



# **August 15, 1984 – The Start of a New Resistance in the Middle East**

**An interview with Duran Kalkan, member of the KCK  
Executive Council, about the history of the armed  
struggle in Kurdistan**

**In an extensive interview, Duran Kalkan talks about the historic and social circumstances at the beginning of the armed struggle, the difficulties during the preparations for the guerrilla offensive in 1984, the importance and personality of the guerrilla commander Agit, the internationalist characteristic of the guerrilla and lessons to be learned for today`s freedom struggles across the world.**



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.

Published in September 2021

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**37 years have passed since the offensive of August 15, 1984. How do you assess the events that took place around August 15 from today's perspective?**

Before I answer your question, I would like to send my regards to Abdullah Öcalan<sup>1</sup>. He made sure that the August 15 offensive took place in 1984. I would also like to take this opportunity to commemorate, in the person of our immortal commanders Agit<sup>2</sup> and Zilan<sup>3</sup>, all our Şehits<sup>4</sup> who fell in the course of the freedom struggle, with respect, gratitude and love. I congratulate Abdullah Öcalan and all our comrades, our people and friends on the 15th of August - the 'Day of Rebirth'<sup>5</sup>. I also congratulate all the

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1 Duran Kalkan uses the designation 'Önderlik' (leadership) and 'Önder Apo' (leader Abdullah Öcalan) in the original. These terms are widely used in the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and among the people of Kurdistan. They are an expression of the great attachment to Abdullah Öcalan. For better readability, both formulations will be replaced by 'Abdullah Öcalan' in the following.

2 Commander Agit is a central figure in the struggle of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement and the people of Kurdistan due to his key role during the establishment of the guerrilla. In the course of the interview, his role, personality and history are presented in detail.

3 Şehit Zilan (real name: Zeynep Kınacı) is one of the most important identification figures in the movement and among the population. By carrying out an attack on a Turkish military parade in the North Kurdish province of Dersim on June 30, 1996, she underscored the central role of women in the revolution and at the same time unmistakably demonstrated the attachment of all PKK militants to Abdullah Öcalan.

4 In the Kurdistan Freedom Movement, all people who lost their lives in the freedom struggle are called Şehits. Great value is attached to their memory, as they are seen as an inspiration and guide for further struggle.

5 In Kurdish 'roja vejînê'. August 15, 1984 is called a rebirth, because with the beginning of the armed struggle the denial policy of the Turkish state and the imperialist powers was effectively countered for the first time in decades and the Kurdish people became aware of their identity, willpower and strength again within the framework of this struggle.



members of the HPG<sup>6</sup> and YJA-Star<sup>7</sup> guerrilla on this special day of the guerrilla. I would also like to express that in the `38th year of freedom` we will fight even harder as a movement and as a people based on the line of August 15 and thus achieve great victories. Of course, today's conditions are quite different from 37 years ago. At that time, the conditions were completely different. Was it possible then to foresee today's situation? No, certainly not. But without dreams and hope, development does not take place. That's why there was already a lot of hope back then that today's developments would come about, even though none of this was clearly foreseeable at the time.

We were all full of dreams at that time. Abdullah Öcalan in particular had really big dreams and also clearly foresaw the future developments. We were filled with faith. The conditions at that time made an intense struggle necessary everywhere. This ultimately led to the offensive of August 15, 1984. We did not have particularly large resources or possibilities at that time. It is important to know this. When we started the August 15 offensive, we did not have great material resources or capabilities. That just didn't exist. There were really only a handful of people. Fascism after the military coup of September 12, 1980, had really destroyed everything in North Kurdistan and Turkey. Massive outside interventions were also taking place in the region. The defeat of the KDP [Kurdistan Democratic

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6 Hezên Parastina Gel - People's Defense Forces; official name of the guerrilla fighting as part of the Kurdish movement for the liberation of Kurdistan and the democratization of the Middle East.

7 Yekîneyên Jinên Azad ên Star - Free Women's Units; official name of the autonomously organized women's units of the guerrilla.



Party] in 1975<sup>8</sup> had eliminated Kurdish politics as a whole. The classic type of Kurdish insurgency had suffered a severe defeat. The end result was the termination of these uprisings. Instead, petty-bourgeois, bourgeois, nationalist and reformist dreams and tendencies tried to push themselves to the fore, but they were all very much materialistic. They were very much connected to the ruling system and accordingly reformist. Yes, one can even say that they had a tendency to capitulation. It was completely impossible to wage a liberation struggle in this way in Kurdistan, a country so afflicted by denial, fragmentation and genocide.

The conditions at that time were really very difficult. But was there no glimmer of hope at all? I mentioned this before: without dreams and hope, there can be no developments. And there were, of course, things that were hoped for and dreamed of. For example, the Kurdish people were massively oppressed in the wake of the military coup of September 12, 1980. But that only intensified the people's anger, that is, their desire for freedom. I remember very well the following: In early 1982, Abdullah Öcalan gave us a notebook. At that time, he was in the process of writing the program for the 'National Liberation Front' ['Ulusal Kurtuluş Cephesi']. This notebook had been lying on his table for a whole year. I opened it and saw that there was only one sentence written in it: 'National liberation has become a hope of our people that cannot

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<sup>8</sup> After Iraq and Iran reached an agreement in Algeria that same year, Iran ceased its support for the armed KDP forces. As a result, their political and military leader Mola Mustafa Barzanî gave up resistance in South Kurdistan (North Iraq) and fled to Iran.



be stopped.’ Based on this one sentence, we then wrote a whole program. The program of the ERNK [Eniya Rizgariya Neteweyî ya Kurdistanê - Kurdistan National Liberation Front] was created on the basis of this one statement. So there was hope. Of course, Kurdish society at that time was not organized and had not yet been turned into a real force. But there was a consciousness that the people had deeply internalized.

Materially, but also from a political and military point of view, the region was influenced at the time by the war between Iran and Iraq<sup>9</sup>. This influence should not be underestimated. What exactly was the influence of the Iran-Iraq war at that time? Kurdistan had been divided into four parts [in the early 20th century] and was under the rule of four different nation-states<sup>10</sup>. There was already a genocidal policy being pursued in Kurdistan at that time, but it had not been developed by these four states. Rather, the global capitalist system was responsible for this policy. So, in a way, the system had only charged these four states with implementing the policy. The point I want to make here is this: There is definitely a partitioned state leadership, that is, a different state government for each individual part of Kurdistan. But at the same time, there is a common leadership for all of Kurdistan. This is a political and military leadership. Whether agreed in writing or verbally, certain things have not been made public to this day. But it is clear that there are such agreements. Under this system, there is a joint leadership between all the states involved. For example, it was clearly agreed

<sup>9</sup> The war lasted from 1980 to 1988.

<sup>10</sup> This refers to Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq.



at that time that one state would not support the Kurdish population in another state to its disadvantage. That was one of the rules agreed upon by this joint leadership for Kurdistan. Thus, the border between the different parts of Kurdistan had been completely fortified.

The classic type of Kurdish insurgency was completely crushed in this framework. The Iran-Iraq war caused this. At that time, Iran began to support the Kurds in Iraq and Iraq did the same with the Kurds in Iran. For a while, CENTO [Central Treaty Organization], which was created by the global system, had existed, that is, the so-called Baghdad Pact, in which all four states were involved. Within this framework, there had been common organizational links among these states. But these relations broke down. They no longer functioned. So there was some fragmentation in the area of Kurdistan's political and military control. But most fundamental to the coming about of the August 15 offensive was the outstanding talent of Abdullah Öcalan. So under extremely difficult conditions and at a time when all hopes and dreams seemed impossible, Abdullah Öcalan triggered such developments. At that time, he himself also said that he was creating hope and dreams. His faith and determination played a central role in this. The Kurdish youth is truly courageous and selfless. Through Abdullah Öcalan's ideas, they developed their determined attitude, which played an important role in the development of the August 15 offensive.

Against the military coup of March 12, 1970, the revolutionary movement of Turkey had resisted and had





thus gained important experiences. Then there was also the struggle and support of the Palestinian people. All this combined with the great efforts, will and genius of Abdullah Öcalan. The courage and selflessness of the Kurdish youth created the foundation for all this. And of course, the prison resistance in 1982<sup>11</sup> pushed the developments like an engine. The various resistances that had already taken place before the July 14, 1982 resistance - the resistance of Mazlum, Hayri, Kemal, Ferhat or Sara<sup>12</sup> - meant that the meager resources of the time were used in a very effective way and that we developed the courage for this kind of resistance. Abdullah Öcalan was the one who showed this courage. His courage was imbued with a strong consciousness. This consciousness, in turn, was based on a very deep historical understanding and the urge to live a free life.

Later, Abdullah Öcalan expressed this in the following words: 'Either we live a free life, or we do not live at all.' This has been his philosophy of life from the beginning anyway. All of this ultimately led to the guerrilla offensive of August 15, 1984, that is, the guerrilla attacks in Eruh and Şemdinli [two small towns in the North Kurdish region of Botan], with which this offensive began. Today's conditions are, of course, quite different. But here's what

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<sup>11</sup> Starting on July 14, 1982, a hunger strike led by PKK cadres took place in Amed Prison (city of Diyarbakir). They were reacting to the severe torture, the denial of the prisoners' most basic rights, and at the same time underlined the enormous spirit of resistance of the PKK militants.

<sup>12</sup> This refers to Mazlum Doğan, Hayri Durmus, Kemal Pir, Ferhat Kurtay and Sakine Cansiz. They were all PKK cadres who actively participated in building the party and thus created the foundations for today's struggle. As prisoners in Amed Prison, they actively led the resistance there.



we can still say: even if it is only faintly visible, the light at the end of the tunnel never disappears. Without this profound awareness, the huge dreams and hopes, the great prison resistance would never have happened. Mazlum Doğan<sup>13</sup> would never have existed. Nor would July 14 and 'The Action of the Four'<sup>14</sup> have ever happened. Without his perspective and foresight, it would never have been possible for Abdullah Öcalan to carry out such intensive work with such courage and selflessness in the face of such meager resources. He would not have been able to start it in the first place. He simply would not have been able to carry out this work. He succeeded in all this because he had realized certain things.

There was almost no hope at that time. Hope itself seemed like a distant dream. That is why it required tremendous efforts. Huge courage and great selflessness were needed. And all this had to be done by humans themselves. Abdullah Öcalan created exactly this kind of human being. He played a leading role in the creation of this kind of person. He developed this personality within himself and at the same time taught it to the entire Kurdish youth, to all Kurdish women and to the entire people. He created a new society, a new individual and a free society. Therefore, August 15 became a Kurdish new beginning. We can say 13 Mazlum Doğan fell as a martyr on March 21, 1982, during his imprisonment in Amed Prison. As an act of resistance against the policies of the Turkish state, he hung himself in his cell on the day of the Newroz festival. The central slogan of the movement goes back to him: 'Berxwedan jiyan e' (Resistance means life).

14 To protest against the policies of the Turkish state, four PKK militants, Ferhat Kurtay, Eşref Anyık, Mahmut Zengin and Necmi Öner, burned themselves in Amed Prison on May 17, 1982. They thus became the source of inspiration for the resistance of the Kurdish movement.



that clearly. Today, everybody should therefore celebrate the '38th year of free Kurdish identity'. Because August 15 stopped the national decline and national destruction. The first bullet for free existence was fired on August 15. So, for 37 years now, we have been fighting and living in freedom. Today the 38th year of the freedom calendar of our free life begins for us. I congratulate everyone on the beginning of this year.

**What can you say about the preparations for August 15 at that time? What preparations exactly were made? Would it not also have been possible to extend the offensive, which had such a strong effect in Kurdistan, to Turkey as well? What were the reasons for Turkey not becoming part of this offensive?**

Today we use terms like 'Kurdish resistance', 'national resistance', 'democratic resistance' or 'resistance for freedom'. There is no doubt that this is a Kurdish resistance, but it is not only limited to Kurdistan. So it is not only the resistance of the Kurds. This resistance is a kind of pure form of the resistance of the Middle East. It is a new synthesis developed under the leadership of Abdullah Öcalan. We have to be aware of that. So behind this resistance stands the resistant attitude of the peoples of Turkey, the Arab peoples and the peoples of Iran. But also the other peoples of the Middle East such as the Armenians, Assyrians and Chaldeans. The Kurdish guerrilla is such a guerrilla. So, yes, it is a Kurdish guerrilla. That is the identity that has developed over time. But at the same time, the guerrilla is a synthesis. The Kurdistan guerrilla has gained many theoretical insights from the



experiences of the different peoples of this world. And in practice, it has completely united the different aspects of Middle Eastern guerrilla warfare.

There are, for example, the experiences gained during the guerrilla resistance against the military coup of March 12, 1971 in Turkey. From this, the guerrilla of Kurdistan drew a great many fundamental lessons. So from the experiences of Mahir Çayan, Deniz Gezmiş, İbrahim Kaypakkaya and Sinan Cemgil<sup>15</sup>. They all had gone to the mountains of Turkey as well as to the mountains of Kurdistan. Thus, they ignited the first spark of the guerrilla struggle. So, in the end, they fired the first bullet. It was a joint revolutionary resistance of the Turkish and Kurdish youth. So, with the resistance against the military coup of March 12, 1971, the resistance began. But the leaders of this resistance were all murdered. The resistance at that time was crushed and thus interrupted. Nevertheless, it was a very important experience. A very valuable experience. The later departure of Abdullah Öcalan was based entirely on this very experience.

Abdullah Öcalan has always talked about how he started his resistance in order not to leave the dreams and goals of all these revolutionary leaders unfulfilled. `I am carrying out their instructions`. That is what he always said. So he continued their resistance by questioning certain things and by drawing lessons from them on the basis of criticism and self-criticism. These revolutionary leaders

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<sup>15</sup> They were the political, ideological, and military leaders of the Turkish left in the early 1970s. All of them were assassinated by the Turkish state by death penalty or military operations shortly after the military coup in 1971.



made the beginning. They were inexperienced and made mistakes. That is why they were wiped out. Abdullah Öcalan managed to avoid mistakes, lead the guerrilla into the mountains of Kurdistan and secure their existence there. He only managed to do this because he had learned important lessons from the mistakes that had been made before. Without that, things would have developed in a completely different way. It is therefore very important to be aware of the significance of these lessons.

We received our guerrilla training in the ranks of the Palestinian guerrilla. The forces that later carried out the August 15 offensive were all trained in Lebanon, in Palestine and in the Palestinian camps. So the Palestinian people provided a lot of support and made great efforts for us. I would like to take this opportunity to respectfully commemorate their valuable support. The Palestinian forces had relations with the socialist forces of the Soviet Union. They received their training there. So through them, the guerrilla strategy of the socialist movement also shaped our forces. Our practice at that time was completely shaped by the Palestinian guerrilla. Everyone was in Palestine at that time. All the Arab resistance as well. And not only Arabs, communities from Iran were there as well.

For example, my name is the name of an Iranian revolutionary: `Abbas`<sup>16</sup>. I got my name from him. He was one of the people who sacrificed himself for the revolutionary people of Iran. He was a revolutionary and a truly great commander. In the Palestinian camps 16 Duran Kalkan's party name in the PKK is Heval Abbas.



in Lebanon, he had received training together with the friends. When he said goodbye, all the friends were very sad. When I also left, the friends gave me his name. Since then I have kept his legacy alive. Such an intense synthesis developed there at that time. The Kurdish guerrilla and the PKK have carried this synthesis to Kurdistan. In any case, the Kurdish people are historically characterized by a strong spirit of resistance, very much in line with the characteristics of guerrilla warfare. Abdullah Öcalan has analyzed all this very carefully. He raised the question of how to bring this people back to life. He explored this question, found answers to it and progressed accordingly.

In this sense, the Kurdish guerrilla is actually a `guerrilla of synthesis`. Its resistance resembles the Kurdish spirit of resistance. At the same time, it must also be called a `guerrilla of the Middle East`. Because it has united all guerrilla traditions of the peoples of the Middle East. But it is not even limited only on that. It is very important to understand the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan correctly in this context. They have analyzed the theory of all revolutions of the peoples of the world. The peoples of Europe have also resisted in order to develop into nations. They too have experience of guerrilla struggle. And how have the peoples of Asia resisted? In Vietnam, Cambodia and many other places. How did they defeat the global hegemonic forces, the so-called powerful states? The PKK has studied all this as intensively as if it were its own resistance.

In North America, Latin America and in Africa - many did not pay the slightest attention to the black population



of Africa at that time. But how did all these peoples fight against imperialism and capitalism in their territories, organize and fight as guerrilla movements? All this has been studied by the PKK and Abdullah Öcalan, for example, the experiences of Mozambique and Angola. They have analyzed all the guerrilla wars of that era very carefully. It was through the unification of all these different struggles that the August 15, 1984 offensive came about. The resistance began and the guerrilla came into being. In this context, I would also like to mention the following: From September 1982, the guerrilla began to return to the mountains of Kurdistan from abroad. It did so as the guerrilla of the PKK, but at least as much as the guerrilla of the 'United Resistance Front against Fascism' [Faşizme Karşı Birleşik Direniş Cephesi - FKBDC]. Because we were part of this front at that time. It had been established in the spring of 1982. A program had also been developed in this context. Eight organizations had joined the FKBDC and two others officially supported it. This front had been established to fight against the fascist military regime that had ruled Turkey since the military coup of September 12, 1980.

The PKK was the only Kurdish organization in the FKBDC. All other organizations were from Turkey. Among them were some organizations that were at least as strong as the PKK. Dev-Yol [Revolutionary Way - Devrimci Yol], for example, was much stronger because this organization had more and better qualified cadres. Dev-Yol had brought more people than us to Lebanon or Palestine. They were all trained together as a common front. At the 2nd Party



Congress of the PKK, it had been decided to expand the resistance. Moreover, we understood the prison resistance as a clear order for us. So, on this basis, the guerrilla returned to Kurdistan. It did so both as the PKK guerrilla and as the FKBDC guerrilla. It went to the mountains of Kurdistan to fight for the freedom of the Kurds. But at least as much, it took this step for the democratization of Turkey. So the members of the guerrilla were fighters of the FKBDC, the guerrillas of the FKBDC. They all had the goal of democratizing Turkey. Just as it had been defined as a goal in the program of the FKBDC. All those who were actively involved in the August 15 offensive and all those who fell as martyrs during it were deeply convinced of this goal. They had internalized this consciousness very deeply. It is important that we express this so clearly.

So all of this did not only begin as a force of the PKK. Yes, the resistance took place in Kurdistan, but it was not only a Kurdish resistance. What was new about this development? After the military coup of March 12, 1971, Turkey's revolutionaries had begun to resist both in Turkey itself and in Kurdistan. For its struggle against the military coup of September 12, 1980, the PKK drew important lessons from this 1971 resistance and began a similar resistance in Kurdistan, but with the help of more appropriate methods. Thus, by August 15, 1984, the PKK succeeded in transforming the resistance into an offensive led by an invincible guerrilla. The revolutionaries of Turkey did not have the courage to take this step at that time. They did not take this step. Thus, the disintegration, split and dissolution of the FKBDC ultimately began





when the guerrilla returned to Kurdistan.

Turkey's revolutionaries opposed this step at the time. They lacked the courage to do so. Why? Because their leaders had been assassinated during the resistance in 1971. It is very important to be aware of the crucial importance of leadership. As a movement, you cannot underestimate the question of leadership. Leadership is everything. It is crucial. Of course, all those who choose to fight become part of the struggle. But this kind of struggle, this struggle of leaders - it is always led by leaders. They are the ones who determine the method and direction of the struggle. But in 1971, the revolutionaries of Turkey lost their leaders. They were annihilated. After that, they did not succeed in continuing the line of their leadership. They also failed to draw the right lessons and develop leaders who could follow the footsteps of the 1971 leaders. They did not manage to deal with them on the basis of self-criticism. The revolutionaries of Turkey, who reorganized themselves from 1974, did not practice self-criticism in order to come to the necessary conclusions. There had been a huge resistance in 1971. So there was a legacy. But the revolutionaries of Turkey at that time simply assumed that this legacy would lead them to success. Thus, they insufficiently dealt with their heritage and did not draw any lessons from it. They did not recognize their mistakes and shortcomings. And so they did not prepare and educate themselves properly. So they failed to find the right methods to continue this line.

When another military coup took place on September



12, 1980, that is, another serious attack happened, the revolutionaries of Turkey did not manage to resist as a guerrilla movement in the same way as Mahir, Ibrahim, Deniz or Sinan did in 1971. There was no other reason why this did not happen. The conditions in Turkey were just as favorable for this as they were in Kurdistan. The military coup was directed against everyone. Just as much as in Kurdistan, there was great support in Turkey for the forces that resisted the military coup of September 12, 1980. Had it not been for the leadership problem described earlier, the guerrilla would have become as strong in Turkey as it was in Kurdistan. Moreover, given the leadership role of the guerrilla in Kurdistan, it would have developed an even greater impact in Turkey. Thus, with Kurdistan as a base - Kurdistan itself is after all based on the Middle East - the revolutionary struggle and the guerrilla in Turkey would have become very strong.

So we can state the following: If the revolutionary struggle had been conducted as planned by the FKBDC, the Turkish state - that is, the fascist dictatorship of September 12 - would have completely collapsed in the early 1990s and Turkey would have changed fundamentally. A completely new situation would have arisen. The fact that it did not come about in this way is not due to the lack of preconditions for this or to the intelligence or the successful policies of the Evren regime of September 12. The reason is simply that they failed to develop a revolutionary struggle that understood this regime correctly and could defeat it accordingly. The reason is that they did not succeed in developing a revolutionary leadership. Today, the



revolutionaries of Turkey are trying to overcome exactly that. This is very important, but they have to approach this question even more thoroughly and comprehensively and be even more courageous. Criticism and self-criticism is especially necessary for them. In order to apply criticism and self-criticism, they must break away from their world of private property. Cherishing the system life and private property, thus living individualistically, but at the same time carrying out self-criticism and admitting your own mistakes! This simply does not work. The PKK has developed into a force that applies self-criticism and draws lessons from its mistakes because it has broken with the world of private property and individualism. This break was brought about by Abdullah Öcalan. Through him, all these developments were achieved. All those who failed to take this step have only wasted our resources and opportunities.

**What conditions characterized the period of the August 15 offensive? What was the situation of Kurdistan's population at the time, especially in the Botan region? And another question: Why was it deemed necessary to transform the HRK [Hezên Rizgariya Kurdistan - Kurdistan Liberation Forces] into the ARGK [Artêşa Rizgariya Gelê Kurdistan - Army for the Liberation of the People of Kurdistan]? What developments did this change bring about?**

During the preparation of the August 15 offensive, the PKK came to Botan for the first time. It is important to be aware of this. The Turkish government had made the decision in 1979 not to give the PKK the opportunity to



enter the regions of Mardin and Botan. We know this for sure because we received very concrete information about this decision at that time. We also learned that other Kurdish organizations were organizing together against us. As the PKK leadership, we instructed some friends and sympathizers of our party at that time to inform all Kurdish organizations that we were ready for any form of relations and alliances without any preconditions. So we made efforts for the one unity of the Kurds. For three months, our friends and sympathizers worked on this. But after three months, they told us that it was simply impossible, because no one was willing to meet with them and accept our proposal. All these organizations had agreed with each other. There was an agreement between them. In January 1980, they attacked in Ceylanpinar for the first time. They had formed an alliance called ‘National and Democratic Unity of Forces’ for this purpose. Their aim was to build an anti-Apoist group. And so they attacked our movement. In these attacks, about 70 of our cadres and patriots<sup>17</sup> were killed.

These attacks led to certain developments in Mardin. The Kurdish organizations said quite openly that they would not allow us to enter Botan and make our PKK line known in the region and among the population there. At the same time, from 1977 onwards, there were attempts by our movement to reach Colemerg via the Serhat region and via Van and to become active there. But these attempts were not very successful. This was due to the

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<sup>17</sup> Patriots (Kurdish: welatparêz) are supporters of the Kurdistan Freedom Movement who have not joined the movement as cadres, but who do active work for the revolution as part of their civilian lives.



fact that the relevant preparations were inadequate. Those who carried out this work also played their part. Later, anyway, it turned out that they belonged to the forces that favored capitulation<sup>18</sup>. Thus, when the guerrilla returned to the Botan and Behdinan regions from September 1982, there were no organizational structures of the PKK there. The other organizations had been crushed by the September 12 coup anyway. Thus, there were no longer any organizational structures on the ground. Most of the population sympathized with the KDP [Kurdistan Democratic Party]. All Ağas were naturally KDP sympathizers. The newly developing petty bourgeoisie had developed a certain closeness to the other movements. But they, too, had been crushed by the September 12 coup. Thus, a void had been created in Botan.

So, a political and military void existed in Botan. The September 12 regime had carried out massive attacks, captured well-known people, exerted great pressure and caused widespread destruction. But it had not succeeded in affecting the entire society. Botan was under the control of the military. Even on the highest mountain peaks there were large military stations at that time, and even in small towns there were smaller military bases. Nevertheless, this massive military dominance had not made a big impact on society. As a result, society had been left with

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18 In the Kurdistan Freedom Movement, the term `tasfiyecilik` is often used to describe a current within the PKK that advocated the integration of the PKK into the ruling capitalist system and was willing to cooperate with imperialist powers. This current became particularly active after the illegal detention of Abdullah Öcalan on February 15, 1999. In an inner-party struggle that lasted for years, the representatives of this current eventually lost their influence and left the party.



room to breathe. The historically grown patriotism and spirit of resistance of the tribes and individuals was very strong. When the friends came to Botan at that time, they encountered things that did not exist like that in any other area of Kurdistan. This caused a great euphoria, excitement and hope. In this sense, the return to Botan from abroad strengthened the hope a bit. Of course, it was a great advantage to have such a patriotic population. But it also led to certain misconceptions later on. Why? It led to the assessment that the population was very well prepared, that is, very aware, educated, organized and capable of fighting. This misjudgment later led to a deviation from our actual line. It turned out that these assumptions were wrong.

We realized that our impressions of the people of Botan were not correct. Yes, the level of patriotism was good, but the people of Botan were not educated and they were disorganized. They had been crushed dozens of times, had made uprisings, and had been defeated. They did not know anything else. Moreover, after the defeat of the KDP, there were no longer any organized structures capable of carrying out an uprising. So they needed a new consciousness, a new organization and leadership to bring out patriotism properly. This is what the PKK gave to the people. All of this came about as a result of the August 15 offensive. Botan participated in this offensive. It were mostly the youth and women of Botan who joined the guerrilla. The August 15 resistance thus became Botan's resistance. At the second party congress, it had already been decided to start the offensive in Botan. This is also



documented in books. At that time, we declared the region along the Iraqi border as the central war zone. The regions of Şırnak and Colemerg had thus been declared the central war zone, the area of action and the center of the guerrilla. We had reached this decision after comprehensive analyses and discussions.

So all these developments had been achieved. But there were also mistakes and shortcomings. They resulted from the fact that the situation was not fully and adequately harnessed at the time. Even before the offensive began, many young people had joined at the sight of the revolutionaries. The news of the August 15 attacks in the small towns of Eruh and Şemdinli spread most widely in Botan. This had been planned by us beforehand as well. If the situation had been harnessed properly at that time, there could have been a series of popular uprisings. There could have been local or even regional uprisings. Because the events of August 15, 1984, triggered an enormous euphoria among the people of Botan. We can state this unequivocally. However, we did not succeed adequately in using this euphoria to lead and educate the population and thus persuade them to join the guerrilla.

Regarding the other question: Yes, HRK was the first name of the guerrilla. That represented a kind of beginning and offensive, a kind of first step. With the HRK, the beginning of the guerrilla resistance was announced. At that time, we thought it was more appropriate to take this step not in the name of the PKK, but in the name of a liberation organization, a military organization. Later, of



course, we understood that we were wrong. Because we had assumed that only those who use weapons would be called terrorists. Therefore, we did not want to carry out armed actions in the name of the PKK, so that no one could call the PKK terrorist. Later, we realized that this designation has nothing to do with weapons or actual terrorism. The term 'terrorist' is used much more as an ideological term. We realized that back then. Before, we had simply not been aware of this. So these considerations had a certain influence on the developments of the time. To call ourselves an army at that time, before the first action had been carried out, the foundation had been announced and the first bullet had been fired, would probably have been a bit exaggerated. We rather followed the principle of developing step by step. We may not have done justice to that either. This is how we approached the question and we decided that it was right to take our first step as the HRK. At the beginning this step was also successful. But it was impossible to simply continue in the same way. Later, we realized that although we had made a successful start with the HRK, new developments could only be initiated sluggishly in the further course.

The HRK was not enough to develop a war for freedom and national liberation under the existing conditions of Kurdistan. Moreover, the HRK did not quite live up to our paradigm at the time either. The paradigm of the PKK was the paradigm of national liberation. From this and from the strategy of the revolutionary people's war, which had been developed against the fascist military regime of September 12, the necessity arose for us to become an





army, a people's army. There was a need for a liberation army to be able to intensify and expand the war and through that to achieve liberation. Therefore, two years later, at the Third Party Congress in 1986, this situation was analyzed and it was decided that the time was ripe. Thus, the HRK became the ARGK. So the decision to establish the ARGK was made at the third party congress. At the congress, the statutes, leadership and goals of the ARGK were established.

The ARGK was a really big step that led to a corresponding offensive. Beginning in 1987, the ARGK launched a major offensive in many regions of Kurdistan, especially in Botan, similar to the guerrilla offensive in 1984. The ARGK launched this offensive, expanded its attacks and increased the size of its units. It abandoned carrying out small attacks with small guerrilla units and formed companies within the guerrilla. During the Third Party Congress, Abdullah Öcalan had set the goal of organizing the guerrilla in the form of companies within a year in memory of the friend Agit. This goal was decided at the Third Party Congress on the basis of Abdullah Öcalan's analysis. The year 1987 was marked by the implementation of this decision. Then, at the end of '87, the first guerrilla companies were formed. Thus, the guerrilla proved their ability to develop into an army.

The evolution into the HPG was paradigmatic in nature. It is important to understand that in this way. The necessity for this arose from the paradigm shift that Abdullah Öcalan had initiated at the beginning of the 2000's. From



a military point of view, that is, from the point of view of our military understanding, it had also become necessary to make changes to the understanding and system of the ARGK. These changes were made on a mental and systemic level. It was also necessary at the level of identity, of course. Therefore, it was no longer possible to call the newly developed line of resistance ARGK. According to the new paradigm, a defense force based on self-defense was needed. A self-defense or popular defense force led by the guerrilla. All this gained new form as the HPG.

**As the guerrilla and as a people, we celebrate August 15 as a special day. It is a holy day for us. What role did Commander Agit play in the August 15 offensive? As someone who lived and worked with Heval Agit, can you tell us a little about your personal memories of him?**

I knew the friend Agit since 1977. I knew him as one of the youngest friends who stood out most clearly in the struggle of the youth of the city of Batman. The friend Mazlum was responsible for the work in Batman at that time. Batman and Amed together formed a region. Accordingly, there were close relations between the friends Agit and Mazlum. Heval Agit attracted a lot of attention both by his determined attitude and by his creativity and flexibility in practice and his corresponding success. He also participated in military actions in the Batman area and in the uprising in Siverek<sup>19</sup>. He spent

19 An uprising of the local population in the Siverek region in 1979 against feudal exploitation, which was organized and led by the PKK. Due to the role of its cadres in the uprising, the PKK quickly won the sympathies of the local population and at the same time gained valuable experience in the armed struggle against the Turkish state.



some time there in the summer of 1979. He was one of the 15 friends who were selected to go to Palestine to receive education after Abdullah Öcalan's call. Each of them was militarily responsible for a region at that time. The area of responsibility of the friend Agit was Batman. He was personally involved in the guerrilla actions during the Siverek uprising. So, Heval Agit belonged to the first group that went to Palestine. Together with the friend Kemal Pir, he played an active role in the group that was the first to receive educations in Palestine.

In May 1980, he returned to Siirt (Botan region) with the friend Kemal Pir to build up the Botan Command. Abdullah Öcalan had given him the task of forming both the Botan Command and the general Central Command of the guerrilla. It consisted of three commands: the Toros Command, the Dersim Command, and the Botan Command. The latter was to lead the other two at the same time. It was therefore what we call today the Central Command. Even before this work began, Kemal Pir was arrested in a very unfortunate way. The friend Agit was able to save himself while injured in this incident. His rescue itself was a real miracle. Saving yourself in such a situation by jumping [out of the car]... The friend Kemal Pir had fainted. So he was not conscious when he was arrested. Otherwise, it would never have been possible to capture Kemal Pir. But that didn't happen to the friend Agit. He managed to save himself even though he had broken his collarbone.

Then later, when the military coup of September 12



took place, Heval Agit went abroad [to Palestine] and received a very intensive education there. After a party conference that took place at that time, he was part of the leadership of an educational session that revolved around preparations for returning to the country [to Kurdistan]. After it ended, Abdullah Öcalan gave him the task of going to South and East Kurdistan in November 1981. The friends Karasungur and Hoca had the same task at that time. Together with them, Heval Agit went back to the country and made the first practical preparations for the guerrilla. All the members of the guerrilla who returned to the country from September 1982 onwards were received there by the friends Karasungur and Agit, were assigned by them and made their preparations there in the winter of 1982/83. From the spring of 1983, Heval Agit was involved as part of the leadership in assigning the guerrillas to North Kurdistan. So he sent guerrilla units to North Kurdistan at that time.

At that time, a military operation took place. When the Turkish army began this operation in May 1983 and advanced through Habur, Heval Agit went to Botan. He had the goal to participate in popular uprisings that might occur. So he got to know the Garzan area in the Botan region and led the guerrilla units there. In the spring of 1984, on the basis of the party's then newly prepared plans, he took on tasks in Botan aimed at beginning practical actions in the region. This resulted in the establishment of the command of the '14th of July Armed Propaganda Unit' and the Eruh attack. Heval Agit was the person who organized all this. So he was in charge of the guerrilla



units there in 1983. The friend Agit was the commander of the guerrilla attack on Eruh in 1984, where the first shot of the guerrilla was fired. He then fought in Botan in the fall of 1984.

Some time later, he went to Abdullah Öcalan in the Central Party Academy [in Lebanon]. There he evaluated the results of the August 15 offensive together with Abdullah Öcalan. There are photos of Abdullah Öcalan and Heval Agit from that time. They were taken at the Central Party Academy. In April 1985, Heval Agit came back to the country and went to Botan. He led the war in Botan in 1985 as part of the command. On March 28, 1986, he was martyred in an ambush in the Gabar area. This is how the story of Heval Agit can be briefly summarized. It is important to know his story and the time well. And to know the personality of Agit. In his life, he always played the role of a commander. He did practical preparatory work in South, East and North Kurdistan, that is, the very first preparations for the stationing of the guerrilla there. A little later, as commander, he directed the attacks of August 15. And until the day he fell as a martyr, he was active as a commander of an active fighting unit.

He was also the commander in charge of the guerrilla throughout Botan. The leadership had withdrawn him from there so that he could participate in the upcoming Party Congress. Friend Agit was always active as a commander in North Kurdistan and fell there as a martyr. Since then, we consider him as the commander of our war that has been going on for 37 years. For two years he had



prepared the offensive of August 15 and for another two years he had led the practical war as commander. So, for 35 years now, people have been developing a special spirit and their courage under his command. They develop their consciousness, organize themselves and become active. And they wage war.

We have often talked about this topic and numerous books have been written about it. If we had more time, we could go into more detail. It is indeed very important to know the personality of Agit well. He was a personality who gave everything for the work and the preparations of the guerrilla and used his mind and all his concentration for the enhancement of the guerrilla. This does not happen based on orders or anything like that. These qualities are based on his firm belief in freedom, his attachment to Kurdish existence and the earth of Kurdistan. They originate from the deep attachment to patriotism, life as a revolutionary, striving for freedom and the line of Abdullah Öcalan. From a firm belief in all of this. This belief, in turn, is a result of consciousness. The friend Agit represents a personality filled with such consciousness and faith.

What were the unique characteristics of Heval Agit? His consciousness and faith were very strong. He did not do anything that he did not firmly believe in. He always acted very consciously. Whatever he did, he was determined to do. So he didn't just work on orders like a civil servant. He was a conscious militant with a strong faith. Moreover, he was a person who knew how to use his time very well. He was not a person who squandered his time, had petty



conversations, or acted arbitrarily. He was filled with enormous respect for all people and was very disciplined.

He thought, read and researched incessantly. He always did everything in a very planned and organized way. What he said, how he lived and what he did were all based on a plan. He was a person who worked in that way. A person who was always busy with something or working on something. He did not have extraordinary physical strength. Yes, he had learned judo. He was a combative person and was interested in armed combat. He had also learned how to use weapons. But he was not someone who relied only on his physical strength. He relied on proper technique and tactics. He was a guerrillero 24/7. That was his way. Every single minute he was intensely studying and thinking about life and war. He really didn't have any individual pretensions. The friend Agit was always exactly what was required of him at the particular moment: a simple fighter, main commander or commander. He always did exactly what the current difficulties and tasks required. He distinguished himself through all these qualities.

For him, the most important thing was always to achieve his goal. He overcame difficulties with his willpower, education, awareness and tactical creativity. He was both a commander and a simple fighter. His style as a commander was based on a clear line. This line was later distorted. The gang system<sup>20</sup> [in the PKK ranks]

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<sup>20</sup> The term 'çetecilik' (Turkish for gang system) is used in the PKK to describe a current within the guerrilla that, during the early years of the guerrilla, represented a culture and military logic that were in strong contradiction



distorted it. Abdullah Öcalan dealt with this distortion very intensively. It is important to be aware of this. This distortion was really dangerous. There was an attempt to eliminate the qualities of the kind of commander that Heval Agit represented. Because with these qualities, the guerrilla was invincible. From August 15, 1984 to March 1986, Heval Agit actively participated in the guerrilla war. He did not fall as a martyr in his own unit. He was on his way to a meeting with some other friends when he fell as a martyr. He would not have fallen as a martyr in this way in his actual unit, which he had trained for the war. It would have been impossible for him to be ambushed in that way.

He always paid attention to everything. He adhered very strongly to the existing rules. At the same time, he was not dogmatic and narrow-minded, but in a very creative way mindful of discipline, order and especially military aspects. He himself did not suffer a single martyr in his unit. This simply did not happen in Heval Agit's unit. He was the commander who carried out the most attacks and waged the most intensive war within the two years. He had shouldered the war himself, so to speak. Of course, he was not the only one waging war. The guerrilla gained a foothold in all parts of Kurdistan at that time - from Zagros, Amed and Dersim to Toros. But the war command, led by Heval Agit, shouldered the brunt of the war. This is an important aspect. Later, the gang system distorted this way of the guerrilla and reduced it to a purely physical

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to the PKK's politics and philosophy. Abdullah Öcalan's offensive confrontation with this current led to intensive discussions within the PKK about the reasons for and consequences of this gang system.





strength. This was a very dangerous development. The friend Agit was a calm person. He did not get angry quickly, but always thought, tried to understand and only then reacted accordingly. He educated, organized and provided practical help, because he held the position of a commander. Being a commander means training a large number of fighters and reaching out to them all. Since he did all this, he was naturally loved by everyone. Everyone wanted to fight in his unit.

He always made great efforts and tried out new things in practice. In his diary he writes about it himself. The everyday difficulties and obstacles on the spiritual, mental or practical level - about all this he racked his brains incessantly and looked for solutions. He lived every second of his life very intensively. For example, Heval Agit was the friend who had the hardest time walking. He must have had flat feet. At that time we didn't know that. In the winter of 1982/83, he made very intensive preparations. He put a lot of effort into these preparations. People generally talk about the theory of violence. In this context, Abdullah Öcalan always said: 'The nail drives the nail.' In other words, revolutionary violence defeats fascist genocidal violence. We discussed this topic a lot at that time. Heval Agit was once busy splitting wood at that time. He was struggling because the piece of wood was really big. I said to him that there was a saying in our country: 'Wood is good for wood. Only an imbecile makes efforts for nothing.' And I told him that he could split the wood not with the axe, but with another piece of wood. After I described to him how to do it, he did just



that. When he saw that it worked, he said, 'This means that revolutionary violence must also proceed in exactly the same way to destroy the enemy.' He came to this realization directly.

**How did the practical organization of the August 15 offensive proceed? Where exactly did the preparations take place?**

This phase began with some delay. At the end of 1982 and also in 1983, the return to the country began. In May 1983, the friend Karasungur fell as a martyr. In addition, Turkey also attacked South Kurdistan in that year. As a result, some friends went to North Kurdistan. The lack of experience and insufficient planning did not allow us to use the year 1983 properly. The results of this phase were evaluated in the meeting of the Central Committee in January/February 1984 and Abdullah Öcalan voiced his criticism in this context. He thereby clarified that it was necessary to take certain steps to establish the guerrilla. Because there were efforts in our ranks to make us surrender. In order to defeat this current, it was essential to build up the guerrilla. At that time, the enemy [the Turkish state] wanted to impose more death sentences. The judges of the September 12 coup imposed these sentences. In response, we began 1984 with a much larger drive. In the spring, the results of the January/February meeting were discussed in the Çiya Reş and Behdinan regions. As a result, Uludere and Çukurca were chosen as places for the first guerrilla attacks and the friends who would carry out these attacks were also determined.



Friend Agit was assigned as commander to plan and carry out the attacks in Uludere, while friend Abdullah Ekinci was assigned as commander to prepare the attack in Çukurca. At that time, they already carried out some smaller attacks, but they had little effect. It was still unclear how we wanted to start and what steps we wanted to take afterwards. It was unclear what was to be selected as the target of the attack and where to strike. Moreover, it was not clear to us what the consequences of the attacks would be. So there were many unanswered questions. It was necessary to take up this matter with great courage, but it was difficult to determine how exactly all this should be done. This was because our inability to find solutions gradually led to steps backward. In response, Abdullah Öcalan intensified his analysis and criticism. He gave the friend Fuat a very concrete plan for organizing and working, which he was to bring to the country. He then also came together with Fatma<sup>21</sup>. It was a really comprehensive perspective that was completely practical in nature. To discuss it together, we gathered as a leadership in the Xinere region. There we discussed the perspective of Abdullah Öcalan.

The result of these discussions was the organization of the HRK, the establishment of the armed propaganda units and the planning of attacks in Eruh and Şemdinli.

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21 Kesire Yıldırım (party name: Fatma) was a founding member of the PKK and at the same time married to Abdullah Öcalan for several years. From the beginning, Abdullah Öcalan was very open in analyzing the conflicts with her that eventually led to her breaking away from the PKK. Later, in detailed analyses, Abdullah Öcalan explained how important his struggle with Kesire Yıldırım was for the emergence of the women's freedom ideology and the women's movement.



However, the attacks in Şemdinli never took place. We had reached these conclusions through our discussions, in which friend Cuma [Cemil Bayık] was also involved. There we also decided to establish the HRK. I think these discussions took place in early/mid-July 1984. Even the founding declaration of the HRK was written there together. There we decided to establish the armed propaganda units. The leadership determined their names and assigned the friends to the various tasks. The friend Agit was designated as the commander of the 'Armed Propaganda Unit July 14'. Friend Abdullah Ekinci was designated as the commander of the 'March 21 Armed Propaganda Unit'.

So very important preparations were made at that time. We could not handle all these developments at once at that time. But the planning of the various attacks was started shortly thereafter in the Behdinan region. There, as I said, we decided to establish the HRK, drafted its founding declaration, and established various units. It was decided to carry out attacks and then to announce the foundation of the HRK. But where and how exactly, we wanted to discuss and decide together with the units that were active in the Çukurca, Geveer and Şemdinan areas and who knew the most about these areas. It was therefore necessary to take their considerations and suggestions into account. We therefore went to Behdinan and met with the mentioned units for a meeting on the mountain we call 'Şikefta Brindara'. The concrete planning of the attacks took place at this meeting. The friends brought a map of the Şemdinli area, which showed the geographical and demographic



features. There we discussed with each other and thus developed the concrete idea for the attack.

Attacking only in one place would not be enough. Therefore, we discussed where else attacks could take place. I have already mentioned that we had defined the area between the border with Syria and Iran as a war zone. So we felt it was necessary for the attacks to encompass that entire area. Therefore, it was decided that at least three attacks should take place, in Eruh, Çatak and Şemdinli. This area is the Botan-Zagros triangle. Whatever happened in these three places would immediately be known to the entire population of Botan and Zagros. Because the enemy was able to conceal our attacks. As mentioned before, the enemy had not mentioned our attacks in Çatak, Çukurca and Uludere with a single word in the media, but simply concealed them. We assumed that the state would do so again. Therefore, the attacks could only have their effect if society learned about them directly. But people in Eruh would not hear about an attack in Şemdinli. There was simply no such communication between these areas at that time. Therefore, the attacks had to be planned and executed in such a way that all of Botan and Zagros would learn about them directly. Based on these considerations, we developed our idea for the attacks.

These three small towns were the smallest of their kind in Botan at the time. We considered them suitable for carrying out an attack with a single guerrilla unit each. We chose them because of their location in this geographic triangle and their small size to ensure that all areas in the



vicinity would learn of the attacks. Then we planned the exact sequence of the attacks. All of our friends on the ground had by now gained war experience in Kurdistan. We had also gained war experience in Palestine. What had to be considered in such attacks? On the one hand, there was the military dimension, but also the question of propaganda. After all, we were carrying out an action on behalf of the party. Accordingly, it was an ideological, political and military action. We planned all these aspects. So behind the attacks of August 15, 1984, there was not only military planning. There was also propaganda. Leaflets were distributed and speeches were made in cafés. All of that was part of these attacks. But fundamentally, of course, they were military attacks. All of this was planned together.

It was jointly determined at that time how long it would take the forces involved in the planning meeting to get to the appropriate locations and carry out the attacks. Then we discussed which date in this period of time would be best to remember. So we agreed on the 15th of August. It had to be either early or mid-August. If we had determined August 12, many would have forgotten it again. Because weeks would pass until then, during which we would cover long distances on foot and be exhausted accordingly. We did not write anything down at that time. So there were no written notes at all. Except for geographical maps, we did not make any written documents during the preparations for August 15. Everything was discussed and passed on only verbally, so that no one would know about the plans. We took great care to maintain secrecy. In order to make it



possible that all attacks would take place at the same time and effectively, we agreed on August 15 - a date that no one could forget.

As soon as August 15 had been determined, we assigned our friends there to their respective tasks, i.e. to one of the three armed propaganda units. One group then set off for Eruh. The friend Agit passed on the information and planning and took over the assignment of tasks. Another group went to Çatak. But they did not carry out the planned attack because, as they said later, they could not reach Çatak. At the said planning meeting, most of the forces that had been tasked with the attack in Şemdinli were present anyway. Accordingly, they organized themselves as a separate unit. After this meeting, we headed to the Avaşin region. Near Mam Reşo Mountain, we gathered for our final meeting. In a village located on a slope between the two mountain peaks Tepe Xwede and Govendê, our last meeting took place. At that time there were still villages in the region. It was a large village called Heroj. So the final planning for the attack in Şemdinli took place there. From there, everyone set out and in the evening of the same day, Şemdinli was attacked.

### **How did the Turkish state react to the offensive of August 15, 1984? How did it deal with this attack?**

For us it was completely unclear how the enemy would react. We were constantly trying to predict this. According to our assumptions, we developed certain precautions. For example, we decided to carry out the attacks simultaneously and in such a way that all neighboring areas would quickly



know about it. So that the news would spread even if the enemy tried to conceal the attacks. And that is exactly what the enemy did later. After the August 15 attacks, a secret alarm was triggered in Turkey. At that time, the Turkish army was focused on suppressing a popular uprising. This focus stemmed from the days of the Ottoman army. Their entire system was completely geared toward suppressing such an uprising. The Department of Asymmetric Warfare against the guerrilla was still quite new and, accordingly, ineffective. They assumed that the attacks were the beginning of a Kurdish uprising and therefore put the entire army on alert. At the same time, they concealed all their actions from the media. Turgut Özal was on vacation at the time. He left his resort in Marmaris immediately and rushed straight to Ankara. The army went on alert. They did not really succeed in hiding all this from the general public and the media.

I believe it was August 17 when the first report of the attacks appeared on BBC radio. Thus, the news reached the general public. From then on, they tried to control the developments according to their interests. On this basis, what was the enemy's practical response? As part of their counterinsurgency plans, they immediately began to talk about criminals and terrorists who had attacked the country. Thus, they announced their plan and began counterattacking. They claimed that they would destroy the guerrilla within 24 hours and gave this operation the name `Operation Sun`. First they spoke of 24 hours, then 72 hours. After 48 hours had passed, they still said that they would destroy the guerrilla. Tansu Çiller spoke





the most about putting an end to the guerrilla under any circumstances.

In the course of the 37 years that have passed since then, dozens of so-called politicians, parties and organizations have disappeared from the scene. However, the resistance of the guerrilla that started on August 15, 1984 is no longer only taking place in Eruh and Şemdinli, that is, only in North Kurdistan. It has spread to all four parts of Kurdistan and is no longer taking place only in the mountains, but also in the cities and the valleys. Today, resistance is everywhere. Such a far-reaching development was initiated at that time. It simply could not be prevented. The Turkish state really attacked at that time with the aim of destroying the guerrilla. They used all kinds of methods and means to do so. They were extremely aggressive and really determined to destroy the guerrilla. However, they simply did not succeed. Their strength, methods and tactics were not enough for that. They were defeated by the guerrilla. They proved weak in the face of the guerrilla. The guerrilla had synthesized the experiences of all the peoples of the world, the resistance and guerrilla traditions from Turkey, Arabia, Iran and the entire Middle East. The guerrilla struggle of the PKK guerrilla, the Apoist guerrilla, the then HRK and ARGK and today's HPG and YJA-Star have defeated the fascist Turkish army.

This is a NATO army that has had limitless support from NATO. As part of this support, Gladio was set in motion. The guerrilla has eventually defeated Gladio<sup>22</sup>

22 Gladio refers to so-called 'stay-behind armies' of NATO that were es-



and NATO. To this day, the Turkish state has not been able to cope with this fact. That is why it is attacking Abdullah Öcalan. That's why the international conspiracy happened. And that is why the isolation and severe torture against Abdullah Öcalan is so intense. Because they simply cannot cope with this fact and try to take revenge for it. They refuse to accept their defeat. So, as I said, the first 24, 48 and 72 hours passed after the attacks of August 15, 1984. But only with great difficulty. Read the diaries of Heval Agit. There you will learn how the enemy pursued Heval Agit. They followed him all the way to Hezil. His unit had captured about 60 weapons during the attack on August 15. When his unit tried to transport all these weapons from the courthouse in Eruh with the help of donkeys, difficulties occurred. The enemy began to pursue the friends. But he did not succeed in killing them. The enemy's strength was simply not enough. Of course, he continued his attacks uninterruptedly from then on.

The Turkish President Kenan Evren took command of the attacks at the time. Özal, as prime minister, bore political responsibility. So they divided the tasks among themselves. They put the entire army in attack mode. Kenan Evren personally came as far as Şemdinli and tried to motivate the army there. He did so in numerous other places as well. Statement after statement was released so that the motivation of the army and its readiness for war would not decrease. A really huge effort was made. In the established in numerous NATO countries, e.g. Italy, Germany and Turkey, as preparations for a guerrilla war against the Soviet Union. They were to become active in the event of a Soviet occupation of European NATO members. Their members were recruited from fascist circles and used for assassinations of revolutionaries and civilians.



past, it has been repeatedly claimed that Özal did not take the attacks seriously at that time and that there were no warlike confrontations. These are pure lies. This is simply false. No one fought the Kurdish guerrilla as intensively as Özal. He was very good at organizing the economic and political aspects of the war. But even that was not enough. Despite all his great efforts, it was not enough in the end.

Kenan Evren's manner of commanding was also not enough. All the heavy attacks that were carried out at that time were not enough. For example, he went as far as Şemdinli and threatened the guerrilla and everybody else in the Middle East from there. However, when his convoy was on the way back from Şemdinli, it was attacked by the friends. Some members of Kenan Evren's security personnel were killed and wounded in the attack. This, of course, left some deep scratches on his charisma. Because of the news about the attack on Kenan Evren's convoy, the August 15 attacks also made it into the media. This is how effective the guerrilla attacks were. The military actions were important at that stage. Only military actions were carried out. Except for one incident in the Gabar area, no friend fell as a martyr during these first three months.

Only one friend named Kerim Baytar, who was doing community work in Gabar at the time, was shot by some gang members in Derik (Mardin). Otherwise, there were no martyrs in the war. So the guerrilla actions in 1984 went well. However, we found it difficult to make proper use of the results of this phase, to organize the war, to



enlarge the guerrilla and make it a creative force. So there were signs of regression. This was also the reason why in 1985 there were casualties and we suffered martyrs. In the end, this happened because we did not succeed in moving according to the demands of the guerrilla. Of course, the guerrilla must achieve success. Its way is to achieve success. It never gets involved in a fight that it cannot win. It always takes precautions and maintains its order.

So that was the situation at the beginning. The guerrilla under the command of Heval Agit definitely followed his line, that is, his correct way of commanding. But we later failed to maintain this line and make it the basis of our work. The gang system in our ranks distorted it. So the enemy created these distortions from within. That is why the war dragged on and there were casualties on our side. This, of course, gave hope to the enemy, although he had actually been defeated by the attacks of August 15, 1984. Then, in the spring of 1985, Turkey brought the issue to NATO. Had they not been defeated, they would never have taken this step. Under NATO's Article 5, Turkey then requested assistance. It justified this by saying that it was being attacked from Iraqi territory and therefore NATO needed to provide support. From then on, NATO took control of the war. And it continues to direct this war to this day.

**What was the participation of women in the August 15 offensive like? What effect did their participation have on the later phases of the struggle?**

The participation of women and the historical development



of their revolutionary struggle is an important topic. Women have really always participated in the social uprisings in Kurdistan. It was a kind of necessity. But the conscious and organized participation of women as leaders only came about through the PKK and the ideas of Abdullah Öcalan. The difficulties and obstacles were greater in this field than in others. The struggle as a professional revolutionary militant was really difficult in the context of this traditional society and colonialist rule. During the phase of building the party, we encountered these difficulties, but we resisted against them. The attitude of Abdullah Öcalan was crucial for this. He did not deviate from his stance against all these backward and narrow-minded attitudes. Therefore, a women's movement of the party already existed when the military coup took place on September 12, 1980.

Women took part in the founding congress of the party, e.g. the friend Sara. Women's structures existed in all party committees and in all local and regional committees. They may not have had sufficient awareness and education, but women were represented everywhere. The PKK's way has always been to consider every human being as valuable, to attach high value to women, not to consider them as possessions, to accordingly approach women differently, and to take a clear stance against all the conservative attitudes in society. Once this conservative streak was broken and the PKK's stance became known in society, major developments occurred very quickly. It was as if society had just been waiting to put an end to conservative attitudes. In other cases, society had not been ready for



this, but it had developed an enormously strong trust in the PKK. Thus, a clear Kurdish patriotism developed.

In 1978, 1979 and 1980 in Mardin and many other areas - all known to be extremely conservative - many families became unconditional supporters of the PKK. The women participated in the struggle with great courage. They took on tasks directly and developed into cadres in all areas. During our withdrawal from the country, a considerable group of women friends emerged in our ranks. A situation arose that did not exist in any other organization. The women friends not only joined the PKK, but also left Kurdistan to go with the PKK to other areas of the Middle East - Lebanon and Palestine. As free individuals, they participated in the trainings of the guerrilla.

After the first conference, we had formed a group of 70 to 80 people who received trainings and then headed back to the country. Among them were eight to ten female friends. They all received three months of training. At the end of it, we held a big parade. Abdullah Öcalan also invited many friendly forces and personalities. The friend Cuma brought the Libyan military attaché from Beirut. In addition, Palestinian organizations and many other organizations came. The Libyan military attaché said something very interesting at that time. I will never forget his words: 'The Kurds have always initiated new developments in this region. And now they are doing it again. I am deeply impressed by your courage. How did you turn all these women into a part of this struggle and into freedom fighters? There is nothing like it in the entire



Middle East. When I go back to Libya, I will propose to President Gaddafi that women be included in the army.'

Later, women actually became soldiers in the Libyan Army. So even then, our party triggered changes not only in Kurdistan but in the whole region. During the return to the country, a few female friends returned to Kurdistan in 1983. Not all at once or in larger groups, but in pairs or threes, female friends came back to the country. They were active in the Behdinan, Xinere, Avaşın and Zap regions and lived in the guerrilla camps there.

From the winter of 1983/84 and the following spring onwards, the return to the country and the struggle of the guerrilla finally began. I have already mentioned that at that time it was not at all clear how the guerrilla struggle would proceed. Of course, the party organization was dependent on the course of the guerrilla struggle. Therefore, it was necessary to overcome all the problems related to it. It was also necessary to analyze in detail how women would join the party and how they would develop into guerrilla fighters. Creativity was therefore required. When the attacks took place on August 15, 1984, female friends were in the Behdinan region. Shortly thereafter - just two weeks later - some of them went to Botan.

The female friend Hanım was the first to go to Botan. Later - in the winter of 1984/85 and during '85 - there were female friends in all units in the Zagros and Botan regions. They joined the guerrilla there. Since the number of female friends was still small, we had to be somewhat



careful when they joined. Because being the only female friend in a unit was hard. As more women joined, the number of units with female friends increased. So this issue was also solved. Through constant trial and error in practice and through making mistakes we solved these problems. We made mistakes. But what was the deciding factor? Our perseverance. Our continuation of the struggle as revolutionaries. The guerrilla resistance in 1985 involved female friends everywhere. In the same year, our first female friends also fell as martyrs.

Friend Hanım fell as a martyr in 1985 in the Eruh area. Friend Rahime fell in the area between Besta and Cudi at that time. Friend Çiçek also fell as a martyr. She was from Dersim. She had been involved in certain discussions with Fatma, which had weighed on her. She had then written a note expressing her difficulties and asking for permission to participate in the guerrilla struggle. She wrote that she could at least organize a village if there was nothing else she could succeed at. With this goal, she went to the Besta area, where there were many villages at that time. The friend Çiçek fell in battle there. And there were many other female friends in the ranks of the guerrilla.

What changes did it lead to when the female friends joined? Of course, the ideological line of Abdullah Öcalan created the PKK as an organization. But through the guerrilla, all this developed into an organization and practical actions, all the backward characteristics were smashed that originated from the individual and society. The joining of female friends in the guerrilla and their





development into guerrilla fighters were the first steps in the development of the women's guerrilla. From the mid-1970s, during the party's formative period, certain attitudes had been put to an end in North Kurdistan. At first, society was somewhat skeptical. 'How can women do this? They move completely on their own.' Such reactions occurred to a small extent. But when society learned about the principles of the PKK, the tide quickly turned.

The same thing happened due to the guerrilla struggle in the Botan region. When society saw female guerrilla fighters for the first time, there was naturally great astonishment. But there was no protest or rejection. Very quickly, the tide turned and the female friends' participation in the guerrilla had a very positive effect on society. Suddenly society appreciated the guerrilla even more. We had no contacts in the Colemerg area at that time, for example. In the winter of 1985/86, we sent our friend Azime there. She was all alone, since we had no contacts there. She organized a group until the spring of 1986 and then left the area again. The society did not react dismissively. On the contrary, this was received positively. Even in the rural areas. So the female friends in the guerrilla played a decisive role in ensuring that society supported the guerrilla and that more and more people joined the guerrilla.

Women developed a consciousness of freedom, liberated themselves, became revolutionaries and developed their own will. All this represented the greatest revolution imaginable for their individual personalities. And at least



as much, it also led to the greatest possible and most fundamental social revolution. This could be observed with the naked eye and took place with enormous speed. Suddenly, customary value judgments break down. Truths, the beautiful and the good, the paradigms of the people change at once. Likewise their standards for what they reject and approve. In the end, people emerge who are bound to completely new standards and principles. Such developments occurred at that time.

The enormous developments that came later were all based on what happened at the beginning. At the same time, of course, it was very difficult to create this foundation. We tackled these difficulties with struggle and resistance. Everyone should be very well aware of this. We must never forget how all these difficulties were fought against at that time. However, once these impressive and huge developments take place, all the difficulties can be very well accepted. Then, all this is no longer a problem, but much more a source from which to draw strength. The development of the free woman and the basis of the women's guerrilla struggle have led to the fact that today the women's freedom revolution is leading the entire revolution. The foundation for all this was laid in the initial stage that we have talked about. Everything is hidden there. I would like to commemorate that time here once again with respect and love.

I thank all friends and join their remarks on this year's August 15. This day is an expression of one's own spirit, willpower and way of living, of courage, sacrifice and



rebirth. August 15 stands for invincibility. It is the greatest success in history. These events are truly legendary. The spirit of August 15 lives on today in the HPG and YJA-Star guerrilla. It lives on in the regions of Heftanin, Avaşın, Zap, Metina, Zagros, Botan and Xakurkê. It lives on in the Serhat and Dersim regions, Kurdish women and Kurdish youth. It lives on in all Kurdish workers and in all working Kurdish people. And it lives on in all the friends of the Kurds. We are absolutely convinced that in this 38th year since the August 15 offensive, the heroic guerrilla and this brave people will unite, organize and fight even harder. They will fulfill their task of taking revolutionary revenge even better. This year we will definitely achieve the physical freedom of Abdullah Öcalan. So I call on everyone everywhere to understand the August 15 offensive correctly, to draw the right lessons from it and to celebrate this festival of rebirth and the guerrilla enthusiastically. 15 Tebaxê pîroz be! Cejna vejînê pîroz be!<sup>23</sup>

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23 English: 'I congratulate everyone on the 15th of August! I congratulate everyone on the festival of rebirth!'

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