

# SHAPING PEACE PROCESSES: A COMPARISON BETWEEN TURKEY AND COLOMBIA

*Despite having different trajectories and internal dynamics, the Colombia/FARC and the Turkey/PKK cases offer an interesting comparative lens through which to analyze the critical factors of any successful peace process. While the Colombian government and the FARC reached a groundbreaking peace agreement in 2016, terminating the country's 52-year internal conflict, the peace process between the Turkish state and the PKK collapsed in 2015, initiating a new cycle in the long-running conflict. This article argues that there are three critical factors which have spelled success for Colombia: favorable regional dynamics, a weakened terrorist organization, and a well-structured agenda for negotiation. In contrast, complicated regional dynamics, a strengthened terrorist organization, and a lack of fixed agenda in negotiations have ultimately stymied Turkey/PKK peace efforts.*

Mehmet Özkan\*



\* Dr. Mehmet Özkan is an Associate Professor at the Turkish National Police Academy in Ankara, Turkey and the Director for Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) in Colombia, and a Lecturer at Pontificia Universidad Javeriana in Bogota, Colombia.

**F**rom Africa to Asia and the Middle East to Latin America, the world has experienced many peace attempts. Each peace process has its own roots, problems, and dimensions. However, while some processes end up terminating the conflict, other processes fail despite all good intentions. For example, the Middle East peace process has not yet reached a turning point despite numerous pushes for peace between Israelis and Palestinians. In Africa, many peace efforts have failed, like the one in Democratic Republic of Congo; while a few others have succeeded such as in South Africa, Burundi, and Rwanda.

Comparative perspectives on the dynamics of peace processes have become important to contextualize the reasons behind their success or failure. In juxtaposing the cases of Turkey and Colombia, three determining factors can be identified for a successful outcome: (1) favorable regional dynamics, (2) a weakened terrorist organization, and (3) well-structured and defined peace negotiations.

The peace processes between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the Colombian government and its largest rebel group, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) were both launched in the autumn of 2012. After more than four years of negotiations, Turkey's peace process collapsed in the summer of 2016, and has returned to a full-fledged war between the PKK – an internationally recognized terrorist organization – and the Turkish state. Since the collapse of the peace process,<sup>1</sup> dynamics of the conflict have changed drastically; leading figures of the Kurdish political party – the People's Democratic Party (HDP) – have been jailed, and many elected HDP mayors and governors have been charged with supporting the PKK and prosecuted. The conflict has also been regionalized with the fight between the Turkish army and the Syrian affiliate of the PKK, the Democratic Union Party (PYD) in Syria, along with already ongoing clashes with PKK militants in Turkey and Northern Iraq.

On the other hand, the Colombian government reached a permanent ceasefire with the FARC in August 2016 and a comprehensive peace deal was reached and signed between the parties after 52 years of civil war. However, in a plebiscite for peace in October 2016, the Colombian people narrowly rejected the agreement, which was not considered a rejection of peace per se, but rather as a way to reach a better deal. The leader of the 'no' campaign, former President Alvaro Uribe, and the leader of the 'yes' campaign, the current President of Colombia Juan Manuel Santos, established dialogue meetings to modify the agreement.<sup>2</sup> In tandem, the FARC announced that in respecting the decision of people, it was amenable to finishing this

<sup>1</sup> Officially this process was called as "solution process" in Turkey.

<sup>2</sup> "Colombia, rebels agree revised peace deal to end 52-year war," *Reuters*, 12 November 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-colombia-peace/colombia-rebels-agree-revised-peace-deal-to-end-52-year-war-idUSKBN1370PV>

process. As part of this compromise, on 12 November 2016, the FARC and the Colombian government announced that they reached a revised agreement that took the criticism of the nay-saying bloc in the referendum into consideration. Consequently, the new agreement

*“Each peace process has its own roots, problems, and dimensions.”*

was ratified in both houses of the Colombian parliament on 24 November 2016 and technically peace was achieved.<sup>3</sup> However, whether the implementation of the ongoing process in Colombia ends in success or not is another discussion.

### *Contextualizing the Colombian Case*

The Colombian internal conflict is complicated as it has lasted for more than half a century, and it involves a complex web of left and right illegal groups as well as the oldest guerrilla group in Latin America. There is consensus that the period known as *La Violencia (1948-58)* is an antecedent to the violence and conflict afflicting contemporary Colombia. During that time, the confrontation between the two major political parties – the liberals and the conservatives – exacerbated the conflict especially in rural areas and took the lives of at least 180,000 Colombians. A consociational accord put an end to the conflict and fostered a period of political calm, resulting in 16 years of power-sharing between the liberals and conservatives. Meanwhile, during the 1960s, a former peasant self-defense movement that fought during the days of *La Violencia*, gave birth to the FARC,<sup>4</sup> which follows a Marxist-Leninist ideology.

The years of the National Front (1962-78) – which allowed the two parties to alternate in the presidency – brought peace to the country. However, the pact ended in 1978 and the stability of the political system at the local level proved insufficient to keep the peace. During the 1980s, the intensity of armed conflict transitioned from being concentrated in the rural areas to generalized violence. In the following decades, in addition to the generalization of the conflict, new actors appeared on the scene, thus changing the existing traditional dynamic of the conflict – centered on power-sharing in Bogota – into a situation with multiple actors involved, including the National Liberation Army (ELN) among other groups, and less state presence in many rural areas.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> See Murat Zelan “Silahlara Veda” [Goodbye to Weapons], *Yeni Şafak*, 29 June 2017, <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/muratzelan/silahlara-veda-2038698>; Mehmet Özkan, “Kolombiya’da Simdi Ne Olacak?” [What Is Going to Happen in Colombia?], *Gerçek Hayat*, 19 July 2017, <http://www.gercekhayat.com.tr/latin-amerika-gunlugu/kolombiyada-simdi-ne-olacak/>

<sup>4</sup> For a brief history of FARC, see Garry Leech, *The FARC: The Longest Insurgency*, (Zed Books: London, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent history of the conflict see Gonzalo Sanchez and others, *BASTA YA! Colombia: Memorias de Guerra y Dignidad, Informe general Grupo de Memoria Historica* [ENOUGH! Colombia: Memories of the War and Dignity, General Report of Historical Memory Group], (Centro Nacional de Memoria Historica: Bogota, 2013).

Since the early 1980s, there have been several rapprochements between the government and the insurgent groups. The FARC has participated in some talks without reaching any accord. In 1982, President Belisario Betancur initiated a rapprochement with the guerrilla groups but without durable success. At this time, the FARC established a political front, the Patriotic Union (UP), which was supported by the Communist Party and other leftist groups in the Colombian political scene. While the UP gained some legitimacy in the legislative elections of 1986, it disappeared from the political scene thereafter as many of its members were assassinated by paramilitary groups. In the 1990s, the transformation of international circumstances led to the debilitation of some of Colombia's guerrilla movements. After several failed attempts, the peace process led to an accord with middle-range insurgent movements, but none with the FARC nor the ELN. In 1991, the government entered into negotiations with a joint organization of guerrillas – the *Simón Bolívar Guerrilla Coordinator* – which included the FARC. This negotiation also failed after a major violent incident was perpetrated by the guerrilla group.<sup>6</sup> The FARC retreated to the mountains and sharpened their armed confrontation.

The growth of the illicit drug trade in the 1980s and 1990s – turning Colombia into the largest grower of illicit coca and manufacturer of processed cocaine – reshaped the dynamics of the conflict. The FARC increased its strength enormously with its involvement in the drug economy and ransom money from kidnappings. In response, drug barons and land-owners started to establish paramilitary groups; the first one was established in 1982, known as *Muerte a Secuestradores* (Death to Kidnappers) to protect themselves. As a result, during this period violence peaked, social inequality increased, guerrillas became militarily stronger, and the number of internally displaced people as well as kidnappings climbed. In addition, self-defense groups emerged in reaction to the guerrillas in areas where the state was unable to provide security to the population. Self-defense groups were the result of an alliance between local elite, landowners, and drug dealers and some spheres of the Colombian state, primarily the armed force.

By the late 1990s, Colombia's internal problem was being seen as a threat to the international order by the United States and Europe, because Colombia's conflict had occupied the epicenter of the international campaign against drug trade and terrorism. The involvement of the FARC in the drug business became key both in the production and transportation of cocaine outside of the country. *Plan Colombia*, announced by President Bill Clinton in 1998, was a US-led initiative that provided foreign aid, weapons, and diplomatic support to the Colombian government in order to support

<sup>6</sup> See Alderid Gutiérrez Loaiza, “Negociaciones de paz en Colombia, 1982-2009: Un estado del arte” [Peace Negotiations in Colombia, 1982-2009: The State of Art], *Estudios Políticos*, Vol. 40, Instituto de Estudios Políticos, Universidad de Antioquia (2012), pp. 175-200.

its war on drugs and left-wing insurgent groups.<sup>7</sup> However, *Plan Colombia* failed to create confidence among the parties of the conflict. Instead, it bred distrust. Rather than committing to the peace initiative, the Alvaro Uribe administration (2002-2010) opted to implement *Plan Colombia* to gain an upper hand militarily over the FARC. The next chapter of the program, known as *Peace Colombia* was announced by President Obama and President Santos in 2016, and will focus on social and economic aid in the post-conflict period.

*“The FARC increased its strength enormously with its involvement in the drug economy and ransom money from kidnappings.”*

Colombia has experienced various peace processes at different times. During the 1980s, various initiatives of dialogues and negotiations took place. Three middle-range guerrillas signed peace accords during that decade. However, the two main guerrilla groups – ELN and the FARC – continued their violent actions without any real attempt at negotiating. The 1990s was a bloody decade, marked by an escalation of violence, shocking violations of human rights, several increases of internal displacements, politically motivated murders and kidnappings, and drug-trafficking. In 1998, President Andrés Pastrana Arango announced a dialogue with the FARC, but broke-up the negotiations three years later. From then until Santos’ presidency in 2010, Colombian governments treaded carefully before initiating a peace process.

### *The Turkey/PKK Case*

Abdullah Öcalan officially founded the PKK in 1978 as a Marxist organization that reflected his ideology and leanings. The party’s initial objective, which evolved over time, was to establish a Kurdish state in the southeast of Turkey and eventually join it with the rest of Kurdistan, as similar groups were fighting in neighboring countries.<sup>8</sup> In the 1990s, the conflict intensified into a full-scale insurgency waged by the PKK, which claimed the lives of more than 40,000 people.

In the mid-2000s, a Kurdish political party – the Democratic Society Party (DTP) – surfaced and was in direct contact with the PKK and Öcalan. In an environment where Turkey was restoring some Kurdish cultural rights, the party acted

<sup>7</sup> More details on Plan Colombia, see Diana Marcela Rojas, *El Plan Colombia: La Intervencion de Estados Unidos en el Conflicto Armado Colombiano (1998-2012)* [Plan Colombia: Intervention of the United States in Colombian Armed Conflict (1998-2012)], (IEPRI and Debate: Bogota, 2015).

<sup>8</sup> See Nihat Ali Özcan, *PKK (Kürdistan İşçi Partisi): Tarihi, İdeolojisi ve Yöntemi* [PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party): Its History, Ideology and Methods], (ASAM: Ankara, 1999).

*“Abdullah Öcalan officially founded the PKK in 1978 as a Marxist organization that reflected his ideology and leanings.”*

is now embedded in the Parliament, after it passed the 10 percent election threshold in the June 2015 elections.

The first serious attempt to settle the Kurdish issue occurred in 2005 when then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan publicly accepted the existence of an issue and pledged to tackle it in earnest in a speech delivered in front of a crowd in Diyarbakir, the largest Kurdish-majority city in Turkey.<sup>9</sup> However, this opening soon failed mainly because the state did not engage any Kurdish partners for the settlement of the issue. Learning from this failure, the state embarked on a second trial through secret talks between government officials and PKK representatives in Oslo in 2009. This too came to a halt with the outbreak of violence in 2011. It also took place without public knowledge; hence the process would have faced a major crisis if the talks were disclosed. Drawing lessons from this attempt and failure, Turkey’s most audacious attempt was announced by Erdoğan in December 2012 when he said that the state was talking with Öcalan to find a peaceful settlement of the Kurdish issue. Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP) threw their full weight behind the process. This last attempt, which had the full support of the primary decision makers in Turkish and Kurdish politics, is unrivalled in the history of Turkey’s search for a settlement of the Kurdish issue. However, a suicide bombing allegedly perpetrated by ISIS in Suruç – a Turkish town near the Syrian border – killing 34 mostly young Kurds was a significant turning point. Following the Suruç attack, mutual distrust and fresh violence between the PKK and the Turkish government triggered a new cycle in the conflict, which currently continues as a “low intensity-war.”<sup>10</sup> In addition, regional upheaval, particularly the Syrian imbroglio and its Kurdish dimension, has upset this peace process.

<sup>9</sup> See Mesut Yeğin, “The Kurdish Peace Process in Turkey: Genesis, Evolution and Prospects,” Working Paper 11, *Stiftung Mercator*, IAI and IPC, May 2015, [http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/gte\\_wp\\_11.pdf](http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/gte_wp_11.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Galip Dalay, “Turkey’s Kurdish issue: From peace to low intensity war,” *Al Jazeera*, 21 December 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2015/12/turkey-kurdish-issue-peace-intensity-war-151221074921873.html>



### *Lessons Learned: Comparing Turkey and Colombia*

A defining quality of the Colombia/FARC peace process has been not conflating peace with a ceasefire agreement. Since the beginning, the Colombian government and the FARC agreed upon two things. First, that engaging in negotiations does not mean an end to active conflict, meaning that fighting can continue despite talks between parties. Second, both sides agreed that interim agreements would not be signed until a final peace agreement is signed.<sup>11</sup> For the Turkey-PKK peace process, this has not been the case. Indeed, peace talks and a mutual ceasefire fostered the perception among the public that peace could be achieved, despite difficulties.

While the mutual ceasefire between the Turkish state and the PKK has helped gain public confidence in the process on both sides, it has not created enough social pressure to reach a conclusive agreement. In the framework of basic understanding in Colombian case, the Colombian army killed a regional leader of the FARC while peace negotiations were ongoing. The Colombian government refused to call a ceasefire, saying that the guerrillas would just use it to regroup and rearm as they did in the late 1990s during the last peace attempt. In 2015, the Colombian army killed the leader of the 18th division of the FARC, which operates in north-west Colombia. Similarly, the FARC continued to negotiate as they killed 11 soldiers in an ambush in April 2015. Essentially, a mutual ceasefire was not reached until the final agreement was completed on 28 August 2016. This is very different from the Turkey/PKK case where a ceasefire agreement and peace efforts were considered mutually exclusive. In other words, a collapse in the ceasefire meant that peace was quashed as well. This ultimately prevented the Turkey-PKK peace process from getting past stumbling blocks.

### *A Fixed Agenda*

The Colombian peace process has not been without difficulties; however, there are some valuable lessons that can be drawn for Turkey.<sup>12</sup> First, Colombia's well-structured peace negotiation process contributed significantly to reaching an agreement. In Colombia, both the FARC and the government were transparent about the main issues that they would be discussing. In order to advance the process, the negotiators agreed to a fixed agenda before formally beginning the negotiations. The agenda was based on a signed preliminary General Agreement that functioned as

<sup>11</sup> See "The Colombian Peace Agreement: The Opportunity to Build Peace," Office of the High Commissioner for Peace, No Date, p. 2, [http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/herramientas/Documents/The\\_Colombian\\_Peace\\_Agreement\\_the\\_opportunity\\_to\\_build\\_pace.pdf](http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/herramientas/Documents/The_Colombian_Peace_Agreement_the_opportunity_to_build_pace.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> See Mehmet Özkan, "Kolombiya Barış Süreci'nden Türkiye için ders çıkar mı?" [Any Lessons for Turkey from the Colombia Peace Process?], *Star*, 7 May 2016, <http://www.star.com.tr/acik-gorus/kolombiya-baris-surecinden-turkiye-icin-ders-cikar-mi-haber-1109559/>

a framework, stipulating which demands could be made and which could not. This General Agreement was signed after a year and a half of secret negotiations between the Santos administration and the FARC, and sought to put an end to a war that had begun to seem endless.

*“A defining quality of the Colombia/FARC peace process has been not conflating peace with a ceasefire agreement.”*

The peace talks in Colombia followed an agenda comprised of six points,<sup>13</sup> which addressed both the root causes and the effects of the conflict: rural reform, political participation, drug trafficking, justice for victims, disarmament, and implementation. The points regarding rural reform and political participation can be seen as an attempt to solve the causes of the conflict, while

the point regarding justice for victims clearly deals with consequences. Drug trafficking and disarmament were the most difficult and complex issues to address as they have perpetuated the conflict in terms of financing and casualties, respectively. After reaching a consensus on each point in the negotiation, the Colombian government made the agreement public, which introduced an important participatory quality to the negotiations. The FARC leadership also followed the government's lead and began publishing documents on partial agreements reached on issues such as rural reform, political participation, and illicit drugs.

While negotiating the end of the conflict, the two parties agreed to the demobilization and disarmament of the FARC and the measures put in place to help the reintegration of the guerrilla organization's lowest ranks. At the presentation of this deal, both parties also announced a definitive ceasefire, effectively ending the war ahead of the peace deal. Before concluding the agreement, the Colombian government asked the public to approve the peace deal in a referendum, which was narrowly rejected. After re-negotiating the deal, Colombian congress formally ratified the revised peace deal and the government formally started to execute the final agreement and all previously arranged deals. The FARC began its demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration with an observer mission from the United Nations.

In the Turkey/PKK case, there has not been a fixed agenda, at least not one available to the public, in negotiations between the government and PKK. A retrospective analysis of the peace process in Turkey indicates that not only has there been no

<sup>13</sup> Colombia's High Commission for Peace has all the information about negotiations and documents. See <http://www.altocomisionadoparalapaz.gov.co/Paginas/home.aspx>



fixed agenda, but all the issues were interconnected, making any progress difficult. For example, on 25 April 2013, Murat Karayılan, the second in command after Öcalan, stated that the PKK would disarm only as part of a process in which constitutional changes were made, and Öcalan was released. Karayılan added that the village guard system had to be abolished, and that the Special Forces and similar organizations operating within the body of the security forces of Turkey had to be disestablished. Those demands were almost impossible to meet for any elected government in Turkey unless the PKK disarmed totally. Similarly, the Turkish government conditioned that if the peace process were to be concluded successfully, the terrorist organization must lay down its arms both in and outside of the country.

The formation of a “Wise Persons Delegation” to contribute to the peace process, featuring artists and writers, garnered social support for the process; however, this did not create enough pressure to accelerate it or fix an agenda. Perhaps different from Colombia, in Turkey’s peace process, there has been a lack of powerful actors leading the negotiation process. From the Kurdish side, Öcalan seemed to be the most powerful figure; however, influential figures in the mountains like Murat Karayılan tried to co-opt the process rather than implementing what was agreed on. Similarly, on the government side, there was an ongoing conflict between Erdogan and then government allied Gülen movement (now recognized as Fethullah Terrorist Organization, FETÖ) over controlling the bureaucracy. As it turned out since 2013, FETÖ did not only control the judicial, police, and military bureaucracy, but also spoiled the peace process in an effort to damage it. The most visible of such attempts was the summoning of the head of Turkish National Intelligence Hakan Fidan and two high-ranking staff who had played an active role in the Oslo negotiations to testify as “suspects” by a specially authorized prosecutor close to FETÖ.

The only time the both parts came close to having a fixed agenda was when they announced the 10-article Dolmabahçe Consensus on 28 February 2015. However, as regional dynamics changed and mutual trust was destroyed, it became too late to reach a durable deal. Soon the process collapsed when Erdoğan openly opposed the Dolmabahçe meeting.<sup>14</sup>

In any peace process, there are always issues to spoil the process and it is always open to manipulation by day-to-day political developments. The success of Colombian case is largely due to the fact that both sides succeeded in isolating the peace process from political diversions. This element has been absent in the Turkey/PKK case, which may have a direct impact on the destiny of negotiations.

<sup>14</sup> For a chronology of the peace process in Turkey, see <http://hakikatadalethafiza.org/en/chronology-of-peace-process-in-turkey/>

### *A Defeated/Weakened Military Group*

The militarily weakened FARC was another important factor for the success of the Colombian peace process. It is unlikely that the FARC would have been induced to come to the negotiation table had Alvaro Uribe, the Colombian president between 2002 and 2010, not defeated and weakened the FARC militarily. In the 1990s, the FARC held the upper hand militarily in the country. Hence, the FARC was disingenuous during peace talks held between 1998 and 2002. Colombian politicians learned two main lessons from negotiating over the years: (1) the possibility of reaching a realistic peace deal is very low if the FARC is not weakened militarily, and (2) not to allow peace negotiations to be utilized by the FARC to re-group or strengthen its force. Despite criticism of Alvaro Uribe's governing style, only after his success in the military sense did the FARC see the merit in defending their political ideas in parliament as a political party. This also coincided with a trend of leftist political parties coming to power throughout South America. The political tides in favor of the left may have induced the FARC to shift its orientation towards seeking a peace deal within the legal parameters of the Colombian political system.

In the peace talks in Turkey, there has always been a lack of mutual confidence as well as suspicion between the sides.<sup>15</sup> The PKK has utilized the negotiation periods as a way to re-group and re-organize itself. As the PKK has acted reluctantly in disarming its militias, the Turkish government has lost its confidence in the process. It must also be noted here that before the peace process started in 2012, the PKK had not been defeated militarily. In fact, regional developments during the peace process have strengthened the PKK militarily. Gains made by the PYD in northern Syria – establishing Rojava as a federal region under its control in 2016 – has in turn boosted the PKK's regional status and confidence. The international fight against ISIS has placed Kurdish forces at the epicenter of international attention and support, especially from the US. As a result, a politically and militarily strengthened PKK has shown less interest in the peace process, perhaps with the hope of gaining more in any other negotiations in future.

The peace process started with the good intentions of then-Prime Minister Erdoğan and his party to find a permanent solution to the decades old Kurdish issue in Turkey. However, as it did not work, Erdoğan decided to combat PKK forces more decisively both in Turkey and outside since 2016. Apparently, the Turkish government is following a similar policy to that of Alvaro Uribe in Colombia between 2002 and 2010 with an intention to defeat and/or weaken the PKK first, and then to pursue negotiations in the future.

<sup>15</sup> See Serra Hakyemez, "Turkey's Failed Peace process with the Kurds: A Different Explanation," Crown Center for Middle East Studies, Middle East Brief, No. 111 (June 2017).

### *Regional Blessing*

The third lesson to be drawn from Colombia is that regional developments can significantly influence the outcome of the peace process. Unless regional actors cut their support to the terrorist group and back the process, it is unlikely a final agreement can be reached. Recognizing this, since President Juan Manuel Santos was elected in 2010, he has focused on improving relations with

neighboring countries such as Venezuela, Ecuador, and Cuba, which historically have been the main supporters of the FARC. Santos has been successful in pulling them into the process. After garnering support from Venezuela and Cuba at the start of the peace talks, the Santos government highlighted the FARC's isolation and championed regional peace as opposed to simply Colombian peace. That is why negotiations that started in Norway with the FARC have continued in Cuba. Colombia is now following a similar logic with other terrorist groups such as the ELN, another radical left group. Official negotiations with the ELN began in 2016 and are ongoing in Ecuador despite discontinuity.

*“The FARC began its demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration with an observer mission from the United Nations.”*

Regional dynamics have always played an important role in the PKK's overall politics.<sup>16</sup> However, in Turkey's peace talks with the PKK, regional developments have been brought to bear on the process, and have damaged the possible continuity of talks. Developments after the reversal of the Arab Spring and the Syrian war changed many regional balances and calculations, and the peace process has not been an exception. The PKK has shown an unprecedented ability to operate regionally in Syria and Iraq; its Syrian branch, the PYD, has succeeded in forging a strong relationship with the US by becoming an ally in the fight against ISIS; and the Syrian Kurds' conflict with Islamic State jihadists has triggered unrest in Turkish Kurdish communities in Turkey and Europe. At the same time, the now evident dangers of the Syrian spillover have underlined how many shared interests Turkey, the PKK, and Turkey's Kurds have in overcoming inertia in the talks, declaring some mutually agreed end-goals, and making the most of the progress achieved over the past years.

However, the Turkish government and the PKK have had different interpretations and understandings of developments in the region. The Kurds' gains in Syria in the form of the de facto establishment of Rojava was interpreted as a threat by Turkey;

<sup>16</sup> For a historical account see Ali Balcı, *The PKK-Kurdistan Workers' Party's Regional Politics*, (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2017).

“*The militarily weakened FARC was another important factor for the success of the Colombian peace process.*”

Kurdish peace process are two connected issues.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, as long as the Syrian conflict continues, regional dynamics will continue to prevent any possible peace process or the possibility of disarming the PKK.

Perhaps a final lesson to be drawn from the experience of Colombia is that it takes time for people to believe in the process. In all peace negotiations, people are always cautious about the process, and only if they see a real change in their lives do they believe in the benefits of reaching a deal. For example, due to previously failed peace talks in Colombia, the people initially doubted the government’s sincerity. Colombian society is still very polarized about the deal, and only gradually it has begun to believe in the seriousness of the peace process. Even after the agreement between the government and the FARC was ratified in 2016, the Colombian people’s confidence in the deal was not estimated to be that much. The popularity of the peace deal will undoubtedly be tested in the run-up to legislative elections in March 2018 and the presidential vote set for 27 May 2018.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that the Colombian and Turkish conflicts have different trajectories, regional dynamics, and evolutions. However, from a structural point of view, there are lessons to be drawn from the Colombian experience not only for Turkey but also for other peace processes in the world. So far, there has been no direct communication between the governments of Colombia and Turkey in terms of sharing experiences. However, a delegation from Turkey – organized by the Democratic Progress Institute (DPI) with the participation of academics and member of political parties – visited Colombia in May 2016 with the goal of observing Colombia’s experience in reaching peace.<sup>18</sup> Their visit was reflected in a report; however, due to domestic

<sup>17</sup> Aytaç Kadioğlu, “The End of Turkey’s Kurdish ‘Peace Process’?,” 15 February 2016, <http://nottspolitics.org/2016/02/15/the-end-of-turkeys-kurdish-peace-process/>

<sup>18</sup> A Report on Democratic Progress Institute’s visit to Colombia between 16 and 23 April 2016 is available on their website. See *DPI Comparative Study Visit: Conflict Resolution in Colombia – the Havana talks and beyond*, (DPI: London, 2016), <http://www.democraticprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/DPI-CSV-report-Colombia-April-2016-Final-2.pdf>

political circumstances, a genuine debate in Turkey about the Colombian case has not been generated.<sup>19</sup> Since the 1980s, the PKK and the FARC have had connections through their European cells. It is believed that the PKK has been following the peace process in Colombia with a close eye. Therefore, garnering conclusions and lessons from Colombia is not only useful for the Turkish government, but also may have some bearings for the PKK.

The Colombian peace process is now presented as one of the most successful ones as it ended a 52-year internal conflict – the longest in the Americas. That said, several challenges remain regarding its implementation.

After more than one year of ratifying the peace deal, Colombian society is highly divided on FARC's political participation and granting immunity to FARC members. In September 2017, the FARC changed its name officially from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia to the Common Alternative Revolutionary Force but the acronym remains the same, as the group's chosen party name in Spanish is *Fuerza Alternativa Revolucionaria del Común* (FARC). The FARC is now contesting and campaigning openly in the 2018 elections but not without problems. In many parts of Colombia, people continue to protest the FARC leader and presidential candidate Rodrigo Londono, known as Timochenko, calling for a response to committed crimes.

Colombia is now more secure compared to a decade ago. The state is trying to increase its presence especially in rural areas where the FARC used to have control. At the same time, the ELN and other illegal groups are trying to fill the vacuum and increase their control in different parts of Colombia. The FARC, as the largest militant group is now over, but many small militant groups still operate in Colombia, financing its activities with drug trafficking and illegal mining. The Colombian army and institutions are talking about transforming itself from war to peace; however, that is not easy. Colombia needs a bureaucratic overhaul to be more efficient and more responsive to public demands. Expectations from the state are very high, however, it is unclear whether they can be met or not. The fate of the still fragile state of Colombia's peace will fall to the next president who will take office in August 2018.

<sup>19</sup> For a rare example on this, see Murat Zelan, "Türkiye ve Kolombiya, Çözüm Süreci ve Barış Süreci, PKK ve FARC arasındaki farklar" [Turkey and Colombia: Resolution Process and Peace Process, Differences between PKK and FARC], *Yeni Safak*, 13 October 2016, <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/muratzelan/turkiye-ve-kolombiya-cozum-sureci-ve-baris-sureci-pkk-ve-farc-arasindaki-farklar-2033447>