



# **THE KCK PARADIGM**

**An Interview with Duran Kalkan,  
KCK Executive Council member,  
about the philosophical and  
political tenets of the KCK**

# Democratic Modernity, Democratic Autonomy, Democratic Confederalism and Democratic Nation





We have been organizing ourselves under the umbrella of the Kurdistan Democratic Communities Union (KCK) since 2005. Organized in different areas of life – economy, culture, self-defense, law, social life, diplomacy, politics – we strive to support and build structures of self-governance in all four parts of Kurdistan and the Kurdish diaspora. All our member organizations come together under the roof of the `People`s Congress` (Kongra Gel) which constitutes our highest decision-making institution. Thus, even under the hardships of war and colonial state policy we work everyday to put our vision of a self-governed, just and sustainable society into practice

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## **What is the basic philosophical tenet behind the foundation of the KCK in 2005?**

Our leader Abdullah Öcalan has developed a new theory of history which he calls `The History of Democratic Civilization`. According to this theory, the natural society, the society of clans and tribes, the Neolithic Revolution that took place under the leadership of women, and the agricultural village society constitute the beginning of society itself. This kind of society signifies the most long-term instance of social life in human history. It encompasses a period during which the biggest formations, innovations, and developments took place. This theory states that the emergence of class and state in the first cities led to a break in the system of civilization. As a result, the dichotomy between central civilization and Democratic Civilization which emerged in the Sumerian era has been developing and intensifying, in different forms, until today.

Central civilization is a system of power and state. Our leader Abdullah Öcalan defines Capitalist Modernity – a system that was born and developed in Europe and later spread to all other parts of the world – as the latest form of central civilization. This theory presents a multi-dimensional and extensive definition of Capitalist Modernity. It encompasses remarkable new approaches and findings. The theory analyzes the many dimensions of Capitalist Modernity and boils them down to three basic dimensions. The first dimension is capitalism. The second dimension is industrialism, and the third is the nation state. Our leader Abdullah Öcalan names these



dimensions as three pot stands or three black riders of Capitalist Civilization.

We already know what capitalism is about. Capitalism signifies exploitation. It is a specific form of exploitation. It signifies one's leeching off of others without having to work yourself. It is a thievish exploitation. Up until the era of Capitalist Modernity, the communal pressure had not allowed the system of power and state to exploit the society as intensely as it is being exploited now. With the weakening of communal pressure, this haunting system of exploitation evolved in Europe, gained power and eventually spread all over the world. Industrialism represents a form of exploitation thrust against all humanity and the nature. This system entails the looting and ravaging of nature and society and the utilization of everything for the generation of maximum profits – a principle which constitutes the core of capitalism. It signifies an attack on all the resources of nature and all values of society.

The nation-state represents a system in which all individuals are incorporated into the state which has been individualized itself. That is, the individual is nationalized (i.e., statized), while the state-nation is being individualized. It is well-known that during ancient times and the Middle Ages state structures were separate from society. The state was quite a different system. It had certain relations and conflicts with society. But it stood apart from society to a great extent. The state was like a separate 'community' and had its own characteristics. This 'power



and state community' destroyed all values and resources of the larger society and turned it into a part of the state. The resulting structure is what we call the nation-state. This marks the biggest attack against the individual and society. It nationalized (i.e., statized) the individual along with his/her spirit, emotions, mentality, and behaviors and aimed at eliminating society by subjugating it to the state's hegemony and thus getting it to completely surrender to the state. Therefore, our leader Abdullah Öcalan assesses Capitalist Modernity as an all-consuming attack on society. He defines Capitalist Modernity as the ailing and cancerous form of the state and power system. Because it is obvious what is going to happen if society gets destroyed. Briefly, this is the essence of our leader Abdullah Öcalan's historical analysis of society.

He proposes Democratic Modernity as a solution. He highlights the necessity to develop and reassert Democratic Modernity as an alternative to Capitalist Modernity. He defines the development and assertion of Democratic Modernity as the revolution of the new era. Similar to his analysis of Capitalist Modernity, our leader Abdullah Öcalan analyses Democratic Modernity on the basis of three essential dimensions: a democratic-moral society as an alternative to capitalism, an ecological society as an alternative to industrialism, and Democratic Confederalism as an alternative to the nation-state. He defines these three dimensions as the solution and integrates them into a theoretical framework.

Our leader Abdullah Öcalan argues that the democratic-



moral society – in other words, the democratic society – is the natural way through which society has come into existence. Society comes into being through politics and morality. Politics is the process of discussion, planning, decision-making and implementation for every matter that is necessary for the existence of society. Morality constitutes the necessary principles, standards, and modalities to be followed in the process of politics. This is the way through which society comes into existence. Our leader Abdullah Öcalan states that all human communities which lose these two characteristics cease to exist as a society. He proposes the ecological society as an alternative to industrialism which loots and ravages everything for the sake of maximal profit. He sets forth an economic-industrial model of development which rejects destroying nature and, instead, seeks to meet the needs of society through protecting nature and adopting an appropriate understanding and approach towards it. In this context, he suggests an ecological revolution as an alternative to industrialism. He also defines Democratic Confederalism as the alternative to the nation-state. He defines Democratic Confederalism as the free self-organization of society's diverse identities and their engagement in a democratic unity. In his view, Democratic Confederalism is the political dimension of democratic society or the Democratic Nation, which, in turn, is based on women's freedom and social ecology. The concept of Democratic Modernity - the theoretical analysis underlying his historical thesis of Democratic Civilization - is based on this basic paradigm including women's freedom, social ecology, and democratic society.



There are a number of innovative ideas which our leader Abdullah Öcalan has developed as the philosophical basis for the development of this theoretical framework. For instance, he criticizes the idealist tenet that foresees a creator for the world; that is, he does not approve of this idealistic approach. At the same time, he criticizes vulgar materialism which was developed as a critique of idealism and attributed everything solely to material developments. He argues that a concept and approach that goes beyond idealism and vulgar materialism will better help us analyze and understand the social reality. This forms the basis of his approach for studying and analyzing the individual and society. In this way, he surpasses idealism and vulgar materialism. He rejects the application of natural sciences to the analysis of human society. In his view, it is wrong to analyze society and the individual simply as material forces. He argues that society comes into existence as the integrality of spirituality and materiality; that is, the existence of the human being and society is based on the unity of spirituality and materiality.

On this basis, of course, he develops a new analysis of social sciences. He criticizes certain dimensions of dogmatic dialectics which applies natural sciences to the study of society. He develops a far more helpful dialectic approach or method that offers more possibilities, predates on the assumption of endless possibilities and studies the reality of the individual and society by taking their specific characteristics and their combined material and spiritual characteristics into account. This is how he analyzes and tries to understand the universe, the





individual human being and society. He also analyzes and defines the universe not only on material bases, but also with spiritual dimensions. Drawing on these analyses, he disapproves assumptions which attribute existence, life, and development of society to a Creator. Similarly, he rejects the linear progressivist mentality that tries to analyze society through mere economic objectivism. He studies existence and progress in the concrete context of the individual and society. And he develops the necessary perspective and methodology accordingly. He comes up with new innovations, approaches, and viewpoints in social sciences and defines them as an intellectual revolution.

Our leader Abdullah Öcalan regards an intellectual revolution as the most urgent factor necessary for the success of freedom struggles and democratic revolutions. He argues that the revolution has to begin with the intellectual realm and regards religious extremism, nationalism, sexism and scientism as thought systems which serve Capitalist Modernity and liberalism and hence have to be surpassed. He criticizes all these schools of thought as he introduces the right approaches. In this way, he highlights the importance of the power of thought and intellect in bringing about the existence and development of social life. These are the bases on which he establishes his own system of thought. This is what we can briefly say about our general theoretical and philosophical approach.

**As the KCK you propose Democratic Confederalism as a model for the solution of the Kurdish question**



**and the democratization of the Middle East. Can you elaborate on this system and what it entails, especially the concept of Democratic Autonomy?**

Democratic Autonomy is a system in which all diverse identities can freely organize and govern themselves. We can also refer to it as democratic self-governance. Generally, we define it as Democratic Autonomy. It signifies the free self-organization of all diverse identities. It has indivisible connections with Democratic Confederalism. Democratic Confederalism entails the democratic unity of all these diversities that freely organize themselves. It provides for the broadest and most flexible form of unity.

Therefore, we can define Democratic Confederalism as the unity of the diverse democratic self-administrations or Democratic Autonomies. The unity represented by Democratic Confederalism does not start from the top. Rather, it provides for democratic unity throughout all realms and levels of life. It entails the free self-organization of diverse identities in all realms and their free and voluntary participation in the Democratic Autonomy of their respective area. Democratic Confederalism itself is also a voluntary unity. Since participation in the unity is based on everybody's own and free decision, leaving the unity again is also possible. Being a free voluntary unity is largely dependent upon the right to leave this very unity.

It is important not to mistake Democratic Confederalism for the confederal unity some nation-states form at the top level. There might be a similarity in the sense of confederal



relations that exist, but Democratic Confederation does not consist of the confederal unity of different systems from the top level, where each has a different organizational model. Democratic Confederation is a system that is organized from the bottom, from the most basic units of social life, starting from villages, neighborhoods and schools. In this sense, it is not a unity at the top of differently organized systems. Rather, it is a democratic unity whose constituents are closely intertwined with each other on all levels. It is a democratic political system consisting of intertwined horizontal and vertical organizational relations and networks. Therefore, it is important not to mistake it for a confederation formed only on the top level. It is also important not to mix it up with central administrations and central political systems. Also, it should not be construed as a fragmental body. Democratic Confederation draws on the development of democratic autonomous systems. That is, it necessitates building and organizing democratic self-administrations, at all levels, for all the diverse identities and entities.

We ourselves come across two basic shortcomings in the process of putting these systems into practice. Firstly, it is the inability to organize and develop these Democratic Autonomies, these democratic self-administrations. Of course, putting Democratic Confederation into practice necessitates the acquisition of a certain mindset and requires education and effort. It draws on internal self-organization. But we often witness cases where people, instead of building Democratic Autonomy through their own self-organization and self-education, tend to



expect others to help. That is why we are often times unable to fully make use of all the existing possibilities and opportunities. This is a serious shortcoming that we experience in our practice. This implies a kind of inability to put the theoretical ideas into practice. Our second mistake, as opposed to the first one, reveals itself in the form of the inability to predate our work on democratic unity or Democratic Confederal Unity. There are some understandings and attitudes that tend to stay aloof and consider themselves different from others, refuse to understand the significance of unity and fail to unite with others. As a result, they fail to unify different Democratic Autonomies on all levels, from the very grassroots local level to the highest level of Democratic Confederalism. As a result, these shortcomings lead to progress in a certain part but to the failure to establish a democratic whole. That is, they lead to fragmentation. These are the shortcomings that obstruct the organization and development of Democratic Confederalism based on Democratic Autonomy.

On the whole, this is how we can define the two intertwined concepts of Democratic Confederalism and Democratic Autonomy. Of course, Democratic Autonomy constitutes the basis and is essential. It plays a determining role for Democratic Confederalism. It is the domain where democracy comes into being. It indicates the free and autonomous organization of all diverse identities. That is, every conflicting entity, without looking to resemble others, can idiosyncratically educate and organize itself and freely join the Democratic Confederal Unity. This



includes the self-organization of all diverse identities and all parts of the social strata, on all levels.

Thus, Democratic Confederalism – which, for its part, is based on Democratic Autonomy – turns into a line of democratic solutions for all problems in society. It allows for the solution of all these problems. It brings an end to all forms of pressure, inequality and lack of organization. It brings an end to the lack of education and organization. Thus, Democratic Confederalism arises as the best and most practical model, a socio-political project that democratically solves all problems of society. Our leader Abdullah Öcalan has developed this project and the KCK is the practical expression of this social and political system. The KCK represents the democratic politics of a society that is organized on all its levels. This is how we can very briefly explain the core idea of Democratic Confederalism – represented by the KCK – and the underlying Democratic Autonomies.

**How do you theorize the notion of the Democratic Nation as the essence of Democratic Confederalism. How does it differ from the notion of the nation state?**

Actually, the term `nation-state` does not fully express the phenomenon at hand. It is more appropriate to speak of the `state-nation`. It is more helpful to speak of the `state-nation` instead of the `nation-state`. If we do so, we can formulate the existing contrast or dichotomy as follows: the `state-nation` as opposed to the `democratic nation`.



So, what do these two concepts mean? If we take a look at the historic reality of society, we can clearly observe that social existence has never been completely homogeneous. This is the case for all periods of history as well as for almost all geographic areas. A social identity, e.g. the identity or culture of a clan, a tribe, a confederation of tribes or a nation is potentially plural. But there has never been a historic period or geographic area with only one single social identity or a completely homogeneous reality. The diverse identities have always been intertwined. This is how the human race has come into existence and developed its sense of community. This is how the history of social reality predicates the existence of humans and society.

So how can we define the ‘state-nation’ in this context of social existence? Actually, the state is a political-military union. It is a political force, a kind of hegemony based on military power and oppression. In the historic period in which the world was being overtaken by capitalist forces and in which Capitalist Modernity evolved inside the system of power and state, the capitalist hegemony established and organized itself in different parts of the world in the form of the state. It started in Europe and eventually spread to all other parts of the world. The capitalist forces established state hegemony on the basis of the hegemony of the army. But there was no homogeneous national community in the society that was located within the borders where this state hegemony had just been founded. There is no existing community comprised of only one single tribe, one single people, one single



confederation of tribes or one single culture or language. In fact, there are always many different communities, diverse religions and cultures. In such circumstances, the state starts to define itself as a nation despite the fact that it is a military-political system.

In contrast, the nation is a form of social existence. The nation cannot be defined as something belonging to the state. Nevertheless, this is the crucial difference of the state structure that is called nation-state or state-nation in comparison to the forms of state that had existed before: Capitalist Modernity regards state-building as an effective method to be able to strengthen its hegemony, intensify its exploitation and completely eliminate all opposition forces. Then, it starts to establish its own version of culture, unity, economic union, and common mindset within the society that it just subjected to its hegemony. As a result, the state-nation imposes great pressure, carries out huge massacres and enforces assimilation. The state and, in most cases, the army itself annihilates the existing languages, cultures, history, and similar elements. It then adopts its own version of history, of culture, and a specific language that either stems from any one of the communities over which the state has established its own hegemony or that has completely been fabricated, e.g. in the case of the Pakistani state. In Pakistan, the state has developed a language – Urdu – that originally belongs to none of the local communities. And now the Pakistani state tries to transform all Pakistanis into a society that speaks this language. This is the kind of uniform society it tries to build. And it predicates its exploitation and



hegemony, even its vision of the future, on such a uniform society. Therefore, it attacks all other values it considers to be outside of its own version of language, culture, history, etc. It destroys and annihilates, bans and assimilates them. It homogenizes everybody by getting them to adopt its preferred version of culture and language.

The state-nation is a nation that is created by force. It is a nation created by the state. And it is monist. It provides for only one language, one culture, one flag, one homeland, and one economy. It transpires as a centralist and monist dictatorship. Therefore, the nation-state or the state-nation is a monist fascist dictatorship. It is genocidal by nature and nurtures enmity towards all other diverse languages and cultures. To annihilate them all, it carries out fascist attacks in full measure or pursues genocide and assimilation policies under false pretenses. Therefore, it is wrong to characterize the 'nation' itself as an entity which envisages such a genocide. In the past, there were such characterizations. It is wrong to define a nation on the basis of language unity, state unity, territorial integrity, and economic unity. This kind of unity can only be described as state unity, not the unity of a nation. Because such a unity can only come into existence on the basis of annihilating all other diverse entities. Therefore, from the very beginning, the state-nation stands for attacks, pressure, genocide, homogenization and racist-chauvinistic nationalism. The state-nation wages massacres against all other diverse languages and cultures. The context of the state-nation is characterized by genocides.





In contrast to this, how can we describe the essence of the Democratic Nation? The Democratic Nation stands for a system in which all existing identities of a society in a certain geographical area –all ethnic groups, languages, cultures, religions, beliefs, denominations etc. – organize themselves freely and manage their own affairs autonomously while forming a social unity at the very top on the basis of Democratic Confederalism. It represents an upper-nation above the many sub-nations. In contrast to the state-nation, it does not envisage disregarding and annihilating the other diverse identities, ethnic structures, languages and cultures within society. It acknowledges their existence and predicates itself on their existence. It provides for their free self-organization and self-administration. And it unifies all of them in the form of a new national unity, at the top level on the basis of Democratic Confederalism. The Democratic Nation is a nation at the upper level. It arises as ‘the nation of nations’. At the same time, all nations exist freely as a part of it. They organize and educate themselves, manage their own affairs and develop their own national values on all levels. In this way, they make their own contribution to the upper nation, i.e. the Democratic Nation.

Our leader Abdullah Öcalan states that the Democratic Nation is the nation of a certain mindset and culture. He highlights a shared mentality and a shared understanding as the underpinnings of the Democratic Nation, the essence of which is a social culture at the highest level. These are the main factors creating this unity. The other aspects are more related to the free and autonomous self-



organization and self-sustainability of diverse nations.

The state-nation equals an attack on society through the top-down use of state power to eliminate national diversity and create a homogeneous nation while the Democratic Nation provides for a national reality in which all diverse and autonomous identities and ethnic structures can express, organize, and develop themselves, creating the background for all languages and cultures of society to exist interwoven with each other in the richest possible way.

The KCK solution, i.e. the solution offered by Democratic Confederalism, predicates itself on the Democratic Nation. Together with the solution of Democratic Confederalism based on Democratic Autonomy, the Democratic Nation comes into being through the creation of a common Democratic Nation at a higher level in which all different national identities organize themselves freely. This is how we understand and define the Democratic Nation and the solutions it inspires.



**The KCK is vital not only for solving the problems of the Kurds, but also of the Arab, Turkish, Iranian, Afghan and Caucasian societies and all other communities experiencing similar problems.**

**ABDULLAH ÖCALAN**

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