Turkish: The situation and treatment of Kurds and Alevis after the coup attempt in July 2016, including in the large cities (July 2016–January 2017)
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

1. State of Emergency After the Coup Attempt in July 2016

A 2016 report on Turkey, prepared by the European Commission as part of the European Union’s enlargement policy, indicates that “[o]n 20 July a state of emergency was declared across Turkey for three months, [and was] further extended for another three months on 3 October” (European Commission 9 Nov. 2016, 8). The same source reports that the state of emergency grants the Council of Ministers under the chairmanship of the President the power to govern by decree (ibid.). According to the European Commission, these decrees introduced measures such as extending pre-trial detention to 30 days for certain offences, the closure and seizure of institutions and media, as well as suspensions in the army and civil service (ibid., 9).

Similarly, in correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, an associate professor at the University of Binghamton, whose areas of research include the Kurdish issue [1], stated the following regarding the current situation in Turkey:

After the coup attempt, on July 20, 2017, the incumbent Justice and Development Party (AKP)-dominant parliament passed ‘State of Emergency’ (OHAL) for three months, which granted immense rights to the government, the right to issue ‘executive orders.’ Executive orders by the government can change all previous laws and issue new laws without any approval of the parliament and most importantly suspend constitutional rights and freedom... Almost all executive orders are related to the firing of public employees, the closure of media outlets, the restrictions of citizenships, and similar rights. Some of the issued executive orders are not related to the organizations associated with the coup attempt (FETO [Fethullah Gulen movement]) at all.

The State of Emergency has been extended again in October and most recently in this January. The cabinet members continually indicated that it can be extended infinitely until national security is ensured. In other words, there is no guarantee that the State of Emergency will end soon. (16 Jan. 2017)

2. Situation of the Kurds

According to the Associate Professor at the University of Binghamton, the decrees were used against FETO and Kurdish political groups, both identified as a threat to national security (16 Jan. 2017). Similarly, in its 2016 report, the European Commission states “[t]he crackdown has continued since [the attempted coup] and has broadened to pro-Kurdish and other opposition voices” (9 Nov. 2016, 9). In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a research associate at the University of Coventry, the author of a book published in 2017 on the Kurds in Turkey, and whose fields of research include the Kurdish issue [2], stated that the

Kurdish population seems to suffer disproportionally from the effects caused by the laws and decrees related to the state of emergency (research associate, 17 Jan. 2017). The same source indicated that the government exercises judicial authorities conferred on it under the state of emergency to “arbitrarily” decide what constitutes a crime on an “ad hoc” basis (ibid.).

The Associate Professor at the University of Binghamton stated the following with respect to the decrees issued under the state of emergency:

They aim to reduce political awareness among Kurdish population. As a result, they increased restrictions on Kurdish language and Kurdish social, cultural and economic activities. Kurdish private institutions such as Kurdish language institutions, Kurdish TV channels and print media were mostly banned. (16 Jan. 2017)

In addition, Amnesty International states that in the context of a “[AI English version] “crackdown” in the wake of a coup attempt, “the authorities began targeting [Kurdish] opposition voices, closing down hundreds of media outlets and other organisations and replacing elected officials with government-appointed trustees” (Dec. 2016).

The Associate Professor at the University of Binghamton stated the following regarding the change in the treatment of Kurds since the coup attempt in 2016:

[T]he situation has worsened in Turkey for Kurds. Under the [state of emergency], the executive orders make it easy to arrest Kurds and put them into jail without due process. The prosecutors can keep arrested people up to a month without a lawyer. Furthermore, the current permissive political environment increased intolerance against Kurds in the country...

The executive orders targeted Kurds; hundreds of academics, public employees were fired from their works. Some of them have nothing to do with the HDP [People' Democratic Party], were mostly commercial. (16 Jan. 2017)

Furthermore, the Research Associate at the University of Coventry explained that the “purge” was not limited to Kurdish politicians, noting the suspension of teachers in the Kurdish region and the arrest of pro-Kurd journalists (17 Jan. 2017).

The Associate Professor at the University of Binghamton described society’s treatment of Kurds since the coup in 2016 in the following terms:

As for society, the rise of anti-Kurdish attitudes is on the rise. The government again adopted a strong nationalist-conservative discourse, which alienated secular political opposition. Those who speak the Kurdish language are not tolerated and deemed as potential terrorists in Turkey... Communal violence against Kurds is on the rise after the coup attempt, but mainstream media are also hesitant to make news about these incidents.

... Turkish society is mostly supportive of these [executive orders]... The anti-Kurdish sentiment is high in Turkey, and permissive political environment turns this sentiment into violence in some cases. (16 Jan. 2017)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.1 The Kurdish Media

In its 2016 report, the European Commission raises the shut-down of 23 of 39 Kurdish-language radio and television stations, accused of broadcasting "terrorist propaganda" (9 Nov. 2016, 29). Similarly, the Committee to Protect Journalists, "an independent, non-profit organization that promotes press freedom worldwide“ (CPJ, n.d.), reports the closure of some 20 pro-Kurd broadcasters and leftist radio stations, as well as a Kurdish-language channel for children and a radio station that played Kurdish folk music (ibid. 29 Sept. 2016). Article 19, an organization that defends freedom of expression and information (Article 19, n.d.), reports that children’s channels broadcasting Kurdish-language cartoons were shut down (ibid., 30 Sept. 2016).

On 29 October 2016, Amnesty International reports the shut-down of 15 media outlets, most of which were Kurdish outlets based in south-east Turkey, including the only national Kurdish-language newspaper (31 Oct. 2016).

Sources report that the pro-Kurd daily newspaper Özgür Gündem was shut down in August 2016 for terrorist propaganda in favour of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) (AI 19 Aug. 2016; Al Jazeera 17 Aug. 2016). Amnesty International states that the police detained 24 employees at the Özgür Gündem daily...
newspaper (AI 19 Aug. 2016). The newspaper’s lawyer told Amnesty International that police officers damaged computers and other property and ill-treated journalists as they were being detained (ibid.).

The Research Associate at the University of Coventry stated that at least 36 proKurd journalists have been arrested since the attempted coup (17 Jan. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.2 Kurdish Party Members and Elected Representatives

Sources report that in November 2016, a number of HDP members of Parliament were arrested and detained for terrorism (European Commission 9 Nov. 2016, 28; EuroMed Rights 7 Nov. 2016). Sources indicate that 11 HDP members of Parliament were put in detention (associate professor 16 Jan. 2017; Freedom House 4 Nov. 2016).

The Associate Professor at the University of Binghamton stated that hundreds of HDP members were put in prison and that they were all awaiting their court date (16 Jan. 2017). In addition, according to an article published by Mediapart, a [translation] “a digital, independent and participatory newspaper” (Mediapart, n.d.), “thousands of [HDP] militants and supporters are currently in custody or incarcerated” (12 Dec. 2016, 3). According to Amnesty International, “investigations have been initiated against 54 out of 59 deputies of the HDP” (4 Nov. 2016).

The Research Associate at the University of Coventry stated that the security of Kurdish politicians and activists is in jeopardy because incidents, such as the raids of HDP offices in the cities of Osmaniye, Malatya and Iskenderun, were on the rise after the attempted coup (17 Jan. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

2.3 South-East Turkey

Sources report that under the state of emergency imposed after the attempted coup in September 2016, Turkish authorities replaced 24 mayors, mostly in the country’s south-east, by civil administrators on suspicion of ties to the PKK (Al Jazeera 12 Sept. 2016; AA 11 Sept. 2016). Sources indicate that the mayors with ties to the HDP were mainly concerned by this decision (BBC, 11 Sept. 2016; Radio Free Europe, 11 Sept. 2016).

According to Hürriyet Daily News, a newspaper based in Turkey (Hürriyet Daily News, n.d.), the police dispersed crowds that were demonstrating against the “seizure of power” in a number of districts and provinces in the east and south-east (ibid. 11 Sept. 2016). The same source indicates that police fired tear gas and water cannons to disperse demonstrators in Batman (ibid.).

According to the European Commission’s 2016 report, in the aftermath of the attempted coup, a large number of Kurdish teachers were suspended over their alleged links to terrorism (9 Nov. 2016, 29). Furthermore, according to an article published in the Guardian, 11,500 teachers suspected of having links to the PKK were suspended in September 2016 (19 Sept. 2016). The Research Associate at the University of Coventry writes that the teachers suspended by the Ministry of Education were in the Kurdish region (17 Jan. 2017). Sources report that these suspensions involved teachers who took part in a one-day strike to call for peace in the region and who have ties to a union (Turkish Human Rights Association, 30 Oct. 2016; Al-Monitor, 12 Sept. 2016). Al-Monitor, a website that features reporting and analysis by journalists and experts from the Middle East (Al-Monitor, n.d.), states that the leftist union, Egitim Sen, is popular among Kurds (ibid., 12 Sept. 2016).

Amnesty International reports that under the state of emergency, NGOs were shuttered, including the Sarmasik association, [AI English version] “which provides food aid and education services to 32,000 people in Diyarbakir (southeast Turkey), including people forcibly displaced by the state” (16 Nov. 2017). Similarly, Al-Monitor indicates that 46 of the associations closed, including the Sarmasik association, were located in Diyarbakir, “the largest city in Turkey’s Kurdish-majority southeast” (Al-Monitor, 6 Dec. 2016). The same source states that the associations that were shut down include diverse groups, such as neighbourhood associations, a solidarity association, the Kurdish Language Research Association and the Kurdish Writers’ Association, on suspicion of ties to the PKK (ibid.).

Sources indicate that in October 2016 a school offering education in Kurdish was closed in the city of Diyarbakir, in addition to four other Kurdish schools in the region. (The New Arab 27 Dec. 2016; Institut kurde de Paris 22 Dec. 2016).

According to the Research Associate at the University of Coventry, the change in the treatment of Kurds since the attempted coup in 2016 can also be seen in the raids that took place in the cities of Van and Bingöl in the south-east (17 Jan. 2017). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.
2.4 The Kurdish Population in Large Cities

The Associate Professor at the University of Binghamton stated that in the cities where Turks constitute the majority, such as Istanbul, Izmir, Ankara, Bursa and Antalya, as well as in small cities, the Kurdish population is plagued by fear and uncertainty (associate professor 16 Jan. 2017). The same source reported the following about Kurds who are not politically active in large cities like Istanbul and Ankara since the coup in 2016:

If they do not disclose their Kurdish identity and act as a Turk, they are safe. There will be no arrest or jailing for them. However, this may not be easy because Kurds have a particular accent when speaking Turkish.

If they are simply Kurds, they may feel insecure. Speaking Kurdish in public is a risky behavior. Even though there is no law prohibiting speaking Kurdish in public, public reaction to those who talk loudly is possible endangering. Those who assault Kurds because they speak Kurdish are tolerated by police and judiciary. They are either released without going to a police station or released by the court shortly. (ibid.)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to the Research Associate at the University of Coventry, in large cities such as Istanbul and Ankara, the situation of the Kurds who are not politically active has not changed much since the attempted coup in 2016 (research associate 17 Jan. 2017). The same source explained his perspective in this regard as follows:

There is a continuing stigmatization of the Kurdish identity in Turkish society and like their counterparts in the south-eastern cities of Turkey those Kurds living in the western parts of the country are equally at risk of being criminalized because of their political views although they do not actively engage in politics. There are millions of non-politically active Kurds in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir who currently continue their lives as normal without being discriminated against. Those Kurds who cooperate with and support the AKP (Justice and Development Party) government are not few…. (ibid.)

Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

3. Situation of the Alevis

In correspondence sent to the Research Directorate, a research assistant at the University of Sydney, a graduate of Bogaziçi University in Istanbul and the London School of Economics, whose doctoral dissertation was on the transformation of the Alevi movement in the diaspora, stated the following with respect to the treatment of the Alevis by Turkish society since the failed coup in 2016:

Following the 2016 coup attempt in Turkey, the government called the citizens onto the streets to protest against the so-called coup d’état. Some protestors—ignited by the atmosphere on streets—became violent especially in some of the districts where the Alevi population resided. One example was the Pasaköskü district in the city of Malatya where the masses gathered on streets and insulted against the Alevi residents. Another example was in Antakya where a violent group attacked Arab Alevis. Other cases of harassment [have occurred] in districts of Gazi, Nurtepe, Ikitelli, Sari Gazi, Okmeydani in Istanbul, Tuzluçayır in Ankara and Pazarcik in Maras. (15 Jan. 2017)

In addition, Voice of America (VOA) reports that an attack by Erdogan supporters on members of the Alevi religious minority occurred on July 17, 2016, in Malatya (19 July 2016). Erdal Dogan, a specialized human rights attorney, told Al-Monitor that the coordinated lynchings confirmed the Alevis’ fears about security (Al-Monitor, Sept. 2016).

A sociologist from Istanbul told Al-Monitor that he was concerned about the impact of the state of emergency on the Alevi communities in eastern Turkey (ibid.). The sociologist informed Al-Monitor that multiple areas were declared “special sections” in the city of Dersim, which has a considerable impact on the freedom of movement and on the livelihoods of people farming and raising livestock (ibid.).

The Research Assistant at the University of Sydney also stated the following on how the Alevis in Turkey have been treated by authorities since the coup in 2016:

At state level, following the coup attempt, the government has declared state emergency measures and started to detain thousands of state officials, military officers, academics and journalists. In social media, news were circulated that a great number of detained soldiers and officers were Alevi, but it remains difficult to assess whether these news were correct or not. Nonetheless, it is well known that the AKP government, and in particular the previously PM and now president Erdogan denounced Alevis publicly a number of times. (15 Jan. 2017)
In a 2016 report, Human Rights Watch states that on 28 September 2016, Turkish authorities issued a decree under the state of emergency to order the shut-down of 23 radio and television stations popular specifically among the Alevi (Dec. 2016, 1). Similarly, sources report the closure of TV 10, a station catering to an Alevi audience (MRG, 5 Oct. 2016; CPJ, 29 Sept. 2016).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes
[1] The Associate Professor, who is currently in Turkey, mentioned having conversations with Turks and Kurds about politics and the coup attempt. The opinions from this source reflect his personal point of view and are based on his academic research, which focus on the Kurdish issue.

[2] The opinions from this source reflect his personal point of view.

References

Associate Professor, University of Binghamton. 16 January 2017. Correspondence sent to the Research Directorate.
Tips on how to use this search engine.

Additional Sources Consulted

**Oral sources:** Lawyer in the United Kingdom specializing in human rights in Turkey; Canadian Alevi Culture Centre; Center for the Research of Societal Problems; Democratic Progress Institute; university graduate; journalists; Kurdish Human Rights Project; Kurdish Studies Network; Middle East Media Research Institute; university professors.

**Internet sites, including:** Association européenne pour la défense des droits de l'homme; Asylum Research Consultancy; CNN; Le Courrier; Deutsche Welle; European Asylum Support Office; France 24; Front Line Defenders; Huffington Post; IRIN; Middle East Eye; Radio France internationale; Radio Télévision Belge de la Communauté Française; United Nations – Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights; United States – Department of State.

Tips on how to use this search engine.