

# Kurdistan: Scottish activist interviewed on Turkey's local elections

*From a polling station in the Şirnak mountains – an interview with Hazel, an election observer from Scotland for the 31 March local elections in Turkey.*

Sarah Glynn talks to one of two Scottish women who came to observe the elections at the invitation of the DEM Party [Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party – see note 1]. Hazel describes the militarisation of the region and the psychological pressure on voters. She witnessed the mass voting by soldiers brought in from outside the region, and saw the anger and worry in Şirnak (Şirnex) after their election was stolen by imported votes. And she emphasises the power of Kurdish resistance.

Hazel was observing the election at the invitation of the DEM Party, and was sent to village polling stations in the Şirnak (Şirnex) mountains. She describes a heavily militarised region, and militarised police and armoured vehicles outside the polling stations. Despite having become accustomed to the constant military presence, voters described feelings of intimidation and psychological pressure on account of the people outside the polling stations, who included families of AKP members.

Hazel saw a military helicopter that they were informed had brought soldiers to vote, and witnessed a long line of soldiers in civilian dress waiting to cast their ballots. But the observers were restricted in where they could go, and in inspecting voter lists.

She contrasted the victory celebrations in Diyarbakir (Amed) with the anger and worry in Şirnak – at the stolen election due to the votes of thousands of soldiers brought from

outside, and at the prospect of the coming years of AKP control. And she described the immediate post-election repression and arrests in Şirnak.

Hazel attended protest statements in Amed, following the government's refusal to recognise the elected mayor of Van, and observed the importance of the presence of the Saturday Mothers.

She finished by trying to convey the sense of powerful resistance that she could feel in the Kurdish region and that she was reluctant to leave behind.

Below is the full transcript of the interview:

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So, Hazel, obviously a lot has happened since the actual election itself, but you were there to observe the election, so I think we should start with that. And I wondered, for the benefit of people who've not been to a Turkish election, if you could just describe – well, describe where you went, where you were – but also what the polling station is like, who's allowed in, what sort of privacy you get for voting, what sort of security there is to protect the ballots themselves, and whether there's pressure on the voters from people outside.

Yeah, so I've also been to the general election last year, which was a little bit different to this year's municipal elections, and I think it's also a little bit regional. So, all over Kurdistan region, also Turkey, it's generally in schools that people go to vote, and there are certain laws pertaining to the schools. So, for example, police shouldn't have weapons with them if they're actually inside the polling booth, like the room that people are voting in. And last year, there was a proper booth inside the polling stations that did afford people a bit more privacy, but I didn't personally see that at this one, but we were in quite a remote village in

Şîrnak province, and it was called Beytüşşebap in Turkish, or İlkê in Kurdish. And yeah, there wasn't actually really any privacy, to be honest, in the rooms, but people will make their vote, and there's a sort of desk that people from each party – so DEM Party, AK Party, CHP – they all also sit in the room as well, and they're kind of responsible for overseeing the process. So, there's a bit of a collective management of the day, and there's quite a lot of people from each political party there as well, and also outside the schools, and I'm sure we'll get into this more later. It does depend on the region, so what we saw in İlkê or Beytüşşebap is, there's the Jandarma outside the schools, which is like militarised police, and there's also plainclothes police, and also uniformed, but there's the militarised and armored vehicles outside.

**So, did you get a sense that there was pressure on voters?**

So, this is what we asked people, actually, who were there, and they did tell us that they did feel quite a bit of pressure, and I think that also, one thing to keep in mind is that, actually, there's a normalisation of the militarisation of the region, because there's checkpoints, there's military checkpoints when you move inside or outside of the cities in Kurdistan region. You can see the Jandarma (Gendarmerie), or the military – there's military bases all over the place, inside cities, etc. So, I think that there is a desensitisation, actually, as well; but of course, it does also create the psychological pressure, and for example, there was big families from the AK Party outside in the school grounds that we saw ourselves, and it was like an extended family. And people were also telling us this is also a type of psychological pressure, and they also felt intimidated. And it was also reported that – not where we were, but at another location – that some of the police did have weapons with them inside the schools, as well.

**And anyway, they're allowed weapons just outside the schools.**

Yes, they're allowed weapons outside of the schools, including the military vehicles themselves, which were literally parked right outside the gates, literally right opposite the entrance to the schools, multiple ones, actually. And also, one thing that we saw too is a military helicopter actually landing directly next to the school, which we were told was bringing soldiers in from Şirnak, like central, the actual city. And then, you know, we were in quite a remote area up the mountains, and we went to the first school, and then we went to two others, and then we were told, oh, go back to the first school, because now a lot of soldiers have just come. And you know, in the region, it's occupied militarily, so there are soldiers around, but people know who are the local soldiers. You know, there's not thousands and thousands of soldiers in each place, usually. And when we went back to the first school, there was this long line of soldiers in plain clothes who were waiting to vote, and it was a very, very tense atmosphere, and we basically were quite abruptly asked to leave.

They wouldn't actually let us be present inside the polling station on that occasion. And yeah, we saw the helicopter, because it wasn't there when we first arrived, and then when we went to the schools, and then it had arrived, and then it left when we were there.

**And were people able to see the voters' lists there? Were all these soldiers' names on the voters' lists?**

So, one of our friends who was with us – one of our colleagues who was with us, who was also doing the observations, she has a press card, she's a journalist, she was allowed to look, but we were not allowed, and we were barred from looking at the lists. But there is many, many areas that people have had more access to the lists, and Şirnak is one of them, Şirnak Central, that has shown hundreds and hundreds of male names who – and no women at some addresses at all – but just hundreds and hundreds of male names, which aren't normal

military bases. And what we were told is that this is basically soldiers coming from outside, who have been sent here by the state, and they are using other people's addresses to be able – because you know it's municipal, so you have to have like a specific local registered address to be able to vote in that district. And yeah, there's been like a lot of this military people coming and voting.

**Over 6,000 in Şirnak, I think.**

**I know at the general election there was a lot of concern about guarding the ballot boxes, and then there were also problems about changes made when the votes were transferred onto the final system. Were either of those issues this time around, or not?**

Yeah, so this was definitely a thing last time. There was really clear evidence, for example, of votes getting transferred from DEM Party to MHP last time – well it was Yeşil Sol (Green Left) Party last year, but to MHP – and then they even ended up being transferred back in the appeals process at points, but I haven't heard of that myself this time. But also, it's one of those things that, you know, I think it's really hard sometimes to catch the ways that manipulation happens. And there's been really widespread observation amongst the independent observers about this practice with the soldiers, and this is something that – it's in specific areas, it doesn't happen in every single area, obviously – but it's, yeah, it's very difficult to appeal this process. And it didn't really seem like the ballot box issue was something that was really focused on this year, but they were already aware of the extra people signing up in the municipalities this time, so that has been the main focus this year.

**I heard calls for guarding the ballot boxes, but I didn't hear of any actual concerns, I think.**

I haven't heard of any myself.

**And what immediately afterwards, as the results started coming in – I mean, before things started happening in Van – what was the general view of the elections from the DEM Party, because I think you were with people in the party after the elections as well.**

Yeah, so I mean, I was in two different places – in Şirnak at first, and then I went back to Amed. And it was really different in both places, because, you know, in Şirnak, people were really hurting, because AK Party, for the central area, was elected again. And people were pretty furious, and also worried. People are really worried about their future, and they're very angry, because they feel it's a very, very undemocratic process. And straight afterwards, on the same day as the elections, there was an attack on the party office by the police, and they arrested at least a dozen people, I think two dozen people – so two of the responsables in DEM Party, and then also quite a few youth as well. And when we were leaving the next day, we heard that the DEM Party members had been released, but a lot of the local young people were still being detained. And this is just like a kind of – I think that that's very symbolic, actually, because straight away, there's repression. And I mean – you just mentioned Van already, but even when there is a secure vote for the DEM Party, it doesn't mean that repression doesn't come. But when people don't have control of their own municipality, and that really affects, you know, funding, that affects education, that affects all of these different things. It affects also, you know, state propaganda. It affects state control, it affects state access to the border – for example, going south and east, and Şirnak is a really strategic location for the state's war policies. All of these things are affected in people's everyday lives. And somebody – not a DEM Party member, but just like a local person – was saying to me – he was saying, I'm really worried about my child's future. She's only three years old, but

again, and again, and again, this keeps happening. I don't know what I can do. And then for DEM Party, people were really exhausted, but they were just busy the entire time. They were saying, we're going to appeal this, we're not going to stand for this, you know, they have cheated the system. And there was this feeling of loss.

But there wasn't much, I've seen in Western media. There's been a lot of dialogue around – oh, CHP, they've done so well; oh, this is such a win for democracy, because AKP have done really badly in this election. But people don't talk about the Kurdistan region, and don't see that AK Party can't even – they can't even keep hold of their own seats in the West. But still, they try and coup them, basically, from the Kurdish regions, for their war policies, and for political reasons.

But when I went back to Amed – so I didn't see it myself, because we're in Şirnak, but I did see a lot of videos that showed there was a big celebration. People were really happy, but there was this focus on the other regions, it wasn't cut off. I think the first day, people were dancing in the streets, big, big celebrations, but by the time we got back, people were just really focused on Şirnak, and then also the other regions where AKP had sent soldiers, or just where they'd also just done well, you know. And then, also what happened in Van after. So, yesterday, all day, there was just announcements, protests. The people in DEM Party were incredibly busy, I have to say, from morning until evening, just full-on organising: visiting the family of the martyr, the shaheed [the DEM Party election official who was killed in a polling station dispute]; organising announcements, where police also repressed people, and two people were arrested from that – nothing like what we've seen in the further east regions, where people have been really being attacked viciously by the police, and, you know, there's a bigger answer, I think, there – but still, people were then focused on that...

It's not clear what's going to happen now. I was asking people. I was saying, do you think that... will come again, is this going to be the policy of the state this time, because it happened so much last municipal election. And people's answer was just, we just don't know. We just don't know what's going to happen. It's just very unclear.

**Which is frightening in itself, of course, the not knowing. So, I don't know when you had to leave that area. Were you able to see any of the protests about what was happening in Van?**

In Amed. Yeah.

**Reactions to the removal of the mayor, of the elected mayor in Van – were you able to see any of the reactions to that?**

Yeah, in Amed, I went to a couple of the announcements and protests, and the thing is, like, even just an announcement, which is what it actually was – or announcement is maybe not quite the right translation, but a kind of, like a statement against what happened – like, even these things, when they're made publicly, are very, very, criminalised by the police. So, maybe in Western Europe you could make a statement saying, oh, the state did this, and it wasn't good, blah, blah. But, in Bakur [North Kurdistan/southeast Turkey] you're surrounded by armed police, armoured vehicles. Lots of people already have criminal cases or have spent a significant time in prison, and these are the kind of things that can certainly get people arrested again and sent to prison. So, there's quite high stakes, even with just standing up and denouncing ...

And there was one protest outside one of the legal centres, and that was made by DEM Party members, and two of the MPs, so one person was Abbas Şahin, and then also Pınar as well. They're both MPs in Amed region. And then also, directly after that, there was another announcement in a park in Amed, and that was by the Democracy Platform, which is particularly,

like a labour platform.

**And there were people from other parties or from...**



Vigil for forced disappearances

Yeah, I mean, in general, the people who attended, it wasn't only DEM Party members who were there. It's just people in the community, basically, people who agree with the fact that what happened in Van was extremely undemocratic and unfair, and it didn't reflect the will of the people. And the second event, I'm not sure, I would need to find out exactly which groups it was present, actually, and yeah, but there was, like, a kind of mix of people from, like, various groups, and also non-affiliated people as well. Not everyone was specifically a member of a specific organisation who was present. There was, oh, and the Saturday Mothers as well, the mothers of the martyrs, and also of the missing people who had disappeared in the 90s. So, when everyone was going to this court in the first

announcement, the first denunciation, some people tried to enter. And they weren't allowed, of course, they weren't allowed to go in, but there was this big crowd of people, maybe a couple hundred people, and the mothers who, you know, they were walking as a group, and they have the white veils on their head, they're very, very distinctive. And they're really, really, really strong embodiments of the principles of the struggle there, and what people sacrificed, and what people continue to do as well, despite such a deep and painful struggle. They tried to get in, and when they first came, everyone started clapping and applauding, and people were chanting. It was really, really beautiful to see how people reacted to their presence as part of that struggle, and part of the wider statement. And they were also at the second denunciation as well, which was in the park. They didn't speak at

it, but there was – yeah, like I said, it was kind of a mix of people present, and – just one second, I’m just gonna check something... I had a thing where I wrote down the chants that people were making, but I’m just struggling to find it...

You were looking for the chants that were said at these demonstrations, so do give us some examples.

Yeah, so, well, one chant that people were chanting is, long live the resistance of Van, so, “Biji Berxwedana Wanê”, and also, “Resistance is Life”, and also, “Kurdistan will become a grave for fascism”, and, yeah, I thought it was just a very – like, every time somebody would make a speech, the young people in the crowd would start leading the chants. Yeah, that was all.

**So, is there anything else you want to add before I let you go and catch your plane?**

It’s really hard to – I thought there is something that I want to add, but it’s really hard to put into words. And I feel really, like I really wish that I wasn’t leaving now, because the different layers of society that say, and one of the other chants, the translation in English is, “we will win by resisting”. I think that that is just such a present spirit and energy, and that is something that is really beautiful and inspiring; and yeah, I’m sure that people really will resist. And if it really is the case that the mayor has, again, been reappointed, I think that that really just shows like that chant, that we will win by resisting, is completely true. And whatever happens now, because I think that the democratic process is completely – it’s not respected in Kurdistan region

especially. And I think that we need to stop invisibilising the politics there, when we talk about Turkey as a whole, and the democratic process in Turkey as a whole, and, you know, not see CHP as this kind of – oh great, everything's answered now, blah, blah, blah. I think that, yeah, the struggle is really alive, and we also need to find ways to support it, that's all.

**Thank you, and bring that spirit of struggle back to Scotland with you. Thanks very much.**

Thank you for having me.

*Sarah Glynn is an activist from Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan who writes for Medya News.*

**For a full report of the local election results and the successful resistance movement to the annulment and subsequent reinstatement of the successful DEM candidate in the municipality of Van, see Sarah Glynn's article 'Resistance Works!'**

**<https://medyanews.net/resistance-works-a-weekly-news-review/>**

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*Note by Ecosocialist.scot: [1] **DEM Party – Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party** is a pro-Kurdish political party in the Turkish state. It is the legal successor of the Green Left Party (Yesil Sol) and with the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) handing over its work to this party in 2023, it has become the*

*latest iteration of Kurdish interests in Turkey. It won 10 provinces and 2.6 million votes (5.7%), the fourth highest vote in the elections of 31 March.*

*Photo: DEM Party Election Rally, Medya News*

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# **Turkey is trying to bomb Rojava out of existence**

*Sarah Glynn of Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan writes for Bella Caledonia*

**'Turkey even announced their intention to commit their latest war crime in advance. On Wednesday, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan, declared that all the region's infrastructure was a legitimate target. According to international law, essential infrastructure is never a legitimate target.'** Sarah Glynn reports for Bella on the unfolding campaign to destroy the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria.

That little click. I check WhatsApp. 'Just now drone attacks next to my house – was bloody scary'. Only two hours earlier my friend had been sending me photographs of his village near Kobanê. Now Turkey's latest assault had caught up with him too.

Since Thursday morning, Turkey has accelerated their campaign to destroy the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria. This is the region that combines predominantly-Kurdish Rojava and the adjacent majority-Arab lands that Kurdish forces liberated from ISIS. It covers around about 30% of Syria and provides home to some five million people. Thwarted,

by the United States and Russia, from carrying out another invasion, Turkey is attempting to destroy the Autonomous Administration by making the life of its people impossible.

Constructing and running a new society is slow and difficult work, especially when your land has been ravaged by ISIS and your neighbours blockade your borders. But destroying a society's security and means of subsistence is simple. Bomb the power stations and substations so millions are left without electricity and there is no power for hospitals, for water pumps, for bakeries, and for the myriad other things that we take for granted. Bomb the gas bottling plant that everyone relies on for the fuel to cook their food and to heat their homes in the winter. Bomb the oil fields that not only provide vital fuel but are also the main source of revenue to support the services of daily life. Bomb grain silos, just filled with this year's harvest. Bomb factories to decimate an economy already struggling to get off its feet. Bomb hospitals and homes so people know that nowhere and no one is safe. Turkey is doing all of these things.



Qamishlo residents queue to donate blood for the wounded

## **A pre-announced war crime**

This is illegal, of course, under international law. Targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure is regarded as a war crime. But Turkey has been committing war crimes for a long time without any comeback. International opprobrium depends on who you are and your political leverage, not on what you do. Turkey bombed the region's vital infrastructure a year ago too, though not as thoroughly as now. Since the beginning of 2021, they have cut the flow of water in the Euphrates, and, since their 2019 invasion, their mercenaries have repeatedly shut down the pumping station that supplies water to Hasaka.

They have performed targeted assassinations of key Administration figures, and shelled villages to drive away their inhabitants. They have committed the biggest war crime of all in carrying out unprovoked invasions, and they have empowered and supported groups that have performed the most gratuitous and brutal atrocities.

Turkey even announced their intention to commit their latest war crime in advance. On Wednesday, the Turkish Foreign Minister, Hakan Fidan, declared that all the region's infrastructure was a legitimate target. According to international law, essential infrastructure is never a legitimate target.



Covid hospital, Derik

## **A convenient pretext**

So, what was Turkey's excuse and what was their reason? Two different questions with different answers.

If you were to believe Fidan, this is a legitimate response to the action last Sunday by two members of the PKK, who carried out a suicide attack on the entrance to the police headquarters attached to the Interior Ministry in Ankara, wounding two policemen. Fidan claims, on behalf of the Turkish Government, that the PKK men came through North and East Syria, and that there is no distinction between the PKK and the Peoples Defence Units (YPG), the Syrian Kurdish forces that are now part of the Syrian Democratic Forces, or SDF. Turkey's attack is thus presented as pre-emptive defence in the fight against terrorism, for which, as the United States has demonstrated, almost anything is permissible. Fidan actually referred to 'YPG infrastructure' as though the armed forces and civilian society were one and the same.

Every step of Fidan's argument is problematic. The Turkish Government has produced no evidence that the men came through Syria, and their presence there has been denied by both the SDF and the PKK. It is no secret that the Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria is inspired by the ideas of PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan, and the YPG includes fighters who have previously fought for the PKK – including the man who now commands the SDF – but the YPG and PKK are separate organisations. The YPG operates inside Syria and has never threatened Turkey. Turkey likes to quote article 51 of the UN charter, which describes the right to self-defence. There has been extensive debate over whether this includes pre-emptive action, but even where this is deemed acceptable, [customary law demands](#) that for an action to be regarded as self-defence, it must be necessary, without other alternatives, and proportional. Turkey's pulverisation of North and East Syria does not pass this test, and is very far from proportional.

## **A useful pretext**

It is clear that Turkey has been looking for an excuse for this aggression, and that if the PKK had not attacked, they would have used something else – or even created an incident themselves. Fidan is notorious for having been [caught on tape](#) in 2014 (when he was head of Turkey's National Intelligence Organisation) proposing a missile strike on Turkey to make up a case for war. [A year ago](#), Turkey justified similar, though less intensive, attacks on North and East Syria by blaming the YPG for a bomb attack in Istanbul that appears to have been linked to militant Islamists – certainly not the YPG or PKK. Turkey's aggression would still have happened sometime without the PKK attack, and cannot be blamed on the PKK – though some will try and do so, which can only benefit Turkey.

The PKK's attack has also been used to justify the round-up

and detention of around 250 largely-Kurdish activists within Turkey itself, including many members of the pro-Kurdish leftist Peoples' Democratic Party, the HDP. There is no reason to assume that any of them had anything to do with the attack. This is simply a bigger version of what has been happening every week, when Kurdish activists are detained for absurd and petty reasons under Turkey's endlessly elastic terrorism act.

## Turkey's war on the Kurds

And what of the real reasons behind Turkey's violence? The answer to this question begins 100 years ago when ethnic nationalism was made a doctrine of the new Turkish republic. Kurds were expected to turn themselves into Turks and forget about their own culture, which was harshly suppressed, and generations of Turks have been indoctrinated with anti-Kurdish rhetoric. For four decades now, the PKK, led by Abdullah Öcalan, has fought a war against the Turkish state. They succeeded in replacing the Kurds' internalised oppression with a proud Kurdish consciousness, but not in winning external freedom. Many times during this period, the PKK has declared a unilateral ceasefire and attempted to negotiate a peace settlement, and sometimes there have been talks, but the Turkish authorities have not proved ready to allow the Kurds a dignified existence. Since the 1990s, there have also been pro-Kurdish political parties in the Turkish parliament, but their MPs and activists face harassment and imprisonment, while [successive parties have been banned and closed down](#). The most recent peace talks took place between 2013 and 2015, when there was a real sense of hope in the air. But President Erdoğan saw that this was winning support for the HDP rather than for himself and his party, and that, at the same time, Kurds across the border were beating back ISIS and strengthening their autonomous control over northern Syria. He repudiated the initial agreement in order to pursue a military 'solution' to the Kurdish Question, which he has been doing with increasing vengeance. A century of ethnic nationalism has

made Kurd bashing a central plank of Turkish populism, and the hopes raised by the main opposition party for a gentler politics did not even last into the second round of the presidential election. Rallying against the Kurds has become a substitute for addressing Turkey's severe economic and social problems.

Erdoğan has always viewed the existence of an autonomous region in Kurdish Syria as a threat, and he will not rest until it is eliminated. It has never been a physical threat, but does indeed pose a political threat to the status quo by providing an example of a multicultural feminist democracy inspired by Öcalan's ideas. While ostensibly supporting the coalition against ISIS, Turkey has given ISIS assistance – not least in enabling the passage of thousands of foreign fighters – in the hope that they will put an end to regional, and especially Kurdish, autonomy. And Turkey has twice invaded the region with the help of brutal Islamist militias, to whom they have given control over the occupied lands. Despite US and Russian negotiated ceasefires, Turkey has not stopped their low-level war of attrition against the Autonomous Administration, and if the US and Russia had not refused to move out of the way, Turkey would have carried out another land invasion.

Russia is in Syria to support the Syrian Government in the civil war. They don't want to see more land occupied by Turkey, but are happy for Turkey to weaken the Autonomous Administration, which they want to force back under President Assad's centralised control. America initially intervened in Syria by supporting opposition groups who they hoped would bring about regime change – the same violent groups that are still supported by Turkey. But when these proved unreliable partners, and when ISIS threatened to create a centre of anti-Western violence, the US moved to support the YPG (and women's YPJ) which was the only force providing effective resistance to ISIS.

America has always supported the Turkish Government against the PKK, but American troops are now also in a military partnership with the SDF (which includes the YPG). Turkey is determined to break that partnership and to persuade America that the YPG and PKK are one and the same, which is another reason for them insisting that the PKK men came from Syria.

However, that US-SDF partnership is limited to the fight against ISIS, which still retains many sleeper cells. America will not help the SDF defend themselves against Turkey, which is a NATO 'ally'. Nor will they allow them the anti-aircraft weapons they need to defend themselves, even though the insecurity created by Turkey's attacks is a gift to ISIS recruiters.

Last week, for the first time, the US brought down a Turkish drone. Of course, that particular drone was seen as threatening an American base, and the incident was followed by top-level phone diplomacy between the US and Turkey. This sent a message that the US was not going to move out of the way, as Turkey had demanded, but all Turkey's other drones and military aircraft were left free to destroy the life and lives of the people of North and East Syria. There have been protests against lack of action by the US, which is supposed to be a guarantor of Turkey's ceasefire.

## **Neo-Ottoman dreams**

Erdoğan feels no need to hide his plans. Shortly before Turkey's 2019 invasion, he held up a map of Syria at the United Nations General Assembly that showed a 30km deep strip all along the Turkish border, over which Turkey demanded control. This strip included the main Kurdish areas as well as some of Syria's most fertile land. Erdoğan called it a 'safe zone', claiming it was necessary to prevent the YPG from attacking across the border. In fact, the YPG has never shown any intention of attacking Turkey, and the areas Turkey captured in 2019 have become some of the most dangerous places

on earth. Kurds and other minorities have learnt to flee rather than try and survive under Turkish occupation. In a deliberate policy of demographic change, they have been replaced by families of Islamist militias and by refugees from other parts of Syria forcibly deported from Turkey.

When Turkey's modern borders were agreed in the Treaty of Lausanne, 100 years ago this year, the Turkish delegation based their negotiations on a document entitled the National Pact, drawn up in 1919-20, which claimed for Turkey all those areas with an 'Ottoman Moslem majority'. This included the predominantly Kurdish regions that the treaty subsequently awarded to Iraq and Syria. There was no separate Kurdish delegation at the Lausanne negotiations, and it was only after the Turkish republic was founded that its leaders [made horribly clear](#) that this was solely a Turkish project and not a joint Turkish-Kurdish one. For Erdoğan, the National Pact is still on the table, and his irredentist dreams for the 'Turkish Century' also inform his desire to control the belt of land south of the Turkish border.



Electricity station, Qamishlo

## **A future in ruins**

After three days of bombardment with drones and warplanes, accompanied by intense shelling of border areas, the devastation Turkey has caused is cataclysmic. Places that have been working hard to recover from the damage caused by ISIS have seen all their hard work destroyed and more. Rebuilding will be difficult and slow, and always under the shadow of a possible repeat attack. The damage to the Suwayda gas plant alone has been estimated at over \$50 million, and essential parts are difficult to get under boycott.

There have been at least seventeen people killed and many others wounded, and the psychological toll of these never-ending attacks is impossible to measure.

The determination and resistance that defeated ISIS remains strong, but if the administration is prevented from being able to meet people's basic needs, dissatisfaction may grow among those less committed to their democratic and feminist project, especially in more tribal areas such as Deir ez-Zor. This is, of course, part of Turkey's plan.

When I spoke to my friend in Kobanê on Sunday morning all was quiet. Unlike in Qamishlo, they still had power, though only in late afternoon and evening as water levels have become so low that the turbines can't function fully. People in Kobanê have become used to drone attacks. Their biggest fear is another invasion and being displaced again, as at the time of ISIS. No one can start new projects: they can't even plan for the next day. There is a sense that the future is out of their hands, and only God will protect them.

As I finish writing this on Sunday night, Turkey's bombardment continues along the whole border region, and calls are going out from the hospitals for people to donate blood for the wounded.

[Sarah Glynn](#)

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<https://bellacaledonia.org.uk/2023/10/09/turkey-is-trying-to-bomb-rojava-out-of-existence/>

*Main image: Kobane Friday 6 October 2023*



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## Hope is shipwrecked: Erdogan's regime wins again

After twenty years in power, *writes Uraz Aydin*, Recep Tayyip Erdogan won again in the second round of the presidential elections on 28 May 2023. Faced with his rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who won 47.84 per cent of the vote, Erdogan, whose bloc had also obtained a majority in parliament, was the winner with 52.16 per cent. Which means that the “Reis” should normally reign over an autocratic, fascist and Islamist regime for another five years.

# The reactionary bloc wins the majority in parliament

The bloc formed around Recep Tayyip Erdogan is probably one of the most reactionary coalitions in the country's political history. Already, since 2015, the AKP [*Erdogan's party*] had been in alliance with the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). For this election Erdogan included in his bloc the Islamist party Yeniden Refah, led by Fatih Erbakan, son of the historic leader of political Islam in Turkey, Necmettin Erbakan.

Another more Islamist wing of the far right, the Great Union Party (BBP) also forms part of Erdogan's camp. This bloc was also joined by HÜDA-PAR, the legal party of Hezbollah in Turkey, mainly established in the Kurdish region and which in the 1990s had been used as an armed force by the Turkish Gladio against the PKK [*Kurdish Workers Party*] and had committed numerous massacres. The regime will try to use this organization to break the hegemony of the Kurdish political movement, which has maintained itself despite a level of fierce repression since 2015.

During the legislative elections of 14 May, which were held at the same time as the first round of the presidential elections, the pro-Erdogan bloc obtained, with 49.4 per cent of the votes, 323 deputies (out of 600). Although his votes were down compared to the election of 2018 when he obtained 344 deputies, Erdogan still has the majority in parliament which allows him to adopt or prevent bills. The results obtained by the AKP were also down, but the MHP, which was estimated to have fallen to 6-7 per cent, almost regained its 2018 level, reaching 10 per cent. However it should be noted that the bloc came first in almost all the cities of the earthquake zone.

## **A defeat for the opposition**

Opposite this bloc was the Alliance of the Nation, whose main party is the Republican People's Party (CHP), a centre-left party whose origins lie in the foundation of the Republic. The other "big party" in this bloc is Meral Akşener's Good Party (İYİP), which is a far-right split, representing a more secular nationalism than the MHP, but trying to reposition itself towards the centre-right .

Also part of this alliance are two parties whose leaders were previously leaders of the AKP, one led by Ahmet Davutoğlu, former Prime Minister, and the other by Ali Babacan, former Minister of Economy. Finally, the Saadet Partisi (SP), which comes from the historical current of Islamism from which the AKP emerged, also participates in this bloc, as well as another small right-wing party.

Politically, this opposition alliance defends a return to a parliamentary regime (abolished by Erdogan in 2017 following a referendum) and the recovery of the economy through a restored neoliberalism with certain "social" traits. With 35.4 per cent of the vote, the opposition bloc obtained 212 deputies, 23 more seats than in the previous election.

The parties of Babacan and Davutoğlu , as well as the SP, whose candidates were presented under the CHP lists, seem to have contributed 3 per cent to the results of the CHP. These right-wing parties thus obtain 40 seats, while they only brought in 22 more. The eligible places reserved for right-wing candidates in these lists had sparked debate among the rank and file of the CHP.

## **Nationalist turn of the opposition**

## after the first round

During the 14 May presidential election, despite all the opposition's predictions, Erdogan won 49.5 per cent of the vote, thus beating the leader of the Alliance of the Nation by 5 points, the latter only receiving 44.8 per cent. Given the importance of the President of the Republic in the autocratic system, Kılıçdaroğlu's victory was decisive for regime change. He led a campaign that was able to embrace large sectors of the population. The fact that he is an Alevi Kurd (a minority stream of Islam seen as a heresy by traditional Sunnism) had generated debate, with many believing that he could not unify the opposition. However, the leader of the CHP led a campaign proudly claiming his adhesion to Alevism and calling for a reconciliation of the population of Turkey in the face of the polarizing policies of Erdogan.

A third candidate, Sinan Ogan, an ultra-nationalist from the ranks of the MHP, won 5.2 per cent. He was the candidate of a small nationalist, anti-migrant and anti-Kurdish bloc, who refused to support Kılıçdaroğlu, in particular because the latter was also supported by the pro-Kurdish party HDP. He thus held a crucial position for the second round.

In order to be able to rally the electorate of Ogan, Kılıçdaroğlu, himself a candidate from a bloc made up of various centre-left, conservative, Islamist and far-right currents, thus operated a nationalist turn.

He argued that, in the context of a victory for Erdogan, 10 million new migrants would arrive in the country, that the cities would be under the control of refugees and the mafia, that young girls would no longer be able to walk around on their own, that violence against women was going to increase (because of the refugees) and that finally Erdogan was going to make concessions in the face of "terrorism" (therefore of the Kurdish movement). He was thus trying to ride the

(massive, among Turks and Kurds) anti-migrant wave by declaring that he was going to send them all back to their own country, but also to reverse Erdogan's main argument during his campaign, that the opposition supposedly supported the "terrorism" of the PKK.

Indeed, the fact that the HDP (pro-Kurdish left) supported Kilicdaroglu, himself Kurd and Alevi, and that it promised to release Selahattin Demirtaş (former HDP leader, imprisoned for seven years) had been Erdogan's main angle of attack against the opposition. After having maintained a more democratic discourse before the first round, Kılıcдарoglu ended up criticizing Erdogan himself for having conducted negotiations with the Kurdish movement (in 2009-2014).

Eventually Ogan preferred to express his support for Erdogan, but the most prominent party in the bloc for which Ogan had been a candidate, the Victory Party, whose main political stance was anti-migrant nationalism, declared its support for Kilicdaroglu. On this, the latter signed a protocol with this party, where the anti-migrant position was reaffirmed but which also promised (within the framework of the laws) the continuation of the appointments of administrators in place of HDP mayors in the Kurdish region, who were accused of having links with the PKK (about fifty municipalities are concerned by this). While in the initial programme of the opposition it was a question of new elections for the town halls concerned.. Although the HDP protested this decision, it continued to call to vote for Kilicdaroglu, but the percentage of participation in Kurdistan, which was already below Turkey's average in the first round, fell further in the second round. Despite everything, the opposition candidate emerged a winner in all the towns of the Kurdish region.

**HDP, TIP and the "Work and Freedom"**

# Alliance

Another opposition alliance was the one called “Work and Freedom,” made up of the HDP (Democratic People’s Party, left-wing party from the Kurdish movement), the TIP (Workers’ Party of Turkey, in which our comrades of the [Fourth International](#) are active) as well as four other formations of the radical left. For the presidential elections this coalition supported Kılıçdaroğlu. For the presidential elections the HDP participated in the elections under the name of its “replacement party”, against the probability that it would be banned, the Green-Left Party (YSP).

The TIP did not present itself in the cities where the HDP had a large majority (Turkish Kurdistan) and in some where it risked losing deputies to the HDP and the CHP; it submitted slates in 52 out of 81 cities. The fact that the TIP wanted to run within the alliance but with independent slates in some cities is a question that has generated a lot of debate. For the HDP, the TIP should have included its candidates in the lists of the YSP; its opinion was that having two competing lists within the same alliance would divide the votes and lose potential elected representatives.

The TIP had another proposal. The party had been observing an influx of members for several months. It had quadrupled its membership since mid-January, going from 10,000 to 40,000 members in four months, in particular because of its mobilization in solidarity with the city of Hatay (Antioch), seriously affected by the earthquake. This participation, but above all the sympathy that was expressed towards the party and its elected representatives, who for five years had led a very combative policy, came from political and social sectors that were largely different from those who had previously voted for the HDP. An important part came from the left of the CHP, but also from an electorate which previously voted for the right but which (especially through the elected

representatives of the TIP) discovered a combative left, which does not mince its words vis-a-vis the ruling circles and gives a prominent place to workers' rights. It was clear that the TIP could not channel all of these votes to the HDP-YSP lists. So its proposal was that the alliance candidates present themselves in certain cities under the TIP lists (even if it meant putting HDP candidates at the top of the list) and thus having a plurality of candidacy tactics according to the demographic, ethnic and social specificities of the localities. This would have increased the results of the alliance at the national level, but also the number of elected representatives. In the end, the two parties failed to agree on this tactic, mismanaged the controversy (which had negative repercussions on the networks) and the TIP ended up presenting itself with its own lists in fifty cities. Among the TIP lists there were also candidates from two Trotskyist currents, the Workers' Democracy Party (IDP) and the International Workers' Solidarity Association (UID-DER).

The HDP-YSP obtained 8.8 per cent in the legislative elections, 3 per cent less than in the previous ones. It is still too early to make substantial analyses, but it seems that support for Kılıçdaroğlu for the presidential elections was understood as support for the CHP (in the legislative elections) and therefore votes went to this party. On the other hand, the 10 per cent barrier (to enter parliament) was an important source of motivation to vote for this party and allow its representation in parliament (and reduce that of the opposing bloc). The fact that this barrier is currently 7 per cent (a threshold that the HDP should easily exceed, according to estimates) must also have weighed, and part of the left-wing electorate who had previously voted for the HDP returned to vote for the CHP and partly for the TIP. Finally, we know that especially within the Kurdish people, certain more conservative and nationalist sectors are opposed to alliances with the Turkish far left; this must also have had an effect on the results.

The results of the YSP, which are considered a failure by the party, have triggered debates and in particular severe criticism from Selahattin Demirtaş, whose relationship with the leadership had been strained for several years. Having played an important role during the campaign from his cell (through the daily visits of his lawyers and his Twitter account directed from outside according to his instructions), Demirtaş has declared his retirement from “active politics”. The HDP is thus embarking on a process of internal debates which will culminate in its next congress.

In this nightmarish panorama a meagre (but significant) consolation is the result that the TIP obtained. For the first time since 1965, a socialist party defending the cause of the working class has managed to enter parliament with its own votes (and not by being elected under the list of another party). The TIP obtained 1.7 per cent with a million votes, only presenting itself in two-thirds of the territory, therefore probably above 2 per cent in total. It thus gained four deputies, three of whom were already in the previous parliament. The fourth, Can Atalay, who was elected as deputy for Hatay, is a renowned lawyer involved in all the struggles of the country and who has at present been in detention for a year and has been sentenced to 18 years in prison for having been one of the main spokespersons for the Gezi revolt in 2013. Can’s case is being appealed; legally he should be able to be freed to take his place in parliament, but the regime refuses for the moment to release him.

## **Rebuilding class consciousness**

If the conditions for carrying out the campaigns were completely unequal (control of the media by Erdogan, etc.) and many cases of fraud were observed, we must recognize that the regime triumphed despite everything. Neither the economic crisis nor the earthquakes of February, and even less the attacks on democracy have led the conservative and popular

electorate to break with the regime. On the contrary, the discontent of the working classes was expressed within the reactionary bloc, but towards currents even more radical than the AKP.

The results of these elections show once again that to defeat the Erdogan regime the defence of democratic and secular values is not enough. If Erdogan's camp brings together different social classes, so does the opposing bloc. Once again we see that the right wing of the opposition, far from being a solution, further strengthens the regime and the dominant bourgeois, nationalist and Islamist ideology. It is necessary to build another polarization, in order to break the reactionary hegemony, but also that of the opposition bloc. A polarization that would allow the dissociation between the interests of the working class, the oppressed and those of the bosses, whether secular or Islamist. The fight against authoritarianism must be invested with a social, class content. And this goes through the reconstruction of the "subjective factor", of class consciousness, of the capacity for self-organization of the exploited, of women against patriarchal domination, of the unification of local and migrant workers, Turkish, Kurdish, Syrians and Afghans. This is the main challenge facing the radical left, from the HDP to the TIP and other currents of the revolutionary left. Certainly the situation is not easy. We recognize our defeat, but we refuse to bend and give up the fight. Being aware of the fact that freedom and equality will only be the work of the workers themselves, as we like to repeat here, we pour ourselves a tea and get back to work...

1 June 2023

*Uraz Aydin is the editor of Yeniyol, the review of the Turkish section of the [Fourth International](#), and one of many academics dismissed for having signed a petition in favour of peace with the Kurdish people, in the context of the state of emergency decreed after the attempted coup in 2016.*

## **Earthquake hits Kurdish regions in Turkiye/Syria**

The earthquake that hit parts of the Turkish and Syrian states on Monday is a tragic disaster for millions of people in the region, *writes Mike Picken*. Tens of thousands are already known to have died and the scale of human disaster is unfolding every hour.

Many of the worst affected populations are in towns, cities and villages with large Kurdish populations. Aid is being mobilised by states and governments around the world, but there is a big issue about the Turkish state government and the officially recognised Syrian state governments being used to coordinate emergency support.

The Turkish government of President Erdogan has sought to repress its Kurdish population for decades and with an election originally scheduled for May has increasingly been attempting political attacks and bans on Kurdish-supporting parties and taking military action in Kurdish areas, including invading and attacking Kurdish communities within the neighbouring states of Iraq and Syria prior to the earthquake. The declaration of a state of emergency gives the Turkish state massive military powers in the affected regions (the Turkish state has the second largest army in NATO after the USA).

The Syrian dictatorship of Assad, backed by the Russian state, has waged a brutal war for a decade with the help of Russian

forces against all opposition to the despotic regime, including the Kurdish liberated zone of [Rojava](#) that stands as a beacon of hope.

The Turkish state also has an appalling record of mismanagement of funds for emergencies and is now apparently blocking independent aid entering Turkey. The progressive Turkish party, the pro-Kurdish HDP under threat of being banned, has issued a briefing to Members of the European Parliament that we are publishing below that warns of the role of the Turkish government and the steps European powers need to take to ensure aid goes to those who need it.

Kurdish fighters were the key element of the resistance to Daesh/ISIS in the region in recent years, but the progressive Kurdish movement is under attack by governments around the world who accept the Turkish and Syrian states' repressive behaviours.

## **Aid must be independent of the Turkish and Syrian states**

The Kurdish community in the region cannot rely on the Turkish or Syrian states to come to their aid in this disaster. It is therefore urging that solidarity and aid pass through appropriate NGO bodies, particularly Heyva Sor (the Kurdish 'Red Crescent/Moon' humanitarian group). Getting funds to Heyva Sor, which is repressed by the Turkish state, is difficult. We don't yet know whether the Disasters Emergency Committee of 14 UK charities is prepared to work with independent Kurdish organisations or whether it will accept the veto of the Turkish state.

So, we are therefore calling for fundraising efforts in Scotland and the rest of Britain to support the efforts of the London-based registered charity the Refugee and Workers

Cultural Association which has launched an appeal for fundraising via gofundme as the quickest way of getting monies to support Kurdish and other communities on the ground. It is also possible to donate from the UK directly to Heyva Sor via its German account. Links for both these appeals are below.

The main organisations in Britain coordinating solidarity and aid in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake are [Scottish Solidarity with Kurdistan](#) and the [Kurdistan Solidarity Network](#) covering England and Wales. We urge readers to support these two organisations. You can also follow developments on the independent news channel [MedyaNews](#). We also publish below the statement of the **Workers Party of Turkey** on the disaster (Workers Party of Turkey is a left wing extra-parliamentary party [supported by members of the Fourth International in Turkey](#)).

## ***Supporting victims of devastating Earthquake***

*FERHAT AKGUL is organising this fundraiser on behalf of REFUGEE WORKERS' CULTURAL ASSOCIATION.*

*At Gik-Der we are dismayed and heartbroken to hear of the terrible earthquakes that have affected various cities in Turkey, in which thousands of people have tragically lost their lives. Many of our members and wider community in the UK are from areas where the devastation has been worst, and we note with a solemn heart that relatives and those dear to us are among those who have been killed. As we come to terms with this grief and loss, we are equally outraged at the government's failure to act with any degree of care and decisiveness in preparation for such events, despite continued warnings from the community. Natural disasters like this are not simply acts of God – the devastation and destruction, the loss of life and limb, are unforgivable*

*failures of a state which places no value on lives.*

*The first and most important foundation for any such struggle is solidarity, and for this reason, we are immediately starting a campaign to fundraise for relief for those effected by this tragedy.*

*Funds will be sent directly to organisations working on the ground to support the victims.*

*Update by FERHAT AKGUL, Organiser*

*Donations are reaching out to those effected. Teams we work with our working tirelessly day and night supporting the victims of the earthquake, even clearing snowy roads to reach the aid to those in need.*

*GOFUNDME Appeal by Refugee and Workers Cultural Association*  
<https://gofund.me/f9db8b43>

## ***HDP Briefing to Members of the European Parliament***

*Instead of monopolising aid, which given the Erdoğan government's track record of financial mismanagement will simply generate more chaos and bureaucracy, we recommend the following seven-point plan to Brussels:*

*The European Parliament and the EEAS should, through resolutions, delegations and diplomatic notes, call on the Turkish government to allow all civil society and political actors to participate in humanitarian relief efforts without facing politically-motivated obstruction;*

*The member states of the European Council should establish*

*and facilitate a joint crisis and recovery group to coordinate relief and rescue operations. The group should include Turkish state and civil society actors such as HD, TTB, KESK, DISK and Egitim-Sen, as well as international institutions.*

*Grants made to the Turkish state in the context of the crisis should be subject to constant scrutiny to prevent nepotism, embezzlement, and misuse of aid funds.*

*It should be made easier for aid organised by European charitable initiatives or smaller aid organisations to cross Turkey's borders.*

*On 8 February, President Erdoğan declared a three-month state of emergency in ten provinces affected by the earthquake. The government is seeking parliamentary approval for this unprecedented measure. This is unnecessary and will most likely serve to further weaken the opposition in the country, which already faces liquidation in the form of ongoing legal efforts to ban the HDP. The EU and international organisations, should strongly emphasise that it is not necessary to declare a state of emergency and concomitant rule of law, while pointing out that this difficult transition can be managed through alternative legislative mechanisms.*

*In addition to the political and humanitarian crisis resulting from ten years of war, Syria has suffered major damage in the recent earthquake. Due to Damascus' obstruction of aid to opposition-held areas, the main routes for aid to enter Syria are via neighboring states. Therefore, it is recommended that all border crossings to Syria be opened so that humanitarian aid can also reach Syria via neighboring states, reaching all regions of Syria including those out of Syrian Government control.*

*The consequences of this earthquake are long-reaching in*

*nature. Millions of people are affected, not only because of the earthquake, but more generally because Turkish society is in a severe economic crisis. Therefore, longer-term support is needed to help people rebuild their communities and homes. Planning longer-term reconstruction assistance for Turkey should be an crucial issue for the EU and international institutions not only in the present crisis, but also in the months and years ahead.*

*If you have any further questions about the situation after the earthquake in Turkey or Syria, please do not hesitate to contact the crisis coordination office of the HDP*

## ***Earthquake Appeal – Kurdistan Solidarity Network (England/Wales)***

*Thousands in Turkey and Syria are still trapped from the earthquake and are sending messages to loved ones from under the rubble. The region affected is largely Kurdish. Please donate to Heyva Sor (the Kurdish Red Crescent). They are the main Kurdish charity on the ground carrying out rescue operations right now.*

*“Today, 6 February, an earthquake of magnitude 7.8 occurred in the Pazarcik district of Maraş city in Northern Kurdistan. After that, there was a second earthquake with a magnitude of 6.4 in Nurdagi district of Dilok and a third earthquake with a magnitude of 6.5 in Islahiye district of Dilok.*

*These strong earthquakes mainly affected the cities of Amed, Malatya, Urfa, Semsur, Dilok and many other areas in northern Kurdistan, the cities of Adana, Hatay, Kilis, Osmaniye and Kayseri in Turkey, and the areas of Cizre, Euphrates and Shehba in northern and eastern Syria. The earthquake also affected the surrounding countries. As a result of the earthquake, hundreds of citizens have lost their lives and*

*thousands are injured. Thousands of people are still under the rubble. Many houses and buildings have been destroyed, with winter conditions making rescue operations difficult.” – Heyva Sor*

*More from Heyva Sor and a link to a Direct Paypal donation, or the bank transfer details to their European branch in Germany:*

<https://www.heyvasor.com/en/banga-alikariya-lezgin-ji-bo-mexduren-erdheje/>

*The Direct Paypal donate button link:*

[https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted\\_button\\_id=ST5BWWFB7FPGS](https://www.paypal.com/donate/?hosted_button_id=ST5BWWFB7FPGS)

*As of today, Monday 7th, the day after the earthquakes the death toll has reached 6,000 with the search for survivors ongoing. With at least 8,000 people rescued from debris in Turkey with 380,000 taking refuge in shelters.*

*Please donate what you can to the ongoing rescue efforts, and share this appeal as wide as you can.*

*Thank you.*

*Published by Kurdistan Solidarity Network 7 February 2023*

<https://kurdistansolidarity.net/2023/02/07/earthquake-appeal/>

***“Our country does not deserve this cruelty – we stand in solidarity with our people with all our***

# **strength”**

*Statement by the Workers Party of Turkey*

*Upon receiving the news of the earthquake that shook our country this morning, we in the Workers’ Party of Turkey took immediate action, and rapidly established a Disaster Coordination Center. Since then, we reached out to many compatriots in the earthquake zone and coordinated humanitarian aid coming from citizens in other provinces.*

*So far, the TİP Disaster Coordination Center has received more than 1500 calls for help. The number of calls reveal the severity of the situation we are facing.*

*– > In many neighborhoods of the Hatay province, especially in Defne and Samandağ, as well as in provinces Kahramanmaraş, Gaziantep and Adıyaman, people have been left to their fate in the harsh winter conditions.*

*– > In these areas, many buildings, old and new, subcontracted via state tenders under the AKP government - public institutions such as hospitals, dormitories, hotels, AFAD and municipality buildings- collapsed. The pro-government construction companies, and the ministries and directorates which awarded these tenders to them are responsible for the death of the young, the children, and the patients. We demand the prosecution of those who caused the death and suffering of thousands of citizens.*

*– > Against all the protests of Hatay residents, experts, and environmental activists, Hatay Airport was built on the Amik Plain, and is now unusable. With the cities’ highways and viaducts damaged, it is now impossible to reach Hatay, and tens of thousands of people cannot receive aid.*

*– > Institutions such as the Turkish Armed Forces and AFAD are tasked with search and rescue and providing food during*

*emergencies. However, under the AKP rule, they have been systematically disempowered, their staff and personnel reduced, and thus they have been rendered useless in search and rescue operations. Besides, many specialized, volunteer search and rescue groups were not allowed to get involved because they couldn't get the necessary certification issued by the pro-AKP bureaucracy.*

*– > In the aftermath of the massive earthquake of 17 August 1999 in northwestern Turkey almost 25 years ago, the “earthquake taxes” collected nationwide were not spent on preparing for earthquakes and ensuring the safety of the citizens, but on roads and bridges that the AKP has built in order to generate political gains and enrich pro-government contractors.*

*– > Our country was hit by two very severe earthquakes during the coldest days of winter. Effective search and rescue in the earthquake region, especially in Hatay, Kahramanmaraş and Adıyaman, is virtually impossible. Besides, there is a lack of food and water supply. Our citizens are trying to rescue their relatives from the rubble by digging with their hands, while those who survived struggle in the freezing cold.*

*– > Our country has been facing a great challenge for hours since the two devastating earthquakes. But the state, the government institutions, specialized experts, means for transportation and sustenance are nowhere to be seen.*

*The people of our country do not deserve to be abandoned to such despair, nor do they deserve the remorselessness of the government.*

*We will never forget and never forgive those who abandoned our people to this fate.*

*We have mobilized with all our power to stand with our fellow citizens who have been left to fend for themselves in these harsh winter conditions.*

*Our people will heal their wounds through solidarity.*

*Our fellow citizens will never be alone and helpless.*

*7 February 2023*

*Published by International Viewpoint:*  
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7979>

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## **Statement by ecology movements in Turkey- demands for immediate action**

*Immediately after the February 6 earthquake, one of the biggest in the history of Turkey, a broad meeting of Ecology Organizations in Turkey published this statement:*

*Our urgent demands from the government, which holds all the resources of the state in its hands, and our call for solidarity.*

*After the 7.7 magnitude earthquakes centered in Pazarcık, Kahramanmaraş, at midnight on February 6, followed by the 7.6 magnitude earthquakes centered in Elbistan at noon on the same day, more than ten thousand buildings collapsed and tens of thousands of people were trapped under the rubble. In reality, it is the government, which is trying to turn this disaster into an opportunity for its own survival and has declared a state of emergency in the region to this end. Organization of civil initiatives and rank and file solidarity networks are vital to making emergency*

*interventions in the areas of destruction and rebuilding life. It is imperative that the disaster is not magnified by obstructing the aid and solidarity of civil initiatives under the pretext of the State of Emergency!*

*The state, unable to fulfill its basic duty of organization and coordination, has left the people of Turkey today with the obligation and responsibility to organize themselves.*

*Our most urgent need today is to weave a solidarity that crosses borders in order to keep alive our people who have lost their living spaces and cannot meet their basic needs in the entire geography affected by the earthquake, especially in search and rescue operations.*

*First of all, we would like to observe that an earthquake is a natural phenomenon, that it has been going on for millions of years and that earthquakes occur for nature to realize itself and for the earth to complete itself:*

*The main responsible for the losses of life is this corporatist government, which has left life to freeze under the rubble, and which no longer functions as a social state. Natural phenomena cannot be characterized as disasters, catastrophes or fate to cover up the massacres caused by the capitalist system based on the greed for profit. Humanity has lived in peace with nature for thousands of years, and has built its social life in harmony with nature, taking into account natural phenomena. Houses were built in harmony with the behavior of nature. Now, the governments that nourish the concrete-oriented urban policies imposed by capitalist modernism with multi-storey buildings, thus paving the way for capital to increase its earnings, bear the main responsibility for these losses.*

*In the last two hundred years, policies that increase the exploitation of nature and labor have been followed. As a result of these policies, we are facing an ecocide caused by*

*the brutal face of capitalism, which causes destruction and collapse by destroying human and non-human life. The region where the earthquake occurred is a region where many ecological crimes have been committed, such as the construction of hydroelectric dams, thermal power plants, nuclear power plants and airports on fault lines and, as a result, lives have been endangered. The only way to defend life against this destruction is not in spite of nature, but in a reciprocal relationship with nature, in peace with nature, and in solidarity with nature.*

*We know that there are many things we need to do to build the life we dream of, but today we are faced with an urgent, vital situation that requires us to act without waiting. As you read this, there are still lives under the rubble waiting to be rescued if they are not frozen. While they are fighting for their lives, the construction and mining companies who caused the collapses continue to count their money.*

*This is our warning to the government, which controls all the resources of the state, about what needs to be done urgently and our public call for solidarity:*

#### *WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE URGENTLY:*

*1. Mining and construction activities, especially in the region and neighboring regions, should be stopped immediately, and construction machinery and equipment belonging to public and private companies should be sent to earthquake zones for search and rescue operations together with technical personnel.*

*2. Civilian and military infrastructure and personnel, and private sector airline infrastructure and search and rescue and relief teams should be rapidly deployed to earthquake areas that cannot be reached by road.*

*3. Buildings such as second residences, hotels, places of worship, including those in neighboring regions, especially*

*reliable buildings in the region, should be put into service free of charge or by using public resources to be used in solving the shelter problem.*

*4. In order to provide vital needs such as clean drinking water, food, clothing and hygiene products, the mechanisms created by civil society for solidarity should be fully and completely coordinated with public services.*

*5. Rescue teams should be formed to include living beings other than humans. The work of civilian teams taking initiative in this regard should be facilitated and supported.*

*6. Since the earthquake occurred in a region with a high concentration of migrants, search and rescue and basic needs should be carried out with full inclusiveness, free from discrimination.*

#### *ECOLOGICAL DEMANDS:*

*1. Information should be provided on the causes of the natural gas explosions and the fire at Iskenderun Port, which materials were burned, and the chemical and nuclear materials, if any, involved in the fire.*

*2. An inventory of hazardous, flammable and explosive materials in the industrial facilities in the region should be made; preventive measures should be taken without delay for possible disasters as a result of aftershocks or new earthquakes.*

*3. More than ten thousand buildings are thought to have collapsed. Work on asbestos, radon and other harmful gases emitted from these buildings should begin as soon as possible to ensure the safety of the people in the region, especially search and rescue teams.*

*4. Damage assessments should begin on the dams, which control*

*water and are an extension of the commodification work, and necessary measures should be taken to prevent a secondary disaster.*

*5. It must be determined whether the chemicals in the mines are mixed with water aquifers; necessary measures must be taken.*

*6. The problems of non-human creatures living in cities and their peripheries, whose habitats we have usurped, regarding nutrition, access to clean and healthy water and shelter must be solved as soon as possible.*

*7. Damage to electricity and natural gas transmission lines in the earthquake zone, explosions in natural gas lines, security dams in the region, thermal power plants in Maraş and Adana poses great risks.*

*8. Large energy investments, security policies and fossil fuels that put life at risk must be abandoned.*

*Our condolences to everyone who is suffering. We are very saddened by our losses, but our sadness does not prevent us from ignoring the cause of the destruction, the slowness of the search and rescue efforts, and the measures that need to be taken to prevent possible further disasters. The state of emergency cannot hide this situation, nor will we allow it to.*

*In solidarity.*

*Climate Justice Coalition*

*Assembly for Unity of Ecology*

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# Earthquake in Turkey: the state versus the people

What do you do when you are thousands of miles from your family, writes [Sarah Glynn](#) on [Bella Caledonia](#), and their phone stops ringing and you don't know if they are lacking a signal or buried under rubble? This is the situation facing very many diaspora families with roots in the extensive region devastated by Monday morning's earthquake. Ugur Cagritekin, from Edinburgh's Kurdish community, told me that around a dozen of his close friends had already flown back to Turkey to try and find their relatives. Many members of his sister in law's family are beneath the ruins.

Those remaining in Scotland, and in other parts of the Kurdish and Turkish diaspora, are working frantically to try and organise aid deliveries to the worst affected regions. Besides damaged roads and severe winter weather, this task is made much more difficult by the Turkish authorities who insist that all aid must be delivered through AFAD, the government's Disaster and Emergency Management Authority. AFAD has been shown to be woefully inadequate for the task it faces, and there are also well-founded concerns over its priorities. Government bodies are known to favour government supporters, and there is no confidence that AFAD will distribute aid where it is most needed. Rather than allow the evolution of local support networks, this top-down approach is designed to make people dependent on, and grateful to, President Erdoğan and his ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP). A record of government corruption makes many wary that aid distribution will be co-opted to boost the image of the government.

Hatice (not her real name), another Edinburgh resident, told

me that she has been working with contacts in Turkey to try and organise the delivery of essential equipment that can help some of the hundreds of thousands of people who have had to leave their homes and are struggling to survive in the bitter cold. They are looking for vehicles that can travel through the snow, and for routes where they can avoid having their supplies confiscated by AFAD. Hatice, in common with a very high proportion of Edinburgh's Kurds, hales from Elbistan. Their hometown, which was very close to the epicentre of the second earthquake that followed eight hours after the first one, has suffered severe damage. Buildings that had cracked with the first quake were brought down completely by the second. Hatice's mother-in-law is lost in her collapsed home, as are many of her cousins and friends.

Monday's earthquakes have devastated ten Turkish provinces that are home to around thirteen million people: well over twice the population of Scotland. They have also caused massive destruction in Syria, especially in government-controlled areas and areas controlled by Turkey (including occupied Afrîn). Autonomous North and East Syria is less badly affected, and their Syrian Democratic forces have offered to provide help to all other parts of Syria – however I only have space to look at Turkey here. The scale of the disaster is terrifying. Thousands are already confirmed dead, but with so many more trapped in the destroyed buildings, and the vast majority of these buildings yet to see any rescue equipment, the number is expected to rise into the tens of thousands. Some fear the final figure may be over 100,000.

Three days after the initial earthquake, which caught people asleep in their beds, many places, and especially smaller towns and villages, have yet to see any sign of official help. Local people are trying to remove the rubble that is burying their families and neighbours with their bare hands, but without the equipment to cut and lift concrete this is often impossible. Chances of survival in the sub-zero temperatures

are eking away with every passing minute.

Even for those who have escaped the initial destruction, conditions are extremely difficult. The risks from the many aftershocks, as well as dangerous structural damage, makes it unsafe for people to stay in their homes, but AFAD has done very little to supply them with the basic shelter, warmth, and sustenance that they need to survive. Many places are without water and electricity. Checking that surviving buildings are safe for people to return to will be a massive task in itself.

Social media is full of desperate pleas for help, and anger at the absence of the authorities that should be providing it. The response from the government has been to clamp down on people sharing news of what is happening. In an angry television message on Tuesday, President Erdoğan announced a State of Emergency in the affected provinces. The main effect of this, like the national emergency following the 2016 coup attempt, will be to allow much greater government control and suppression of criticism. Erdoğan told viewers that he is keeping a note of all the 'lies and distortions' and will open his notebook 'when the time comes'. Already, twitter has been restricted – although it was being used to provide vital information for search and rescue. Journalists have been detained while reporting from the rubble in Diyarbakir, and investigations are being opened against TV commentators and social media users.

The one organisation that has the equipment, skills, and competence to make a serious impact on the rescue efforts, the Turkish army, remains in readiness to invade Syria, but only a relatively small force has been deputed to help the rescue operation.

Prospects are grim and hopes are fading for the tens of thousands still buried.

# A natural disaster in a political context

Before looking at the huge mobilisation by local people in Turkey, and at what people in Scotland can do to help, I want to examine the political context that has massively amplified the horror of this natural disaster. Of course, the focus must be on humanity, but we do need to understand the politics that makes humanity so difficult to achieve, and the political forces that are seeking to exploit the situation for their own, very inhumane, ends.

This natural disaster has taken place in the context of a lethal cocktail of ruthless neoliberal crony capitalism, political corruption, anti-Kurdish racism (which has left infrastructure underdeveloped and attacked political and civic organisation), and an increasingly dictatorial authoritarian regime that will not work with others and will not broach criticism.

Across the affected region, blocks of flats have collapsed like houses of cards. Much of Turkey's recent economic development was based on a building boom, with contracts awarded to government supporters. Turkey is crossed by major geological fault lines, but in the rush for profits, there was no room for such niceties as observing earthquake design regulations. As a friend who works in disaster planning put it to me, you can have a lot of good regulations and codes, but 'the snag is in the governance' and politicians feel that enforcing regulations is not a vote-winning priority and that nothing will happen on their watch.

The neglect of earthquake preparedness has come from the top. After the 1999 Istanbul earthquake, the government of the time brought in what was commonly known as the 'Earthquake Tax', which was supposed to pay for disaster preparation. This is estimated to have brought in £3.8 billion pounds, but there is

no evidence that this has been spent on making anything safer.

It was not as if the government had lacked warnings. The Chairman of the Chamber of Geological Engineers has stated that they had not only expected an earthquake of this kind but had also submitted a report to the president and government on what should be done in preparation, which had received no response. He described the policies of uncontrolled development as 'rent and plunder'.

Despite the palpable and massive failure of the government's disaster response, Erdoğan shows no sense of responsibility, let alone contrition. On Wednesday, when he finally visited Maraş, at the centre of the first earthquake, he told a survivor, 'The damage is done. These things are part of destiny's plan.'

We have seen plenty of evidence of this disregard of safety planning before – notably in the lack of vital planes to fight 2021's forest fires, when, too, Erdoğan seemed more concerned to stamp out negative publicity than extinguish the flames; and also in the mining disasters at Soma in 2014 and Bartın last October, when warnings of dangerous conditions were not heeded, and Erdoğan also provoked anger by putting the blame on 'destiny'.

The abject inadequacy of both preparedness and response has not spared any of the cities hit, whatever their ethnic makeup or political leanings, but it is also significant that the predominantly Kurdish southeast of Turkey, where much of the damage occurred, has been purposefully left behind in infrastructural development by successive governments. And, in the places where the population voted for the pro-Kurdish leftist Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), they have had their elected mayors removed – and often imprisoned – and civic structures that the mayors supported closed down.

When people most need to work together and combine resources,

Erdoğan is terrified of allowing any involvement from other political parties in case it earns them support. Again, this is not a new phenomenon. The central government confiscated aid for Covid victims collected by the Peoples' Republican Party (CHP) mayors of Istanbul and Ankara. An openly HDP delivery of aid to the earthquake areas was seized by the government.

Faced with a disaster of this scale and a response organisation that is clearly unable to cope, most people would have expected the government to turn to the military – the second biggest army in NATO: all the more so as Erdoğan is looking for a popular victory, and what could be more universally popular than an effective response to a major disaster? That he has opted for only a very limited deployment may also be a consequence of his fear of being upstaged. Despite major purges, many in the army do not endorse his turn against Turkish secularism.

The dreadful failures in the government response can also be seen as a product of the arrogance of dictatorship, where one man cannot oversee everything, but others are afraid to criticise: the emperor's new clothes syndrome.

Erdoğan's desperation to hold onto power at all costs makes him prioritise perception over reality. The Turkish government has increasingly resorted to stifling freedom of speech, and last year's Disinformation Law has been widely condemned as a vehicle for censorship and the criminalisation of journalism. Although making political predictions for Turkey has become even more difficult, many must be worrying that if he sees his support falling, Erdoğan might use the emergency situation to postpone the forthcoming election.

The scale of the Turkish Governments failures and of their impacts is staggering, but in trying to understand what could have gone so wrong, I found myself thinking of the Grenfell fire. Turkey's disaster may be a thousand times bigger, but

there are many similarities in the underlying forces and in the attempt to manage perceptions rather than face responsibility.

Inevitably, the lack of effective response – and in many places any response at all – has produced a swell of anger, especially among those who have waited in vain for help to rescue family members trapped beneath the debris. On Wednesday in Adiyaman, where no help had arrived more than two days after the earthquake, the Minister of Transport, and the local governor fled in their cars rather than face the angry crowd. The AKP mayor of Kirikhan has damned his party's government in front of the collapsed building that buried his children. There is a new axiom being shared round Turkey: It is not earthquakes that kill people, it is states that kill people.

## **Solidarity from the grassroots**

In contrast to the state's failures, organisations across Turkey have sprung into action, from political parties to community groups. Cars and trucks are bringing aid supplies from all over the country, organised by local groups or even private individuals.

The big municipalities run by the main opposition Republican People's Party have been coordinating large collections and deliveries of basic aid, with the CHP leader announcing that they will not accept bureaucratic obstacles even if they 'have to be arrested for finding bread and blankets'. And the HDP, which has fewer financial resources and has been deprived of municipal power, is also managing to get deliveries through despite government obstruction. (The scale of the relief effort is going to make government control increasingly difficult to implement.) 93 trucks of supplies organised by the HDP had reached the earthquake area by Wednesday morning, and Ugur Cagritekin told me that they had received news that five trucks had reached Elbistan where supplies were being

delivered to people in need through the coordination of the HDP and the local Alevi centre. They want to take aid to villages as well as the town centre. Some people in the villages have moved from their homes into the relative safety of their more lightly constructed stables, where they can also benefit from the warmth of the animals, but there has been no help from outside.

The HDP's strength lies in its ability to mobilise and organise its large network of supporters and sympathisers and like-minded community organisations. As soon as they heard about the earthquake, the party dropped all other plans, set up a central coordination centre, and dispatched leading members to the affected area. Local election centres were transformed into coordination centres, while the youth organisation concentrated on rescue work. They put out calls for solidarity and for people with shelter and food to share with those without, and they helped create a framework to allow people's natural solidarity to find direction.

I spoke with a volunteer at Rosa Women's Association in Diyarbakir as she took a break from preparing soup and tea for 200 people taking shelter from the dangers of damaged buildings. She told me that their city (the unofficial capital of Turkish Kurdistan) benefitted from being left wing and thus easy to organise. Even in relatively accessible Diyarbakir, where the devastation is patchy, official relief efforts are seriously inadequate; however, although the HDP mayor and council have been removed (and the mayor imprisoned), HDP organisation remains extremely strong.

Their earthquake relief coordination is the HDP's philosophy of grassroots organisation and control put into action. When Ertuğrul Kürkçü, the HDP's honorary president, writes about 'transforming earthquake solidarity into a social movement', he is not talking about an abstract idea but a political practice.

Kurdish communities outside Turkey have wanted to send essential supplies too, but there are reports of deliveries being turned back for lack of documentation, or being taken over by AFAD at the border. The consensus, across the Kurdish diaspora, is to call for financial donations to the Kurdish Red Crescent, Hevya Sor, which operates throughout the affected areas – and of course helps everyone regardless of background. Hevya Sor have the contacts on the ground that enable them to get the aid through to where it is needed, independent of government meddling. So far, this fundraising has been focused on Kurdish communities, but the many other people who want to help and are uncertain who to trust, should be reassured that this is an organisation supported by those with most reason to be concerned.

To donate in from the UK please send to Hevya Sor's German bank account or donate via Paypal:

Account details:

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