

TIME FOR JUSTICE

End the criminalization of the Kurds in Turkey and Europe

Following social unrest by Kurds in April, Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared that the „security forces will intervene against the pawns of terrorism, even if they are children or women.” This was followed by a new wave of repression complete with mass arrests and increasing use of violence, leading many commentators to conclude that the country's reform process was moving into reverse gear.

Despite provocations and the return of state repression, Turkey's Kurdish population continues to demonstrate a determination to press for a negotiated peaceful solution as long advocated by Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned PKK leader who remains the country's most famous political prisoner. Ocalan is still held in an isolation cell on Imrali Island in a condition that has been described as Turkey's Guantanamo and his initial capture in Kenya bears resemblance in its basic illegality to the current controversy over CIA rendition flights, excepting of course that in his case it was done in full glare of the media. Despite the European Court of Human Rights finding irregularities in the conduct of his original trial and that a retrial should be held, Turkey has not addressed the court's concerns and his situation remains unchanged.

Turkey's adoption of new anti-terrorism legislation, which criminalizes basic civil rights such as freedom of expression, is now setting alarm bells ringing outside the country. While expressing “solidarity with Turkey in its fight against terrorism”, a recent report to the European Parliament also warned against stretching “the legal concept of terrorism in such a way as to bring too many crimes within the scope of the Turkish Anti-Terror Law, thereby jeopardising basic freedoms”. The law could herald a harmonization of anti-terror legislation across the EU and the stepping up of the criminalization of the Kurds with whole communities marked as potential terror suspects so long as the national organization to which vast numbers of them owe allegiances remains unfairly listed as a banned terrorist group. Under the new UK law outlawing the glorification of terrorism, the Home Secretary John Reid has now added Kongra-Gele Kurdistan (KONGRA-GEL) and KADEK to the banned list of organisations which he wrongly claims that they are two alternative names for the PKK which is already outlawed. In Turkey as in the UK „anti-terror” laws are used to deter, suppress and criminalise political activities.

Historically, the Kurdish people have too often seen their hopes frustrated and legitimate demands for basic civil and political rights treated as declarations of war and threats to the foundations of the Kemalist state. When the EU became more closely involved with the onset of Turkey's membership negotiations, Kurds keenly supported the move in the belief that the process would open up the country to democratic reforms. Recent months appear to suggest that there is no inevitable connection between the adoption of reform and the EU talks. Are their hopes once again to be cruelly dashed?

Today Turkey floods Kurdistan with troops to terrorize the people. This action started during the Kurdish New Year and Peace Festival when the Kurdish weapons remained silent. This new war has seen allegations of Turkey using chemical weapons, attacking funeral processions and mourners, shooting and murdering of children, arresting of elected Kurdish politicians and of destroying civic organisations.

Meanwhile, Europe continues unashamedly to sell arms to Turkey and carries on with the EU membership negotiations as if everything is normal.

Turkey's aggression is fanning the flames of war and threatens to spill over into the already war-torn Middle East.

The UK must condemn the violence of the Turkish armed forces and must insist on the implementation of the Copenhagen Criteria. All of the member state of the European Union must firmly and unambiguously demand that Turkey ceases to violate international law.

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