

## **ARI Foundation and other Turkish American Groups Speak Out Against PKK Terror at The Wilson Center**

Washington, D.C. March 3, 2008 - The Wilson Center Southeast Europe Project hosted a panel, "Developments in the Politics of the Kurdish Question in Turkey." Speakers were panel moderator, Henri Barkey, Chair, Department of International Relations, Lehigh University; Aliza Marcus, Author of "Blood and Belief: The PKK and the Kurdish Fight for Independence"; Nicole Watts, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, San Francisco State University; and, Gokhan Cetinsaya, Fellow, Woodrow Wilson Center. The Wilson Center SEP is headed by John Sittides, who folded the Greece-oriented Western Policy Center into SEP two years ago.

The Assembly of Turkish American Associations (ATAA), in coordination with local Turkish American organizations, including the American Turkish Association of Washington, DC (ATADC), Turkish Coalition of America (TCA), Turkish American Community Center (TACC), American Turkish Friendship Association (ATFA), Rumi Forum, and ARI Foundation, showed a strong presence to reject and oppose the panel's general position that Turkey should negotiate with terrorists in order to address the needs of its citizens of Kurdish origin. The ATAA believes that Turkey has successfully and continues successfully to address the needs of its citizens without honoring any terrorist organization. The ATAA believes that Turkey has the natural and legal right to defend itself against domestic and international terrorism to protect its citizens.

Marcus claimed that the PKK was a people's movement, because it received almost all of its funds from cultural organizations in Europe, either voluntarily or under force, and that even pro-Kurdish political parties in Turkey were secretly, pro-PKK. Marcus claimed that "the PKK was the main Kurdish organization of Turkey", because it had spilled its blood for its belief in Kurdish nationalism at most, and cultural rights in the least. Marcus stated that college classes should be offered in a Kurdish dialect. **Yurter Ozcan, President of the ARI Foundation**, disagreed that in no way do the mainstream Turkish Kurds endorse violence. He expressed that the vast majority of Turkey's Kurds were supporters of the AKP, not even pro-Kurdish parties, and surely not the PKK terrorist organization. He stated that the vast majority of Turkey's Kurds were integrated with Turkish society, and that a number of Turkish Presidents and Prime Ministers had been Kurdish, such as Turgut Ozal, who did much for the development of the Turkish southeast. "At a time when we are discussing whether America is ready for an African American President, today we should be praising Turkey's diversity success story," Ozcan concluded.

ATAA President-Elect Gunay Evinch disagreed, citing the EU's recent lawsuit in New York against R.J. Reynolds and Phillip Morris for cigarette smuggling and evading duty taxes. The EU alleged that the cigarette companies used the PKK to do the smuggling, and south Cypriot banks to launder the money. The case was immediately settled for \$1.2 billion. Evinch stated that vast majority of the PKK's funding comes from criminal activity - not raffles at Kurdish cultural events. These criminal activities include cigarette smuggling, narcotics, human trafficking, prostitution, and child pornography. This was confirmed by U.S. Ambassador Ross Wilson's recent statement, "The PKK is the largest criminal network organization in the world." None of the panelists were aware of the EU lawsuit, or knowledgeable of the PKK's dependence on criminal activity for funding.

Marcus stated that the success of Turkish ground operations in northern Iraq was limited due to effective resistance by the PKK, and that the Iraqi Kurds had sent a united and tough warning to Turkey. She added that the withdrawal of Turkish forces from Iraq was an opportunity for Turkey to negotiate with the PKK. A person who claimed to be a representative of the "Kurdistan Regional Government" official lent support to Marcus, expressing, "40,000 Turkish troops invaded Iraq to attack Kurds."

But, panel Moderator, Henri Barkey, disagreed, stating there were "no civilian casualties in the Turkish operations against PKK targets." According to Turkey, 3000 special forces targeted several PKK camps, destroyed them, killed over 300 PKK terrorists, and suffered 27 casualties. The same day as the Wilson Center panel, Chief of the Turkish General Staff, General Yasar Buyukanit, stated that the Turkish ground operations against the PKK achieved their objectives:

"We needed to give them a lesson and we did. We have other lessons to give. Other operations will be conducted as necessary. This was just a phase in the fight against terrorism."

Demet Cabbar, President of the ATADC, asked whether U.S. frustration with the lack of cooperation by Kurdish leaders on a wide range of issues concerning peace and stability in a unified Iraq played a role in the United States' support for Turkish ground operations in northern Iraq. A person who claimed to be a representative of the "Kurdistan Regional Government" interjected, "Outside the KRG, there is no other authority or central government, except in Baghdad in the green zone!" Panel Moderator, Henri Barkey, responded, "No, frustration with the Kurds was not a factor in Turkish - U.S. cooperation against the PKK. No one is cooperating with the U.S. An independent Kurdistan is not in the cards, at least for now, and the Kurds should know that."

Sema Muslu, speaking on behalf of the TCA, inquired into the role of Greece as a supporter of the PKK terrorist organization. Marcus replied, "Greece sold out the PKK because it did not want war with Turkey." Between 1984 through the arrest of PKK Chief Abdullah Ocalan as he was exiting the Greek Embassy in Kenya, Greece provided logistical and technical support, as well as military training to the PKK. While Turkey recognizes its citizens of Kurdish origin, Greece still refers to its Turkish and Macedonian minorities as "Turcophone Hellenic Muslims" and Slavophone Hellenes, respectively.

Turkish Embassy Counselor, Fatih Yildiz, asked the panelists to state their positions regarding whether they believed the PKK was a terrorist organization. Marcus responded that by avoiding classification of the PKK and by simply describing the activities of the PKK, she permitted people to draw their own opinions and that she left room for debate on the issue. Watts added that ambiguity permitted for more dialogue. Cetinsaya did not comment. Yildiz questioned whether they would engage in similar ambiguity to support dialogue with Al Qaeda.