

Democratic confederalism in north-east Syria : a region wide systemic change through the communes !

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Since 2012, a « revolution » has been undergoing in the North of Syria, mainly in Rojava (inhabited by a majority of Kurdish people). The model implemented is called democratic confederalism, fashioned by Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the PKK (Kurdish workers party in Turkey), and inspired by the libertarian municipalism of Murray Bookchin the American social ecologist.

1. A unique large scale direct democracy experience in the world.

A whole de-facto autonomous region of more than 2,5 million people, liberated by the Syrian democratic forces, is now ruled under the principles of confederalism democratic through a social contract defined in 2016 (<https://internationalistcommune.com/social-contract/>).



They reject the idea of nation-state and therefore do not seek independence and wish to create a confederation of autonomous regions in Syria.

2. What is confederalism democracy ?

Confederalism democracy is a non state social paradigm which is based on several pillars, according to their charter:

- Local and direct democracy

« *The Democratic Federalism of Northern Syria* » consists of cantons based on democratic self-administrations, which depend on the democratic organizations of ideological, ethnic, feminine, cultural groups, and all social segments ». Article 7

- Gender Equality

« Women's freedom and rights and gender equality shall be guaranteed in society. » Article 13. So far the most developed outcome of the revolution.

- Ecology

« The democratic, environmental, and societal life are the basis for building an ecological democratic society in order not to harm, abuse, and destroy nature. » Article 9.

- Coexistence

« Coexistence shall be established within a fair, free and democratic society system according to the principles of the democratic nation, which are full of the spirit of fraternity between all peoples and groups in northern Syria. » Article 10.

- Cooperative economy

« The Democratic Federalism of Northern Syria" is based on the principle of making the land, water, and resources publicly owned; it adopts ecological industry and societal economy; it does not allow exploitation, monopoly, and the objectification of women; it shall realize health and social insurance for all individuals ». Article 11

3. Communalism and municipalism.

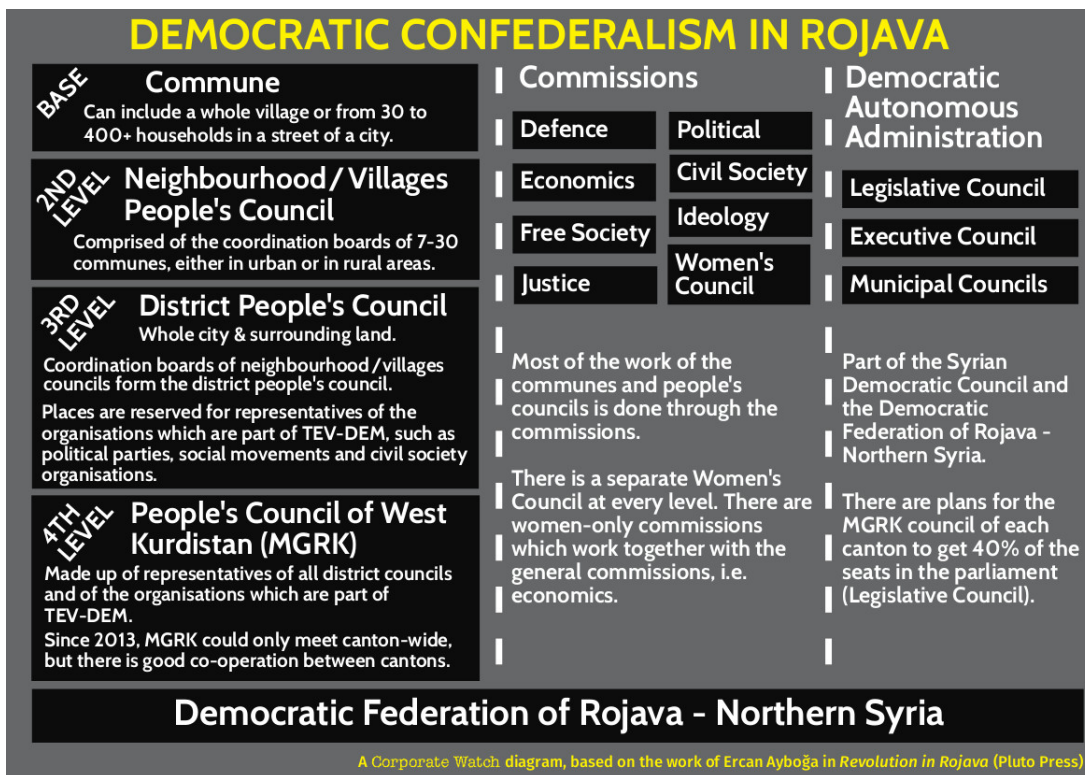
The radical democratic system put in place has many similarities with the communalism and municipalism concepts, and may be seen as a source of inspiration for European movements and vice-versa.



« The commune is the base level of Rojava's council system. In general, communes are made up of 30-400 households in a city, or a whole village in the countryside. The entire population of the

commune meets every two weeks, and it elects a board. The board meets every week, and all members of the commune are able to attend board meetings if they wish. All posts must be filled by a male and female co-chair. All representatives are recallable by the membership of the commune. » <https://mesopotamia.coop/democratic-confederalism-in-kurdistan/>

Communes have several commissions according to their own needs such as the reconciliation and justice commission, self-defense, education, economic, women, youth or health. Those bodies enable self-governance and inclusion of everyone within the decision making process. Translation is ensured (kurdish/arabic at least) so that all members of the territory can understand and participate.



Here is an explanation of its functioning system provided by Corporate Watch.

It is still a model under construction, though implemented since 2004 at the local level (Mahkmmur camp in Iraki Kurdistana ; some localities in the south east of Turkey), it remains a challenge in order to involve the whole population in this major change that gives minorities equal power and requires the use of tools and methods to ensure proper dialogue and transparency in the decision making process. The main training sessions to implement the democratic confederalism mechanisms are run by the so- called *Akademi*, which are mainly organized by sympathisants of the PKK.

4. A fragile and threatened experience.



It remains a unique example of large and significant scale (more than 2,5 millions people) direct democracy experience. It is threatened from outside by governments and interests of Turkey, Syria and other « powers » as well as from the inside as it remains a fragile system. A major challenge will be to strengthen this system as if it is currently accepted by the majority of the population, it is mainly because it was put in place by its liberator and now protector (the Kurdish army YPG) , it now, needs to prove his ability to increase well-being and self-determination of the population as well as overcome the cult of personality for Abdullah Ocalan, that goes against the principle of people having the power to shape society.

The Danielle Mitterrand Foundation will visit local NGOs and local authorities in July to have a better understanding of the challenges faced and connect European organizations and North Syrian civil society.