



## Erdoğan's Apology for the Dersim Massacre

Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, apologized recently on behalf of the Turkish Republic for the 1937-1939 Dersim mass killings and stated that the CHP party, which ruled back then, was responsible for the military operations in Dersim (now Tunceli), an Alevi/Alawi populated city.

Turkey's main opposition CHP party leader, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, criticized Erdoğan's comment on Dersim killings at the Assembly Hall of Kozyatağı Cultural Center of Istanbul's municipality. The leader of the CHP stated that the people of Dersim in eastern Turkey would not allow their pain to be exploited for political reasons by the AKP. Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, an Alevi himself, paid special attention to this point because he was born in Dersim. Other leftist parties, such as the Workers' Party, criticized this debate as well. They argued that the Dersim conflict was a battle between feudalism and the young Turkish Republic. Hence, this apology means for them a step towards ethnic and religious obscurantism.

However, Doğu Ergil, a political scientist, told the Hürriyet newspaper that an apology was not enough and that Erdoğan should address other dark pieces of Turkish history as well. Thus, the debate should not be limited to the Dersim killings. Turkey should also apologize for the 1915 Armenian killings and the September 6-7 1955 Istanbul pogrom that resulted in a mass exodus of minorities from the country. The liberals applauded this apology as a good starting point to review the single party period and Markar Esanyan, a columnist, evaluated it as a chance for a new era in Turkish historiography.

<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2011/11/24/178906.html>

<http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-263963-dersim-apology-as-a-milestone.html>

<http://www.turkishweekly.net/news/126824/turkish-prime-minister-erdo%EF%A3%BFan-apologizes-for-dersim-killings.html>

<http://dunya48.free.fr/index.php/siyaset/7057-hasan-basri-ozbey-dersim-ozru-emperyalistlerden-ve-ortacagdan-ozur-dilemektir.html>

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=first-official-apology-for-killings-in-dersim-2011-11-23>

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## **Redeemable Military Service and Conscientious Objection**

Military service is considered the most important public service that can be fulfilled by a Turkish citizen. Traditionally, Turkish soldiers are called “Mehmetcik” which means “the prophet of Islam” in an interesting social norm. The changing sociopolitical balances have forced governments to update the period of military service and offer the option to soldiers to decrease their military obligations from a full 12 months period to 21 days by paying a fee. The new bill that stipulates the exemption from the 21 days basic military service by paying an amount of money finally passed despite the strong reservations of the Chief of the General Staff, Necdet Ozel.

According to researches, the majority of the Turkish society is negative towards the new bill because it gives the chance to wealthy people to overcome the trouble and dangers of a compulsory military service while poor people cannot. Thus, the principle of equality does not apply to the new law. However, both the conservative and the liberal media supported the bill for different reasons. Conservative media advocated the idea of establishing a “professional army” that might be more effective in fighting terrorism instead of involving the Turkish Armed Forces which have been burdened with cases such as “Ergenekon” and “Balyoz”. A liberal columnist of the Star newspaper, Ahmet Altan, brought up the issue of “conscientious objection”. Altan stated that “conscientious objection” is part of the international law and that the AKP government has a positive attitude towards it as well.

Finally, the nationalists rejected the new bill. Indeed, according to the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), the core purpose of the aforementioned reform is the destruction of the Turkish military forces.

<http://www.aa.com.tr/en/component/content/article/127-ana-manset-haberleri-en/103814-erdogan-on-paid-military-service>

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=erdogan-outlines-paid-military-service-conditions-2011-11-22>

<http://www.nationalturk.com/en/turkey-pm-erdogan-paid-military-service-will-be-in-effect-age-limit-30-15086>

[http://www.samanyoluhaber.com/h\\_718292\\_Gundem-devlet-bahcelinin-bedellideki-rahatsizligi.html](http://www.samanyoluhaber.com/h_718292_Gundem-devlet-bahcelinin-bedellideki-rahatsizligi.html)

## **Tension between Turkey and Syria Increases**

The situation in Syria gets increasingly complicated and Turkey could not remain unaffected by its neighbors. The debates about the future of the relations of these countries have multiplied from both the Turkish media and the political parties.

During the last two weeks, the most pressing issue for Turkey's foreign affairs was Syria's increasing support for the PKK. According to the majority of Turkish newspapers, Syria provided the PKK with three camps which are located close to eastern Turkey. In addition, Damascus seems to use those 1000 armed PKK fighters against Syrian rebels who are protected by Turkey. Therefore the military capabilities of the PKK became much stronger this winter. The letters between Abdullah Ocalan and his lawyers, which were seized during the KCK operation, seem to prove the relationship between Syria and the organization. Furthermore, the recent attack against Muslim pilgrims from Turkey in Syria confirmed that their bilateral relations have seen better days. Hence, according to the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is not suggested to Turkish citizens to visit Syria.

The ruling AKP as well as some conservatives and liberals considered the possibility of imposing sanctions on Syria. Indeed, conservative media such as "Zaman" as well as the AKP party went as far as to discuss the possibility of a military intervention in order to "protect Turkey and regional security". However, Vice-Prime Minister Bulent Arinc stated that armed struggle is not an option and sanctions must be economic and political. Moreover, the Workers' Party advocates that sanctions against Syria would lead to a separation of Turkish society but the pro-Kurdish BDP has not made any official statement yet.

<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-263844-despite-turkeys-warnings-syria-provides-camp-for-terrorist-pkk.html>

[http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en\\_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/06/22/feature-03](http://www.setimes.com/cocoon/setimes/xhtml/en_GB/features/setimes/features/2011/06/22/feature-03)

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=iran-iraq-syria-and-the-pkk-2011-08-25>

## **Erdogan: A Popular yet Controversial Prime Minister**

The articles of Time magazine and The Economist about Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan became the most popular subjects during the last two weeks.

The latest issue of the Time magazine provides details on Erdogan's career as well as on the problems of the Turkish democratic system. Special attention is given to the results of a poll carried out by the Maryland University according to which Erdogan has been the most admired leader among the Arabs. The Time argues that Erdogan's high popularity is the result of his foreign policy. Indeed, the AKP has chosen a much more aggressive and popular policy than the "Zero Problems with Neighbours" one.

Moreover, the article discusses some growing problems in Turkey such as the lack of freedom of the press. According to the Time magazine's poll, Erdogan takes 22% of the votes and appears to be the fourth most popular leader in the world but at the same time 65.000 voters rated him as the least popular leader. This huge difference is a sign of high polarization in Turkish political life.

The Economist focused on negative advances in the Turkish law system and especially the 2911 law of the Turkish constitution. The magazine mentions the rising number of imprisoned activists such as 500 college students, anti-capitalists and anti-imperialists as well as thousands of pro Kurdish party supporters and 76 journalists.

Columnists (e.g. Nuray Mert, Yılmaz Türker) and leftists such as the Turkish Communist Party have also castigated Erdogan for his policies. The liberals recognize AKP'S success in the economic field and the foreign policy but find it hard to support the arrests of students and journalists. Finally, the conservative media insist that the students and journalists currently in prison pay for their "terrorist activities" while the ruling AKP expresses its confidence to the Turkish courts' judgment.

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2078021,00.html>

<http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2093090,00.html>

<http://ataturksocietyuk.com/2011/11/18/from-the-time-magazine-article-erdogans-moment/>

[http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1070624&CategoryID=77"&HYPERLINK](http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1070624&CategoryID=77)

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