

PERSECUTION OF MAYORS, KURDS & OPPOSITION IN TURKEY

An explainer

Since the first election of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as Turkish President in 2014, his government has persecuted hundreds of thousands of people with political views that oppose his own, including members of parliament, local mayors, journalists, trade unionists and many others - especially Kurds and those who support their struggle for independence.

Kurdish mayors dismissed

In August 2019, the Turkish government dismissed the mayors of three predominantly Kurdish cities and detained more than 400 people including elected city councillors and others who are linked with opposition political parties.

The mayors of Diyarbakir, Van and Mardin are members of the pro-Kurdish opposition Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) that were democratically elected with large majorities in local elections held in March. The three of them represent a combined total of around 1.5 million people.

The Turkish interior ministry has accused the mayors of supporting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which the Turkish government has categorised as a terrorist organisation.

However, their dismissal comes just a few months after Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AK) lost control of several major cities including Istanbul in the municipal elections.

In addition, the dismissed mayors had raised evidence of corruption by officials appointed by the national government which left their municipalities in millions of liras of debt.

The Mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu of the secular Republican People's Party (CHP), has also been threatened by the government for speaking out in support of the dismissed mayors.

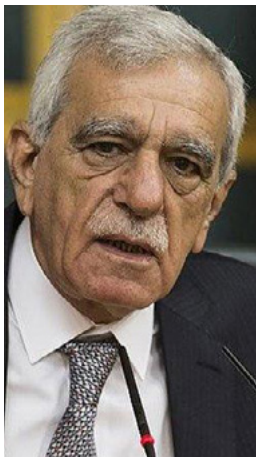
Thus, critics see the attack on mayors as Erdoğan's retaliation against those who speak out against him or defeat his party in elections.



DISMISSED

Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı

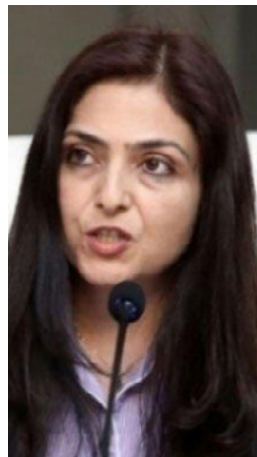
Mayor of Diyarbakır
(HDP)



DISMISSED

Ahmet Türk

Mayor of Mardin
(HDP)



DISMISSED

Bedia Özgöççe Ertan

Mayor of Van
(HDP)



IMPRISONED

Selahattin Demirtaş

Member of Parliament,
HDP Co-Leader
& Presidential candidate



THREATENED

Ekrem İmamoğlu

Mayor of Istanbul
(CHP)

What our MEPs say



Özlem Alev Demirel
(Die Linke, Germany)

"We call on the Turkish government to end the repression against members of the HDP and CHP, to accept the results of the local elections and to refrain from another round of repression of the opposition in Turkey. Real democracy means that the opposition can express its opinions and carry out its mandates when elected."



Miguel Urban, MEP
(Podemos, Spain)

"Erdogan maintains his policy on repression of any political opposition. This time three democratically elected mayors from the HDP have been removed from their offices. This not only represents a fundamental rights violation, but also a major case of hypocrisy from the European Union, which has no reservations about making agreements with countries where human rights are conspicuously absent."

#HumanRights

#Turkey

Persecution of the opposition under Erdoğan

As a result of these and earlier attacks on political opposition, the Turkish government has now seized control of almost 100 municipalities including Diyarbakir that were won by Kurdish, HDP and Democratic Regions Party (DBP - a sister party to the HDP) candidates. The mayors were replaced by government-appointed officials and around half of them were sentenced to prison on politically motivated 'terrorism' charges.

Erdoğan's largest wave of attacks took place in 2016. In May, his government lifted the parliamentary immunity of 148 deputies, 53 of whom are members of the HDP and were also charged with 'terrorism' related offences.

In July, following an attempted coup d'état against Erdoğan's government by elements of the military, a state of emergency was declared, enabling Erdoğan to exercise powers including dismissal of civil servants without an investigation and holding people in police custody for up to 30 days. Under these powers, thousands of soldiers, public officials, police, teachers, judges and prosecutors were dismissed from their jobs and or imprisoned on suspicion of support for the coup d'état.

In November 2016, nine members of parliament including HDP leaders, Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, were arrested and detained, and thousands of HDP officials and activists were imprisoned. Demirtaş, who was the HDP's presidential candidate and achieved third place in the 2014 and 2018 elections, was later sentenced to almost 5 years in prison on the basis of political speeches he had made.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) has ruled that Demirtaş' detention aimed to limit freedom of political debate and democracy and that he should be released. Despite the fact that the ECHR's ruling was binding, he remains in prison.

While many political opponents have been charged with 'terrorism' related offences, their trials have lacked compelling evidence of criminal activity or acts that would reasonably be deemed as terrorism, according to Human Rights Watch.

The role of the EU

While the European Union has made multiple statements raising concerns over the persecution of political opposition and Kurds in Turkey and some member states have called for a suspension of the EU accession process, there has been a lack of concrete action such as sanctions. Sadly, recent EU leaders have prioritised continuing the migration deal with Erdoğan in which his government manages the flow of asylum seekers entering Europe via Turkey.

What the Left is doing about this

In September 2019, the GUE/NGL group in the European Parliament championed a resolution, which was adopted by the European Parliament calling for dismissed mayors to be reinstated and condemning persecution of the opposition in Turkey. We have also written a letter of protest to Erdoğan, which has been signed by 48 MEPs. These actions follow numerous others by the group, such as letters, protests and the nomination of Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ for the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize in 2017, all of which aim to put pressure on the Turkish government to respect democracy.



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