

Turkey, Welcome to EU

By: Kameel Ahmady

Turkey has had ambitions of European Union membership for more than forty years, and recently the UK presidency of the EU has thrown its full weight behind the Turkish bid, flying in the face of concerns from the French and Dutch over Turkey's human rights record, the worst in Europe. The US has of course been another big supporter.



Tureky's march toward EU membership

Six months after the historic day which saw the symbolic handshake between Turkish Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul and his UK counterpart Jack Straw, the plight of the Kurds in Turkey goes ignored by EU diplomats and the mainstream media alike. No where is this more evident than in the last ten days of rioting in Kurdistan. Hundreds have been imprisoned and as many as 30 people killed, including several children, in clashes between the Turkish police forces and Kurdish demonstrators in the southeast of Turkey in recent days.

The Turkish army has instated a de facto lock down in many cities in the Kurdish southeast, after several days of widespread unrest sparked by the funerals of several Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) guerrillas in the city of Diyarbakir (Amed) on 28th March. The PKK has been engaged in an armed struggle with the Turkish state to have Kurdish cultural rights and ethnic identity recognised, after it called an end to its ceasefire in 2002, feeling that the Turkish state had not responded to attempts at negotiation by the party. The PKK has a strong support base amongst the almost 20 million strong Kurdish ethnic minority in Turkey.

When mourners gathered at a cemetery to bury the bodies of those killed in recent clashes with the Turkish army, military forces and police intervened, and reports say shots were fired to disperse the crowds. In what followed, large scale unrest erupted in the streets of Diyarbakir, soon spreading to neighbouring cities including Nuseybin, Batman, and Siirt. This has been brutally suppressed by the Turkish army and police. To date, over 15 demonstrators have been killed, more than 500 injured, and nearly one thousand people, most engaged in democratic protest over the limits placed on their right to commemorate the deaths of members of their community, have been imprisoned.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has responded to these events with the following statement: "Our security forces will use the necessary force and intervene against anybody who agrees to be a tool of terror, including children and women. I want this to be clearly understood. The security forces will intervene against the pawns of terrorism, no matter if they are children or women. Everyone should realize that".

Reports coming direct from the Kurdish region say that the Turkish response to these events has been a virtual lock down in several cities, and an increased suppression of the already limited freedom of movement for Kurds in the area. Two thousand Turkish riot police have been raiding homes, making unsubstantiated arrests, and generally using tactics of intimidation to limit public protest. In town of Nuseybin, direct reports said that residents were prevented from leaving their homes to attend school or work. The levels of violence are at

their highest in decades, say commentators. This new development marks a fresh stage in the Turkish government's treatment of its Kurdish issue. Despite its eagerness to begin the process of taking up European Union membership, a fundamental prerequisite of which is improved human rights for its minority populations, Turkey has in many respects continued to suppress Kurdish voices of dissent, and limited the representation of the Kurds in political process. The Kurdish language, though no longer criminalised, is still not recognised by the state.

The truth is that Turkey must stop hiding behind a rhetoric of securitization and 'terrorism' to in dealing with its Kurdish issue. This approach may win fans with its Imperialist American allies, fond of similar labelling and a big force behind marking the PKK as a proscribed terrorist organisation. However, it will do little to solve the decades old problem which has claimed thousands of lives and led to a well hidden but tragic situation of thousands more internally displaced people. Many commentators in Turkey and elsewhere have pointed out that poverty, economic problems, and chronic under-development in the Kurdish regions are to blame for the widespread disaffection of the population, and accuse the government of failing to take action. It might be added that rather than simply failing to take action, the Turkish government has for years engaged in a purposeful policy of underdevelopment and disempowerment of its Kurdish minority.

Turkey was also quick to blame European based the Kurdish satellite TV station ROJ TV, against which it has been conducting an undemocratic gag campaign for months, for inciting the current events. This is no coincidence, there has already been increasing pressure on ROJ TV to close its broadcasts, and now Turkey wishes to use these developments as further leverage in achieving its long-standing goal. ROJ TV makes the voice of many of the people in Kurdistan, and as such it has been virtually alone in providing transparent coverage of the true extent of human rights abuses by the Turkish army, in recent years. An example of such broadcasting was that of the Semdinli bombings in November of last year, when protests left a total of six people dead, twenty eight people wounded, and drew much press attention which was obviously very damaging for the government which forced turkey to publicly name and sentence the secret police officers who were responsible, asking how to define the word of terror you may wonder that can be called state terrorism.

What the Turkish government has also failed to address is the fact that those engaged in demonstrations this past week are exercising their very basic democratic rights. quite the contrary to being 'terrorists', according to Turkish law they are citizens of the Turkish republic, and as such are entitled to the same privileges as their countrymen who live in more developed and less discriminated against regions of the country.

Those European country who threw their whole Wight behind turkey's bit on EU and ignoring the fundamental human right concerns and lack freedom in respect of ethnic minorities now shockingly, news of these dramatic events did not portrayed the extend of the problem and it has been only summarily covered by mainstream media sources. Many in Western Europe have no idea of the widespread human rights abuses that are currently being perpetrated by the state in the name of security in the Kurdish areas of Turkey. It is now the responsibility of all observers, and those with any source of information direct from the communities now being subject to these conditions, to inform the public and raise a voice of outrage