

# A tale of Rojava and Europe: no time for dried-up dreams

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Rojava is a project born of a historical experience, built and fought for by people who have understood that the only future is that which begins today.



Several hundred Kurds and sympathizers gathered to show their support for the city of Afrin bombed by the Turkish army. Paris, France, March 24, 2018. Boivin Samuel/ Press Association. All rights reserved. At times like these, it can be difficult not to bury your head completely in the sand, eyes closed, turning away. What's going on?

The state of our lives is precarious and, contrary to the narrative of progress that characterised the twentieth century, today, we face a deep uncertainty. The earth is filled with refugees – human and non-human – scorched areas are abandoned, species die, and there are flows of refugees forced to move because of war at home or a lack of water to grow food. Heteropatriarchal power struggles are transforming the world into a powder keg of destructive force.

And so at this chaotic, precarious time, listening closely is all the more important.

Back then, when Kobane was liberated from the so-called Islamic State, the strains of liberation songs also reached us in Europe. Today we hear them again, this time worldwide, because there is above all one sentence that mixes with these wonderful sounds: Afrin is everywhere, there is resistance everywhere.

The political game continues, even as the window of action becomes smaller. But we mustn't be fooled by romantic fantasies and supposedly internationalist ideas – we're better off leaving these behind. Rojava is not the sound of a projection of radical democratic dreams, but a project born of a historical experience, built and fought for by people who have understood that the only future is that which begins today. It is time to focus our actions and boldly look ahead.

It goes without saying that we support the revolution in Rojava in DiEM25. We wouldn't be living up to our name if we didn't profess our support for the project and the values it embodies; DiEM25 is called the 'Democracy in Europe Movement'. 'Democracy in Europe' will remain an oxymoron as long as there is no democracy in the Middle East, Latin America, North America and Africa. 'Democracy in Europe' will remain an oxymoron as long as there is no democracy in the Middle East, Latin America, North America and Africa.

And the prospects for our democracy in Europe are currently bleak. While our democracies are increasingly being infiltrated by fascist structures, and journalists are ending up murdered on their own doorsteps for bringing to light the corruption of their governments, the technocrats in Brussels respond with a free Interrail ticket. A few thousand young Europeans will be able to spend their summer travelling for free through a Europe in which youth unemployment is, in some parts, at 50%, through inner cities, where people are being evicted from their homes because they can no longer pay the rent, through Germany, where children are too hungry to go to school and where Portuguese twentysomethings work for minimum wage in Munich restaurants despite holding academic degrees, and across lands in which right-wing parties have won majorities. This PR gag will cost the EU € 12 billion and cannot hide the fact that this Europe is falling apart. With every human life that sinks to the bottom of the Mediterranean, Europe loses a piece of its soul.

The left has not yet managed to formulate a coherent strategy. On the contrary, it is more fragmented than ever. The positions range from 'open borders' to 'left nationalism' à la Melanchon and Wagenknecht. We believe that retreating into nation states is immensely hazardous. We believe that retreating into nation states is immensely hazardous.

The sounds of those songs from Kobane may then bring us back, and remind us that something better may yet come. We need to tell and build another story that is about hope and about the future. Our project is a daily struggle, a commitment of politically-minded people who realise that we can only be radical if our actions are rooted in collectives. The idea of democratising Europe from within may sound utopian, but Europe will crumble if we do not dare to try.

We are building a transnational, hybrid structure of horizontal, participatory grassroots democracy in our cities and communities, as well as vertical organisation. We are currently forming Europe-wide electoral wings that can take part in national elections with a transnational identity, unless there are parties or party-like platforms in those countries that we support (for example, in countries like Denmark or Poland this electoral wing approach would be redundant thanks to our collaboration with Alternativet or Razem respectively).

We see this strategy as an extension of our activism in DiEM25 (parliamentary democracy continues to exist, after all), but the electoral wings are controlled by the movement. Along with the values we have anchored in our manifesto, we invite all open-minded democrats to participate in this process and to work with us on our progressive agenda, which provides answers to the manifold crises of our time. In 2019, together with our friends in allied parties and platforms, we will offer these answers to Europeans for election in the form of the first transnational list, the 'European Spring'. And why shouldn't Kurds be on this list? The transnational list is already a testimony to the fact that we can prevail if we focus on the common.

Ideas of individual survival, as handed down to us by twentieth century science fiction films and in neoclassical economic or evolutionary theory, are misleading. "Survival, at this precarious time, means working through differences", writes anthropologist, Anna Tsing. "Survival, at this precarious time, means working through differences", writes anthropologist, Anna Tsing.

In *Democratic Confederalism*, Abdullah Öcalan outlines a political structure that stands for equal coexistence and reconciles political traditions. The implementation of these ideas will, of course, not happen overnight – reality is complex and heterogeneous. But the historical oppression of the Kurds in the context of the nation state is central to understanding these ideas and their realisation. The experiences of thirty years of women's guerrilla and autonomy struggles will be fundamental to the success of the revolution in Rojava. Without them, revolution is unthinkable. We, in Europe, can learn a lot from this conversation.

*Come, I'll open my heart*

*Come, I'll tell you my sorrow ...*<sup>[1]</sup>

The songs from Kobane may remind us that Rojava is, indeed, an enclave of hope in a broken present; they may inspire our collective imagination, that which makes us human after Marx. They may also remind us that this hope knows the historical experience from which it is grown, and that it represents a path as well as a goal. The revolution in Rojava has shown us that people cannot only face their deep dehumanisation with resistance, but have the ability to build alternatives in the here and now, whose fruits will be tasted in the future. In this sense, our experiment in European democracy can only be a process.

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[1] English translation from Kurdish poetry.

About the author

Elisa Stowe is an anthropology student, feminist and member of the German National Collective of DiEM25.

Subjects

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