Sharia is a higher authority than secular law and international conventions and agreements. Unfortunately, Erdogan's Turkey is heading in the same direction. As a civilized country you cannot work with regimes that have introduced Sharia. "

This is not just the case for certain Arab states and for Iran, but in the meantime for Turkey as well. In the Middle East, only Jordan and Israel are still reliable partners. Russia, which became more or less willing to work together after the independence referendum, concluded contracts with the Iraqi Kurds and paid them a great advance this spring. Russia is therefore an interested party in the region. According to Baybaşın, China will not participate militarily, but desires economic influence and therefore has an interest in controlling the oil resources.

### **The power of the Kurds**

Hüseyin Baybaşın: "Consequences of the Boycott? What boycott? There is very little. There is always a way out, there are smuggling routes. Taking control of the oil fields is something else. That will have profound economic consequences. The Kurds feel abandoned by the US. But the Kurdish army never gives up. That's the secret of their military power. The Kurds unfortunately received mostly light weapons from the US and Europe (e.g. Germany). In Kirkuk therefore, the were lightly armed Kurds were confronted by a combined Iraqi and Iranian force, which was equipped with the latest Western weapons. The Kurds will do everything in their power to prevent that from happening again."

### **International political commentators are divided on the Kurdish issue**

[\*Die Zeit\*](#) announces the end of the Kurdish dream: "Die Kurden müssen ihre Hoffnung auf einen eigenen Staat begraben." (The Kurds must bury their hopes for an independent state). Stanley Weiss (of the *Huffington Post*), on the other hand advocates support for the pursuit of an independent Kurdistan:

*"In the long term, it would serve as a valuable regional partner to stabilize the region, and it would set a strong example of successful democracy. In other words, Kurdistan could play the role that Turkey used to play."*

Baybaşın also advocates lasting military and political support from the West: it's time that the Western world (EU, US) takes a wise decision from now on and makes it clear that it wants to cooperate with the gradual emergence of the United States of Kurdistan. " To the West, an affiliated democratic, Kurdish buffer-state, akin to Israel, on the borders of Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran can play an important stabilizing role in the Middle East.

If the West rejects the Kurds now, the Kurds will seek other allies. The Kurds will never give up the endeavor for independence. "