

# The largest ethnic minority in turkey essay



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The height of the Ottoman Empire spanned between three continents controlling much of Southeastern Europe, Western Asia and North Africa. The fall of the Ottoman Empire can be attributed to the failure of its economic structure, with the size of the empire creating difficulties integrating its diverse regions economically. The Treaty of Sevres was the peace treaty between the Ottoman Empire and Allies at the end of World War I which divided the empire in to different spheres of influences. Modern day Turkey, the central area of the former Ottoman Empire, is an ethnic mosaic, made of Alevis, Jews, Armenians, Christian Arabs, Greek and Bulgarian immigrants, Cossacks, Circassians, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Sunni Turkmen, Cretans, Azeris, Georgians, Alevi Kurds and Sunni Kurds, Kyrgyz, Albanians and Bosnians, Roms, Yazidis, Germans settled in the East ("the kartofeln", the potatoes) and Poles settled near Istanbul in the village called Polonezkoy ("the Polish village") (1). The largest minority in Turkey have been the Kurds.

My interest in this ethnic group is because one of my close friends is a Kurd from Iraq and of course who can forget our favorite waiter in Istanbul, Turkey Hamdin Genc. I know that the Kurds are known for their constant struggle to attain an independent nation of their own but my focus will be on their history and role in Turkey as the country applies to join the European Union. We may not have recognized or been able to distinguish exactly who are the Kurds during our interim trip but they are a considerable amount of this ethnic group in Turkey. Luckily, our group did not go to Taksim square a couple days before our trip to Asia Minor because as the news reported there was a violent demonstration of Kurds.

The Kurds or Kurdish people are an Iranian people native to the Middle East, mostly inhabiting a mountainous region known as Kurdistan ("Land of the Kurds") which includes neighboring parts of Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. They speak the Kurdish language, which is a member of the Iranian branch of Indo-European languages. The Kurds number about 25 to 30 million, the majority living in the Middle East, with significant Kurdish diaspora communities in the cities of western Turkey, Armenia, Georgia, Israel, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Lebanon. Roughly 55% of the world's Kurds live in Turkey (8). Most Kurds are either bilingual or multilingual, speaking the language of their respective nation of origin, such as Arabic, Turkish and Persian as a second language alongside their native Kurdish. After WWI, many ethnic groups were no longer allowed to migrate between seasons and therefore some groups can be found scattered within the Middle East.

The Kurds are a large ethnic group but they do not necessarily pertain to a single country. Kurdish nationalism emerged after World War I with the ending of the Ottoman Empire which had historically successfully integrated but not assimilated the Kurds. Ottoman policy tended to give local regions limited autonomy. Ottoman sultan Abdul Hamid responded by a campaign of integration by co-opting prominent Kurdish opponents to strong Ottoman power with prestigious positions in his government. This strategy appears successful given the loyalty displayed by the Kurdish Hamidiye regiments during World War I. Kurds have posed the most serious and persistent challenge to the official image of a homogeneous society (3).

Since the 1930s, Kurds have resisted government efforts to assimilate them forcibly, including an official ban on speaking or writing Kurdish. Turkey's

<https://assignbuster.com/the-largest-ethnic-minority-in-turkey-essay/>

Constitution provides a single nationality designation for all Turks and therefore does not recognize ethnic groups as national, racial, or ethnic minorities. However, Kurds who were long-term residents in industrialized cities in the west were in many cases assimilated into the political, economic, and social life of the nation, and much intermarriage has occurred over many generations. Some Kurds have migrated westward towards Istanbul, Iznik, and other major cities and with them, they bring their culture and village identity, but often little education and few skills. The Kurds have been the minority group with the greatest impact on Turkish national politics. The majority of Kurds, however, continued to participate in Turkish political parties and to assimilate into Turkish society.

Since 1984 Kurdish resistance to Turkification encompassed both a peaceful political struggle to obtain basic civil rights for Kurds within Turkey and a violent armed struggle to obtain a separate Kurdish state. The leaders of the nonviolent struggle have worked within the political system for the recognition of Kurdish cultural rights, including the right to speak Kurdish in public and to read, write, and publish in Kurdish. Prior to 1991, these Kurds operated within the national political parties, in particular the SHP, the party most sympathetic to their goal of full equality for all citizens of Turkey. President Ozal's 1991 call for a more liberal policy toward Kurds and for the repeal of the ban on speaking Kurdish raised the hopes of Kurdish politicians. Following the parliamentary elections of October 1991, several Kurdish deputies, including Hatip Dicle, Feridun Yazar, and Leyla Zayna, formed the HEP, a party with the explicit goal of campaigning within the National Assembly for laws guaranteeing equal rights for the Kurds.

The Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey has launched what it calls a comprehensive approach to ending Turkey's "Kurdish problem". The proposal is believed to include greater cultural rights for Kurds, some form of local autonomy, and incentives for PKK fighters to lay down arms. Prime Minister Atalay briefed Parliament about the general framework of the Kurdish initiative, its goals and limits (4). The main goal of the Kurdish initiative is to make possible the return to Turkey of all Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) terrorists, but mainly those in northern Iraq.

The government does not consider pushing for a general amnesty for PKK members because that may include amnesty for PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan. The Kurdish language will be offered as an elective course in secondary schools and high schools. Kurdish classes will be offered to those who want to learn Kurdish at public education centers. Kurdish place names will be restored.

Broadcasts in Kurdish will be expanded to private channels. The state will support Kurdish broadcasts. Furthermore, there is talk of the decentralization of powers to localities (5). At the moment, Turkey is a very centralized state. Every decision has to be taken in Ankara. A teacher in the smallest village has to be appointed by Ankara, by the center.

The majority of Kurds live in the rural regions of western Turkey, where poverty level are high and communication is difficult. The European Union Turkey Civic Commission (EUTCC) was established in order to monitor and conduct regular audits of the European Commission's performance in ensuring Turkey's full compliance with the accession criteria. The 6th

International Annual conference has brought together prominent Turkish and Kurdish intellectuals from all over the world to discuss the progress that has been made in Turkey's bid for accession to the European Union and investigate what further efforts must be made to improve Turkey's performance. The Conference is given the title of, ' Turkey and the Kurdish Conflict: Political Dialogue & Peace-building' in response to the Government's launch of its Kurdish Initiative (2).

The EUTCC acknowledges the government's initiative and believes that dialogue is the only way forward to peace. Despite a common goal of independent statehood, the 20 million or so Kurds in the various countries are hardly unified. With the absence of a central government, many Kurds consider their clan leaders to be their highest source of authority. This has proven to be an obstacle to Kurdish independence since many have been loyal to local leaders instead of national leaders (6). Meanwhile, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the PKK, currently waging a guerrilla insurgency in southeastern Turkey, has rejected the Iraqi Kurds' decision to seek local self-government within a federal Iraq. The PKK believes any independent Kurdish state should be a homeland for all Kurds.

Over the years, many factions have splintered from the PKK and has led to tensions between the PKK, led by Abdullah Ocalan, and Barzani's KDP faction. The KDP controls the Turkey-Iraq border. Barzani has criticized the PKK for establishing military bases inside Iraqi-Kurd territory to launch attacks into Turkey. Such conflicts will only bring more disillusion and prove that extremists are not part of the movement for Kurdish nationalism. I believe that the actions of the PKK have hindered many possible

opportunities for organizations and governments to be open for dialogue between the Kurds.

Many of the violent crimes have in effect discredited the peaceful movement from an ethnic group that wants more civil autonomy into an extreme movement that seeks secession. By definition such an act would be treason to any nation. In conclusion, there are main conflicts that need to be raised in the pursuit of a peaceful and homogeneous country of Turkey. Kurds are a transnational ethnic group forming significant minorities in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. They enjoy full citizenship rights in Turkey unless they publicize their ethnicity.

In accordance with a conservative interpretation of an official ideological national unity, stringent laws and state practices apparently intended to stop separatism have the effect of discouraging any activity promoting, to be specific, Kurdish interests, even in cultural and educational spheres. Eastern and Southeastern Turkey, which are heavily populated by ethnic Kurds, are the country's least developed regions socio-economically. Turkey faces a series of reforms that are prerequisites for starting negotiations for full membership in the EU. Among these, those related to ethnic Kurds, such as the removal of restrictions on education and broadcasting in Kurdish, have encountered the most political resistance. Turkey does not have a lot of leverage in determining the terms of her relations with the EU and seems to have everything to gain from accelerating the political integration process.

Some of Turkey's political groups within the judiciary and the bureaucracy tend to associate public emphasis of ethnic -cultural differences with social-

political disintegration. They also tend to view minority demands in social-cultural domains as a prelude to more radical demands such as political-territorial secession. In contrast, Western European policy makers generally regard the accommodation of ethnic cultural demands as a requirement of democracy and as a way of preempting more radical demands" (7). Although most ethnic groups that migrate towards populated cities tend to integrate and assimilate into the economy, the majority of Kurds still occupy the eastern mountainous regions of Turkey.

I can see Turkey benefitting from nationalizing forms of education and communication in rural areas of Turkey including Kurdish regions to further develop the nation but it must also reevaluate the significance of allowing ethnic groups to express themselves because in the long term, freedom of expression will ease tensions with the diverse nation. Works Cited 1. Ebru : Reflections on Cultural Diversity in Turkey. " Babelmed.

net. 2007. Web. 15 Jan.

2011. . 2. " Final Resolutions to the 6th International Conference in Brussels.

" EUTCC EU Turkey Civic Commission. 2010. Web. 14 Jan. 2011. .

3. " Kurdistan - Turkey. " GlobalSecurity. org. 2008. Web.

15 Jan. 2011. . 4.

" President Barzani, Turkey's Foreign Minister Davutoglu Hold Historic Meetings, Announce Plans to Open Consulate. " Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). 2009. Web. 13 Jan. 2011.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-largest-ethnic-minority-in-turkey-essay/>



. 5. Recknagel, Charles. " Interview: Will Turkey's ' Kurdish Initiative' Succeed? Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty. 2009.

Web. 16 Jan. 2011. . 6.

Runck, Laura. " Kurds. " Kurds. Minnesota State Univeristy Mankato, 1999.

Web. 15 Jan. 2011. . 7.

Somer, Murat. " Ethnic Kurds, Endogenous Identities, and Turkey's Democratization and Integration with Europe. " The Global Review of Ethnopolitics. University of Washington,, 2002.

Web. 19 Jan. 2011. .

8. " Who Are the Kurds? " Washington Post - Politics, National, World ; D. C. Area News and Headlines.

The Washington Post Company, 1999. Web. 16 Jan. 2011. .