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Responses to Information Requests

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Turkey: Situation of Kurds in western cities such as Ankara, Istanbul, Izmir, Konya and Mersin; resettlement to these cities (2006 - 2008)

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General situation of Kurds in western Turkey

As Turkey's largest ethnic and linguistic minority, Kurds constitute between 10 and 23 percent of the country's population (MRG 2007, 11), according to Minority Rights Group International (MRG), while Agence France-Presse (AFP) mentions a figure of 12 million (12 Mar. 2006). Kurds are primarily concentrated in eastern and southeastern Turkey, where they form an absolute majority of the population (MRG 2007, 11).

Since the 1980s, millions of Kurds have either voluntarily or forcibly left south-eastern Turkey and resettled in the major cities of western Anatolia (*Middle East Policy* 1 Apr. 2006; *The New York Review of Books* 1 Mar. 2007; MRG 2007, 11). Previously, in the 1950s, such migration tended to be economically motivated, while beginning in the 1980s, the migration was influenced by conflict between the Turkish Army and Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan, PKK), which resulted in over a million Kurds reportedly being evicted from their homes in eastern and southeastern Turkey (ibid.).

According to *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2007*, Turkish law does not distinguish between "national, racial or ethnic" groups and treats all citizens as Turks (US 11 Mar. 2008, Sec. 5). As a consequence, members of Turkey's Kurdish minority face a threat of "censure, harassment, or prosecution" if they assert their Kurdish identity or engage in public activities that openly promote Kurdish political, cultural or linguistic rights (ibid.). *Country Reports 2007* also notes that the Turkish government monitors Kurdish-language media (ibid.).

Middle East Policy notes that the military tensions that previously characterized Kurdish-Turkish relations have been replaced by ethnic confrontations of an increasingly socio-political nature (1 Apr. 2006). *Middle East Policy* states, "[i]t is not the Turkish state that is confronting the Kurds any longer but Turks and Kurds confronting each other" (1 Apr. 2006).

According to *Middle East Policy*, there exists a sociological category of largely assimilated Kurds, referred to as "'occasional Kurds'," who

have no major problems with the state; their main goal is to define and refine their status in the national society. Active in business and the bureaucracy, these Kurds usually live in major cities in western Turkey and maintain ties with their Kurdish villages in the east. (1 Apr. 2006)

In his book *The Uncontainable Kurds*, Christopher de Bellaigue argues that there exists widespread voluntary assimilation of many Kurds in western Turkey who speak Turkish and hide their ethnicity (*The New*

~~York Review of Books 1 Mar. 2007). At the same time, there remains a sizeable number of Kurds who live in Kurdish neighbourhoods of western cities and who maintain a distinctly Kurdish identity (ibid.).~~

Further recent information on the resettlement of Kurds in Western Turkey could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Violence

In 2007, Minority Rights Group International (MRG) noted a rise in violence directed at ethnic minorities, who are sometimes not protected by the police (MRG 2007, 30). In some cases, authorities have preferred to remove victims of ethnically motivated violence rather than arrest the perpetrators (ibid.). For example, in its 2007 annual report, the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF) noted that in May 2006, "security forces reportedly failed to prevent mob violence against Kurdish IDPs [internally-displaced persons] in Izmir." According to MRG, following the killing of their leader, whom MRG did not name, a group of "ultra-nationalists" assaulted 55 Kurds in Izmir's Kemalpaşa neighbourhood (MRG 2007, 30). The Kurds were reportedly forced to move to Aydın province after municipal authorities informed them that police officers were not in a position to prevent further violence against them (ibid.).

Confrontation between the PKK and Turkish troops resulted in country-wide violence between Kurdish protesters and Turkish security officials in April 2006, reportedly leading to 15 deaths (*The New York Times* 6 Apr. 2006). While most victims were in the Kurdish southeast, three people died in Istanbul after a bus was firebombed by protesters (ibid.).

In August 2006, in the central Anatolian city of Konya (*Lonely Planet* 2005, 454), police removed five Kurdish construction workers from the district following an altercation with non-Kurds (MRG 2007, 30). Eurasianet reported on 14 September 2006 that four migrant workers who were heard speaking Kurdish in an unspecified location of Western Turkey "narrowly escaped a lynching" at the hands of locals, who believed them to be members of the PKK.

Arrests

Several media sources have reported that pro-Kurdish demonstrators have been arrested following protests coinciding with Kurdish New Year (*Newroz* [or *Nowroz*]) celebrations in western Turkish cities (IHL 21 Mar. 2007; AFP 12 Feb. 2006; AFP 23 Mar. 2008). *Newroz* is also an occasion for some to assert their Kurdish identity, sometimes resulting in violence, as the 50 Kurdish fatalities during the festival between 1992 and 2008 can attest (AFP 22 Mar. 2008). In March 2007, pro-Kurdish protests across Turkey coinciding with *Newroz* reportedly led to the arrest by police of 80 demonstrators in Istanbul, 50 in the Mediterranean city of Mersin and 6 in Izmir (AP 21 Mar. 2007).

In February 2006, according to the Associated Press (AP), approximately 250 protesters in Istanbul threw stones and Molotov cocktails at security forces to call for the release of Kurdish separatist leader Abdullah Öcalan (ibid.). The protests were quelled by riot police who used teargas and detained five demonstrators (ibid.). Similar though less violent protests occurred at the same time in the western city of Izmir and the southern city of Antalya (ibid.).

In February 2007, 13 members of Hak-Par, a pro-Kurdish political party, were sentenced to jail terms ranging from six to twelve months for speaking Kurdish and distributing Kurdish-language material at the party's 2004 convention (US 11 Mar. 2008, Sec. 2.a). Nine of the prison terms were later commuted to fines (ibid.). The Constitutional Court ruled that Hak-Par should dismiss these 13 members in order to comply with the Political Parties Law (ibid.).

In May 2007, the Izmir Public Prosecutor's Office filed a case against Ferhat Tunç, a pro-Kurdish artist, for violating the 'Prevention of Terrorism Law' after he made reference to the PKK during a July 2006 concert in Alanya (IFEX 25 May 2007). Tunç could have faced up to 15 years in prison if found guilty (ibid.), although he was later exonerated by the Izmir court (*Turkish Daily News* 5 Oct. 2007).

In a March 2008, pro-Kurdish protesters in Izmir reportedly "attacked the police with chunks of concrete and broke the windows of buildings and cars" (Al Jazeera 23 Mar. 2008). A security sweep conducted by Izmir police led to seizure of petrol bombs and the arrest of 18 (AFP 22 Mar. 2008) to 20 pro-Kurdish demonstrators (Al Jazeera 23 Mar. 2008). One Izmir member of the Kurdish Democratic Society Party (Demokratik Toplum Partisi, DTP) was reportedly arrested after calling for a "Newroz rebellion" (AFP 23 Mar. 2008). Police also arrested 10 protesters in Mersin (ibid. 22 Mar. 2008).

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 additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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Additional Sources Consulted

Oral sources: Several professors specializing in ethnic minorities in Turkey did not respond to requests for information.

Internet sites, including: Amnesty International (AI), Asylum Aid, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), European Union (EU), Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (HRFT), Human Rights Watch (HRW), KurdishMedia.com, *Middle East Report*, *Middle East Times*, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Overseas Security Advisory Council (OSAC), *Today's Zaman*, *Turquie européenne*, World News Connection (WNC).

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