



Turkey Report

No 1

Latest Events Concerning the KCK Case

Currently, 426 KCK (Kurdish Communities Union) members have been imprisoned in Turkey. On November 1, after the latest PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) attack, an Istanbul court arrested 23 suspects including Büşra Zeren, a university professor who was a representative of the pro Kurdish BDP party on the new constitution project, and also Ragıp Zarakolu, a publisher, in an ongoing probe into KCK's activities.

Conservative media have presented some videos as a proof to the, disputable, links between the KCK and the PKK. On the one hand, Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdag stated about this case "The KCK is equal to the PKK and the PKK is equal to the KCK". On the other hand, the BDP and various socialist parties/groups have claimed that those recent events were a political conspiracy and they have declared their solidarity to the suspects. According to them, this case is just an excuse to suspend the rise of the BDP's popularity after the 2009 local elections but the AKP thinks that the KCK is a terrorist organization which is capable of using both legal and illegal actions to reach its goals. Furthermore, some liberal columnists and the PEN (A World Association of Writers) focused on the freedom of press aspect and argued that the arrest of a publisher or a journalist through the anti-terrorism law threatens this democratic right.

A hard and long ideological debate is taking place in Turkey concerning the conflicting goals of fighting terrorism and at the same time protecting political rights as well as the freedom of press.

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Constitutional Spring in Turkey: A National or Regional Issue?

There is a consensus nowadays in Turkey about the necessity of constitutional reforms concerning fields such as ideology, secularism, minority rights and the higher judicial system. The ruling AKP hopes that it will manage to compromise the conflicting opinions concerning the future constitutional changes because the involved parts have not presented any preconditions for this debate.

From the beginning of the debate, conservative media have been criticizing the concept of secularism. The Islamists have recommended not mentioning Atatürk in the new constitution. The BDP and some liberals (such as Cengiz Çandar) address minority rights and local governance laws. The main opposition CHP and other democratic left parties insist that special courts dealing with cases of terrorism, are mere instruments for political conspiracies.

The aforementioned parties approached the constitutional changes as a national issue but TUSİAD, the strongest trade association, and the SDE, an important think-tank, have presented a different vision. They parallel the Turkish and Arab constitutional changes. Indeed, the SDE, the AUC and Yevm el-Seba newspaper have recently organized a related conference. In addition, TUSİAD, Dr. Mustafa El Fiki and the Los Angeles Times have pointed out the importance of constitutional reforms for the Arab Spring.

Most Turkish analysts hardly believe that Libya and Tunisia will be able to implement progressive constitutional reforms due to their intention of using the Shari'a as a basis for their post-revolution constitutions. All in all, if Turkey wants to be a role model for the region, its future constitutional reforms should send a strong message to the other Middle Eastern countries.

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Turkish – American Relations (2011)

Turkish – American relations have been getting closer during the last months because of the Arab Spring. Turkey kept mainly a supportive stance towards the Arab revolutionary movements and their quest for democracy because that would benefit its own national interests. In addition, Turkey's ruling AKP party and most of the main opposition parties consider that Turkey and the USA share almost the same interests in the Middle East.

Actually, that belief has been established as an official state policy since the early 19th century. President Obama's visit to Turkey gave birth to the "model partnership" concept and boosted cooperation between the two allies. During the last months official meetings, articles and conferences from both sides include a variety of topics apart from the usual issues of terrorism and ethnic minorities' rights in Turkey. Indeed, the Congressman Gregory Meeks has confirmed the good climate between the two states at TÜSİAD's (Turkish Industry and Business Association) last conference. Moreover, Hillary Clinton praised Turkey concerning its stance towards the Arab revolutions, its economy and its constitutional reforms during her recent visit to the American-Turkish Council.

The Turkish conservatives and liberals argue that the official stance towards the recent revolutions in Libya and Syria provided Turkey with a respectable status in the region. Hence, Turkish - American partnership should grow stronger. However, some opposition groups and parties, such as the Workers' Party, veterans as well as nationalists, support the idea of building bridges with the rising powers of Eurasia such as Iran, Russia and China.

Indeed, the Russian and Iranian stance has been at least suspicious and negative towards the Turkish policy of protecting and supporting the Syrian rebels. Turkey must choose sides. Hence, we should expect that Turkey's future would influence that of the Arab Spring and vice versa.

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Debate: The Future of the PKK

After the last elections, Turkey has faced an increasing wave of terrorist attacks. At the same time, the Turkish media have become more sensitive on that issue and frequently debate cases like the relations between the BDP and the KCK as well as those between the PKK and regional countries.

Selahattin Erdem, a journalist of the pro Kurdish newspaper "Özgür Politika" suggested that the BDP MPs should resign after the KCK arrests case. However, the Taraf newspaper argued that Selahattin Erdem is actually a nickname used by Duran Kalkan who is a member of the PKK council. After that incident, the BDP MPs declared that they would seriously think about resigning. Other opposition parties as well as liberal, nationalist and conservative newspapers have criticized the probable links between a legal politic party (BDP) and a so-called terrorist organization.

Another important development is the changing vision of the PKK in other countries that was confirmed by Kurdish sources such as the ANF news agency.

According to them, due to the worsened relations between Turkey and Syria, the Iranian PKK will be able to provide support to its Turkish comrades. Indeed, the protection of Syrian rebels and immigrants as well as the missile shield against Iran have raised tensions between Turkey and the aforementioned states. Iran has given up operations against the PJAK, an offshoot organization of the PKK, and Assad provided all Kurds of Syria with citizenship rights.

Finally, Cengiz Çandar, a famous Turkish journalist, predicts that the USA and Turkey will eliminate the PKK militarily. According to him, the PKK evaluates the regional dynamics incorrectly and that gives to the AKP the chance to confound it.

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