

# **A Perspective: Environmental protection and nature conservation in Dersim**

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On behalf of the Dersim Zentrum 38

## **(I)**

Insisting upon the policy to evacuate the land and disperse its inhabitants, Turkish state tried time and again to realise its aim whenever the opportunity arrived.

In 1991, thousands of PKK militants gathered in Dersim and turned the land into a war front together with a Maoist section of Turkish left advocating the strategy of “a prolonged war” with no regard of conditions or military’s strategy of an ongoing “low profile war” in order to keep the statusquo going. Thus, very similar events to that of 1938 had taken place in Dersim between the years 1994 and 1997. Within these three years hundreds of villages were destroyed (decision of which was taken in 1987 by OHAL, Extraordinary State Governorship), thousands of people forced to emigrate, fields and forests were burned, at least sixteen people disappeared. Almost all economic activities, animal husbandry, agriculture and trade stopped. Migration, unemployment and poverty endured. Within three years population fell by half. The armed presence and provocative actions of PKK was used as an excuse for all of these as it often happens. The then government had promised large investments for development of Dersim and Kurdistan after the so-called “PKK’s Rebellion” came to an end. In 1998, the PKK declared its abandonment of armed struggle. The ceasefire lasted for five years during which people had hoped that the state keeps its words in order to recover from mass unemployment and poverty, hoped freedom for their language, religion and culture. Yet, let alone these expectations being fulfilled, a state project that envisages the construction of a series of dams over the rivers of Dersim, eight of them over the River Munzur alone, was launched by the then government. This is when a local environmental movement in Dersim has started as a protest against the planned dam project. The Cultural and Natural Festival of Munzur that held each year’s August since 2000, together with parallel festivals in Germany under the names of Munzur- or Dersim Festival can be taken as the first environmental initiative in Dersim. Not taking a straight and honest stand against the war or an open position on Dersim Question, and evolving together with some firms such as the Anonymous Company of Munzur seeking a share in side works of dam constructions has been the biggest handicap of both this initiative and the Dersim associations that linked to it in Dersim and Germany since the beginning. Therefore the above mentioned Dersim’s environmental initiative can hardly be regarded as successful in mobilising the local people at large and organizing a permanent and an effective resistance against the project that already reached a critical stage. That’s why the new initiatives are emerging here and there such as one or two in Berlin though still too small.

## (II)

The issue of the dam once again reminded us the tragic events of the year 1938, simply because this project, which is already in progress and about to reach a vital stage, will pose a great danger to the people of Dersim, its environment and ecology. What the consequences would be if implemented?

- 1) Many places, first of all the Ovacik region, would be flooded. Nearly people of a hundred more villages will be forced to migrate.
- 2) The climate balance would no longer be there as the vallies of Munzur, Mercan and Pülümür turned into lakes. The water that gives life to the valley will strangle it, when a 125 meter-high wall is built in its front.
- 3) The Munzur's rich flora (all the existing plants in the valley) would be destroyed: Up to now 1518 plant species have been detected in the 63 km long Munzur Valley along the Tunceli-Ovacik road and in Munzur Mounts. 227 of them are endemic to Turkey, of which the 43 species are special to Munzur Mountains such as Işkın, Kekik (*Thymus serpyllum*, *Thymus vulgaris*), Sarmısak (wild garlic, *allium tuncelianum*), Ters Lale, Huş Meşceresi and many variety of flowers in mountains of Pülümür. According to the scientific researches some of the existing plants in this valley are: *Erysimum*, *Graellsia*, *Hymenophysa*, *Didymophysa*, *Delphinium*, *Astargalus*, *Pistacia*, *Heliotropium*, *Caryophyllaceae*, *Poaceae* and *asrtagalus*, *trifolium*, *Alyssum*, *Silene* and *Vicia* and many others.
- 4) The fauna, i.e all the animals living in the vallies, can no longer survive: Munzur Valley and its surroundings are rich for hunting animals. In this valley which used to be the largest national park of Turkey until the dam project, wolf, fox, bear, squirrel, badger, wild bear commonly live. Gray bear living in the caves and rock holes are important mammals of the Munzur wild life. Some animals special to Munzur wild life are: Mountain goat, curved horned goats, Ur Kekliği, Kırmızı benekli alabalık. Munzur Valley and the surrounding are rich for hunting animals.
- 5) The existing archaeological and cultural heritage would be greatly harmed. The dam project is being implemented without archaeological considerations. This is a violation of European Agreement on the protection of archaeological heritage.
- 6) Holy places on and along the rivers Munzur, Harcik and Peri would be destroyed
- 7) The forest would be damaged

In short this project poses a major threat to the fabric of Dersim's society.

That's why we are against it.

People of Dersim believe it to be a politically-motivated initiative, aimed to dislocate and disperse themselves by flooding the country. It is something that makes people think of 1938, when the Turkish military committed a genocide by killing approximately fifty-thousand people. This project openly aims to finish whatever remained of Dersim. Eleven-years long people's protest across Dersim and in some European countries is being ignored. Despite local opposition and countless legal initiatives the Turkish government seems to be quite determined to go ahead

with the project. The River Munzur is the life-blood of the country. The dam project must be stopped.

### **(III)**

The dam project is not what the province needs.

From 1957 to 2000, Turkey has signed up the following agreements, treaties, conventions or protocols:

- The Paris Convention (European Cultural Agreement)
- The Barcelona Convention (for the Protection of Mediterranean Sea Against Pollution)
- The Granada Convention (Convention For the Protection of World's Cultural and Natural Heritage)
- The Bern Convention (European Convention For the Protection of Wild Life and Living Environment)
- Vienna Convention, Montreal and London Protocols
- The Ramsar Convention
- The Basel Convention
- The Malta/Valetta Convention (European Convention For the Protection of Archaeological Heritage)
- The environmental agency Convention of European Union.

Turkey's dam project in Dersim has problems in their implementations.

The dam project is not what the province needs.

According to lawyers the decision of the Turkish State is a violation:

- 1) of the article 63 of Turkish Constitution
- 2) of the code of Nature and Environment
- 3) of the UNESCO's convention on the protection of the World's cultural and natural heritage which is signed by Turkey too
- 4) of the environmental criteria of the European Union, to which Turkey wants to join in.

### **(IV)**

Of course we are not against the economical development of Turkey or against the use of energy resources including water power to produce electricity.

We are well aware of the importance of energy for the economy.

Yet this amount of energy does not worth to destroy the nature and historical inheritance of the province.

What we are asking is to adopt a model which combines economical growth with the preservation of nature.

The construction of eight dams (Merçan, Akyayık, Konaktepe 1-2, Kaletepe, Bozkaya and Pülümür) on the River Munzur including hydroelectric power plants to be stopped.

**(V)**

Nature, the geography of Dersim in particular, has a great importance in the belief system of Dersim. There are numerous places that are sacred in the religion of Dersim including the mountains, rivers, lakes, animals and plants. If the link between the religion and geography of Dersim is broken practically nothing would be left out of Dersim religion. Therefore we regard the dam project as an attack to Dersim's ethnic and cultural identity and hold the present Islamic government responsible of the consequences.

**(VI)**

We call upon the human rights organisations, environmental and ecological groups and all the other people and bodies concerned to put pressure on Turkish Government,  
-not to go ahead with the dam project over River Munzur,  
-to acknowledge the genocides committed in 1915, between the years 1919-1922 and 1938  
-to remove the restrictions imposed on the local language, religion and culture.

**PS:**

Some links for the fotos of Munzur valley, its endemic plants and animals which I don't know how to transfer technically:

<http://dersimzaza.wordpress.com/munzur-xarcik-peri/>

<http://www.dersim.uni-koeln.de/dateien/basin2.htm>