Turkey: The situation and treatment of members and supporters of the Democratic Society Party (Democratik Toplum Partisi, DTP) and the Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP)

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Democratic Society Party (Democratik Toplum Partisi, DTP)

Sources indicate that the Democratic Society Party (Democratik Toplum Partisi, DTP) became a political party in November 2005 and was a successor to the Democratic People's Party (Demokratik Halk Partisi, DEHAP) (Political Parties of the World 2009, 591; PHW 2008, 1355). The DTP is characterized as Turkey's "largest pro-Kurdish party" (IHS Global Insight 14 Dec. 2009) and as a "Kurdish nationalist group" (The New York Times 6 Dec. 2008). According to Political Parties of the World, the DTP is an observer member of the Socialist International and an associate member of the Party of European Socialists (2009, 591). Sources report that in November 2007, the DTP advocated for decentralizing governmental power to Turkey's regions (The New York Times 6 Dec. 2008; EUTCC Jan. 2009, 166).


Sources report that on 16 November 2007, the Chief Prosecutor of the Supreme Court of Appeals filed a case with the Constitutional Court to ban the DTP and expel several of its legislators on charges of separatism and links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan, PKK) (Human Rights Watch 9 Dec. 2009, PPW 2009, 591). According to Agence-France Presse (AFP), the DTP claims that they have "no organic links" with the PKK (14 Dec. 2009). The New York Times states that DTP politicians may sympathize with PKK fighters, but they are not PKK members and they oppose violence (6 Dec. 2008). Both sources indicate that the DTP does not recognize the PKK as a "terrorist group" (AFP 14 Dec. 2009; The New York Times 6 Dec. 2008).

People's Labour Party (HEP), the Democracy Party (DEP), and the People's Democracy Party (Halkin Demokrasi Partisi, HADEP), which were pro-Kurdish predecessor parties to DEHAP and DTP, were accused of being front organizations for the PKK and were banned by the Constitutional Court in earlier years (PPW 2009, 591).


The Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP)

Sources indicate that the Peace and Democracy Party (Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi, BDP) was created as a successor to the DTP in anticipation of the DTP being banned (EUTCC Jan. 2010, 167; Plus News Pakistan 19 Dec. 2009). The 19 legislators who remained in parliament following the ban of DTP have reportedly joined the BDP (Aljazeera 18 Dec. 2009; Plus News Pakistan 19 Dec. 2009; AFP 1 Feb. 2010). According to AFP, Selahattin Demirtas, a lawyer for the Turkish Human Rights Association and a member of parliament, was elected the leader of the BDP (1 Feb. 2010).

Treatment of DTP and BDP members by authorities

Freedom House reports that in 2007 as many as 50 DTP members were arrested for pro-Kurdish activities and some were convicted (2009). The United States (US) Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2008 indicates that in 2007, some DTP members were convicted for speaking Kurdish during political or judicial proceedings (US 25 Feb. 2009, Sec. 2a). Country Reports 2008 also notes that in 2008, prosecutors opened several investigations and trials against DTP members (ibid., Sec. 3). Police raided DTP offices in Van and Siirt provinces and arrested approximately 50 DTP members during the year (ibid.).

KHRP/BHRC reports that in March 2009, villagers in Tepecik were allegedly attacked by village guards for supporting the DTP in local elections (Aug. 2009, 34). Media sources report that in April 2009, following DTP successes in local elections, approximately 50 members of the DTP were arrested (The Guardian 29 Apr. 2009; The Kurdish Globe 19 Dec. 2009).

Information about the approximate number of DTP members arrested throughout 2009 varies: according to KHRP/BHRC, between April 2009 and August 2009, more than 500 DTP members were taken into custody and 267 were indicted (KHRP/BHRC 2009, 17); the Turkish NGO Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği, İHD) reports that three operations were carried out against the DTP between April and October 2009, in which 1,000 people were detained, including 450 DTP members who have not been told the charges laid against them (İHD 27 Oct. 2009). Human Rights Watch reports that between April 2009 and January 2010, more than 100 DTP or BDP party officials were arrested (Human Rights Watch 12 Jan. 2010). Human Rights Watch noted that the investigation of BDP and former DTP members is under a secrecy order, and the evidence against those charged is not disclosed to the suspects or their lawyers (ibid.).

Sources report that on 24 December 2009, Turkish authorities detained over 30 Kurdish political leaders, journalists and activists as part of an anti-terrorism operation against BDP or former DTP members (Human Rights Watch 12 Jan. 2010; IHS Global Insight 30 Dec. 2009; VOA 24 Dec. 2009). Twenty-three people were indicted, including several mayors (Human Rights Watch 12 Jan. 2010; IHS Global Insight 30 Dec. 2009). The Vice President of the Human Rights Association was among those arrested (ibid.; Human Rights Watch 12 Jan. 2010). According to Human Rights Watch, the arrests occurred the day after many of those arrested joined the BDP (ibid.). United Press International reports that following the arrests, Kurdish demonstrators in Istanbul and southeast Turkey clashed with riot police (UPI 28 Dec. 2009).

Media sources report that the BDP headquarters in Ankara was attacked on 5 February 2010 (Anatolia 6 Feb. 2010; Plus News Pakistan 10 Feb. 2010). A BDP party official reportedly stated that more than 15 bullets were fired at the building (ibid.; Anatolia 6 Feb. 2010). According to the official, it was the fifth time that the party was attacked within a year (ibid.). According to one media source, three people were detained by the police in connection to the attack (Plus News Pakistan 10 Feb. 2010).

AFP reports that in February 2010, police arrested 86 people in ten provinces for alleged links with the PKK, including leaders and elected officials of the BDP (AFP 13 Feb. 2010). The arrests occurred in Batman, Hakkari, Mardin, Siirt, Sirnak, Agri, Mus, Van, Adana and Istanbul (ibid.).
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.

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**Internet sites, including:** Council of Europe, European Country of Origin Information Network (ecoi.net), Human Rights First (HRF), International Crisis Group, Office of the United Nations (UN) High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Refworld.

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