



# Turkey Report

## No 4

### How Turkey's political powers view the Syrian crisis

Turkey's political actors and the Turkish public opinion are divided regarding the extent to which Turkey should meddle with Syria's internal affairs. The Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and the Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu never refrained from criticising Bashar Al-Assad's regime and its practices, with Erdoğan always being more outspoken and using heavy verbal artillery. From very early Turkey adopted an unequivocal stance against Assad, something that has been rephended by the opposition. The Turkish government moved on hosting some branches of Syrian dissidents. However, Turkey has not viewed favourably the possibility of taking military action or leading an intervention, despite the international pressure. Recently Erdoğan, in view of the escalation of the crisis, revealed that the establishment of a buffer zone is under consideration. The creation of a humanitarian corridor has also been mentioned, although without a concrete plan as to how this should be achieved. President Abdullah Gül has suggested the implementation of the Yemeni model for Assad's removal.

The main opposition party leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has continuously stated that AKP's foreign policy has not been proved beneficial to Turkey and predicts the same for the Syrian case, expressing fears for eventual domestic repercussions. For CHP, which has remained cautious and avoided to condemn explicitly the Syrian ruler, Turkey has gone already too far regarding the Syrian conflict and it should not cross the borderline of intervening into the neighbouring country's internal issues. The possibility of retaliation from Assad by arming the PKK worries the far right-wing Nationalist Action Party (MHP), which sees no benefit for Turkey in supporting the Syrian opposition. Finally, the left-wing parties, although condemning the crackdown by the Syrian ruler, condemn, at the same time, any kind of foreign meddling as being imperialist.

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2012/03/120316\\_syria\\_buffer\\_zone.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/turkce/haberler/2012/03/120316_syria_buffer_zone.shtml)

[http://www.merhabahaber.com/haber/61359/CHPden\\_Davutogluna\\_Suriye\\_uyarisi.html](http://www.merhabahaber.com/haber/61359/CHPden_Davutogluna_Suriye_uyarisi.html)

**Research: Efpraxia Nerantzaki**

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/gul-offers-yemen-like-exit-way-for-al-assad.aspx?PageID=238&NID=15151&NewsCatID=338>

<http://www.sabah.com.tr/Gundem/2012/02/26/suriyeye-mudahale-olasiligi-masada>

<http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-270565-would-turkey-intervene-in-syria.html>

<http://english.sabah.com.tr/National/2012/02/16/turkey-still-insists-on-the-un-for-a-solution-to-the-syria-crisis>

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/chp-leader-opposes-intervention-in-syria.aspx?PageID=238&NID=14392&NewsCatID=338>

<http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/?hn=320984>

<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-271476-turkey-says-no-for-now-to-buffer-zone-with-syria.html>

<http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/suriye-de-devrim-var-kahrolsun-devrim-/siyaset/siyasetyazardetay/02.02.2012/1496885/default.htm>

[http://www.sendika.org/yazi.php?yazi\\_no=43091](http://www.sendika.org/yazi.php?yazi_no=43091)

## **The debate on the new education law**

The education reform bill was approved by the Turkish Parliament on Friday, 30 March, after a heated debate among political parties, trade unions and NGOs. It came to overturn the previous education law, which was imposed by the military after the so-called post-modern coup of February 28, 1997, and entailed the establishment of an uninterrupted eight-year compulsory education and the closure of the secondary level of vocational and religious schools (imam hatip schools). The new law extends the years of mandatory education to 12 and divides them into three levels: four years of primary school, four years of middle school and four years of high school (this new formula is also known as “4+4+4”). Along with the middle schools it reintroduces the secondary level of the vocational and religious schools. At the same time it reduces the starting age from 7 to 6 and allows the students to opt for home schooling after the ninth grade. The law also introduces a number of elective courses at the middle school level.

The government has supported the law arguing that the previous system has harmed both the society and the economy, as well as deprived the students of the right of religious education. The far right-wing MHP and several unions and institutions (such as MÜSİAD, ENSAR Foundation and ÖNDER) have also been supportive of the reforms.

Members of the Republican People's Party (CHP) have vehemently criticised the law arguing that it was approved without political and social consensus and is driven by ideological and not pedagogical motives. Additionally, women's rights organisations, trade and professional unions (TÜSİAD, KESK, Eğitim-Sen), and universities have opposed the law, asserting that it will encourage the spread of religious education and undermine the schooling of girls, thus increasing the existing gender inequality, while the early introduction of vocational classes will negatively affect children's basic skills and encourage child labour. Economic analysts doubt the feasibility of the planned reforms in terms of the increased financial needs that will emerge.

The pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) asked for the introduction of the Kurdish language as a second official language in the national curricula. The education Minister, Ömer Dinçer, has stated that the elective courses, which are to be determined later, could include Kurdish language and Alevi faith courses.

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/main-opposition-party-strives-to-block-debated-education-bill.aspx?pageID=238&nID=15316&NewsCatID=338>

<http://spm.ku.edu.tr/?p=342>

<http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/23/turkeys-education-reform-bill-is-about-playing-politics-with-pedagogy/>

<http://erg.sabanciuniv.edu/sites/erg.sabanciuniv.edu/files/ERI.Declaration.4%2B4%2B4.LawProposal.pdf>

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/prime-minister-lashes-out-at-leading-business-group.aspx?pageID=238&nid=15053>

<http://www.tepav.org.tr/en/kose-yazisi/s/3083>

<http://www.akparti.org.tr/site/haberler/444-sistemi-genel-kurulda-kabul-edildi/22227>

<http://english.sabah.com.tr/National/2012/02/25/turks-to-receive-a-minimum-12-year-education>

<http://www.yeniozgurpolitika.org/index.php?rupel=nuce&id=8158>

<http://www.sabahenglish.com/National/2012/03/28/civil-society-supports-educational-reforms-while-chp-opposes>

<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-275914-parliament-approves-controversial-education-reform-bill.html>

## The Sivas massacre case and the failure of the Justice System

The decision of the Ankara 11th High Criminal Court to drop the Sivas massacre case, one of the darkest stains in modern Turkish history, provoked a wave of reactions in Turkey. In July 1993, 37 people were killed (mostly Alevi intellectuals) in Sivas, a city in central east Turkey, during the Pir Sultan Abdal Alevi cultural festival, when an angry Islamist mob torched the Madımak hotel, in an attempt to murder the leftist poet Aziz Nesin.

The case was dropped on the 13<sup>th</sup> of March due to the statute of limitations. 79 people have been sentenced to jail, but six of the suspects have never been arrested or indicted, raising questions about the efficiency of the judicial system. The decision of the court has provoked outrage in the country. According to the lawyers of the victims, the Sivas massacre should be handled as a crime against humanity, and therefore the statute of limitations should not be applied to the case. Judge Dündar Örsdemir, on the other hand, stated that such exceptions apply only to cases in which the perpetrators are public servants. President Abdullah Gül asked for more investigation, while the Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç insisted that the real culprits are the then-state officials who showed negligence and failed to intervene in good time. Erdoğan's tepid reaction outraged the opposition party, which accused the governing AKP for lack of willingness to administer justice. Human rights organisations, political parties and individuals have been protesting against the closure of the case. Clashes took also place at Istanbul University between an Islamist youth organisation and students demonstrating against the Court's decision.

The Sivas massacre case along with the recent incidents of the marking of Alevi homes in the city of Adıyaman, which has raised concerns about possible attacks, have increased the pressure put by Alevis for the constitutional recognition of minority and religious rights.

[http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail\\_getNewsById.action?newsId=274374](http://www.todayszaman.com/newsDetail_getNewsById.action?newsId=274374)

<http://bianet.org/english/minorities/136893-sivas-massacre---procedures-time-barred>

<http://cumhuriyet.com.tr/?hn=322268>

<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/new-trial-hope-for-sivas-massacre.aspx?pageID=238&nID=16065&NewsCatID=341>

<http://bianet.org/english/minorities/136985-protests-and-clashes-after-time-barring-sivas-trial>

<http://www.todayszaman.com/news-273384-new-investigation-for-truth-needed-in-1993-sivas-massacre.html>

<http://siyaset.milliyet.com.tr/erdogan-dan-cok-tartisilacak-sivas-davasi-yorumu/siyaset/siyasetdetay/13.03.2012/1514890/default.htm>

<http://www.radikal.com.tr/Radikal.aspx?aType=RadikalDetayV3&ArticleID=1080295&CategoryID=77>

<http://bianet.org/english/minorities/136742-akp-supports-statute-of-limitation-for-sivas-massacre>

## Freedom of expression and terrorism

The issue of press freedom has been an eternal issue in Turkish political history. Journalist affiliated with left-wing media or expressing pro-Kurdish opinions have been always censored by the government or the state mechanisms, especially in periods under military rule. The incumbent government has been criticised domestically and internationally for the various attacks against journalists. Currently there are around 100 journalists in jail (the exact number has not been confirmed) convicted under specific Articles of the Anti-Terror Law and the Criminal Law, either as members of the Ergenekon organisation, an ultranationalist network which allegedly aims at destabilising the Turkish government, or as supporters of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). The Turkish government has continuously disputed the accusations about lack of press freedom and low tolerance to criticism and dissenting views, and insists that only eight journalists have been prosecuted for their professional work. It is generally acknowledged that a large part of the problem lies on the Turkish penal code which defines terrorism in a very broad manner. In the Reporters Without Borders 2011-2012 press freedom index Turkey occupies the 148<sup>th</sup> place, falling back 10 places compared to 2010.

Lately Ahmet Şik and Nedim Sener, two prominent investigative journalists, were released after 375 days in custody; however, they were not acquitted as they face another hearing in June. They were detained for writing about Fethullah Gülen's network and Hrant Dink's murder respectively. Two other journalists were released the same day. Apart from the journalists arrested, several other prominent journalists, such as Ece Temelkuran and Nuray Mert, have been fired from their jobs.

<http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-270567-whats-the-problem-with-the-media-in-turkey.html>

<http://latitude.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/13/turkeys-media-are-a-poor-champion-of-free-expression-thanks-to-government-control/>

<http://en.rsf.org/press-freedom-index-2011-2012,1043.html>

<http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-274164-the-issue-of-jailed-journalists-in-light-of-sener-and-siks-release.html>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/libertycentral/2012/mar/13/turkey-enlightenment-journalists-prisons>

<http://english.al-akhbar.com/content/ordinary-miracles>

<http://bianet.org/english/freedom-of-expression/136981-joint-struggle-for-release-of-journalists-must-be-continued>

<http://cpj.org/2011/12/cpj-condemns-journalist-arrests-in-turkey.php>

<http://bianet.org/english/freedom-of-expression/134466-anti-terror-law-on-the-job---journalists->



*The Centre for Mediterranean, Middle East & Islamic Studies posts a multitude of positions in the context of free academic debate. These do not necessarily reflect the positions of the CEMMIS.*