

## Editorial

# The Kurdish Question in Turkey

Ayse Berktaş has been locked up in a Turkish prison since October 2011. Her home in Istanbul was raided in the early morning, as she described in *Spokesman 115*:

‘I was taken into custody at 5am on 3 October 2011, when my house was raided by the police. All of us were taken into custody in the same way, at approximately the same hour. My door was not broken down, but the doors of some were. Some of our friends, not at home when the police arrived, went to Party Headquarters (BDP – Peace and Democracy Party) to find out what was going on and what could be done, and were then taken into custody themselves from there ... ’

She and some 200 others are, periodically, before Turkey’s Tribunal with Special Powers as part of the ‘KCK trials’. KCK stands for Kurdish Communities Union, which the Turkish government has labelled a ‘terrorist’ organisation, although the actual basis for this draconian claim is not at all clear.

In 2009, the Turkish government under Prime Minister Erdogan launched a massive campaign of repression against the KCK and BDP memberships. As the BDP gained more electoral successes, so the repression increased. In the 2009 elections, the BDP doubled the number of towns and cities it administers, gaining more than 80 per cent of the vote in some places. It has an overwhelming majority in Diyarbakir, the largest city in Turkey’s Kurdish areas in the south-east. In June 2011, defying repression, the Party had 36 representatives elected to Turkey’s Parliament, comfortably passing the excessively high threshold of 10 per cent of the vote to gain entry.

The situation worsened that year, when secret talks ceased between the Turkish intelligence services and representatives of Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned Kurdish leader. Since then, there have been more waves of arrests of Kurdish political activists and their Turkish comrades, including Ayşe. These continue. Some ten thousand people have been imprisoned, often in pre-trial detention, which can last up to ten years in Turkey. Such protracted detention is contrary to all civilised norms, and has been the subject of persistent complaint and criticism by the Council of Europe and the European Union.

In December 2012, many Kurds, some Turks and various others gathered at the European Parliament in Brussels to consider ‘The Kurdish Question in

## **New pipeline through Kurdish areas of Turkey?**

'... Stretching for miles under a ridge of brown, rugged hills near the Turkish border, Shaikan is huge ... Oil finds such as Shaikan have made Kurdistan, an autonomous region in the north of Iraq, one of the biggest draws in the global oil industry. It has attracted \$10 billion in investment from foreign oil companies – a vast amount for a country of only 4.9 million people ... Initially, the region was the playground of wildcatters – small buccaneers with a big appetite for risk. But now the big boys are moving in. Over the past year, ExxonMobil, Chevron and Total have been grabbing some of the 45 billion barrels of oil thought to lie underneath Kurdistan.

... In 2008, there were only three drilling rigs in Kurdistan. This year there are 24 and next year there will be 40. Production, at about 200,000 barrels a day, will reach 250,000 b/d next year. By 2015, Kurdistan hopes to be exporting 1m b/d. To achieve this will require a major reconfiguration of the region's export infrastructure. The current Baghdad-controlled pipeline is plagued by bottlenecks. Many believe that Kurdistan will build its own pipeline into Turkey, giving it full control over exports. If this happens, the Kurdistan Regional Government will receive oil revenues directly from Turkey, rather than via Baghdad. This will give the KRG the economic independence many Kurds have long craved and build on the close relationship evolving between Kurdistan and its neighbour, Turkey ...'

*Guy Chazan, 'An ocean of reserves waiting to be tapped'  
Financial Times Special Report, 'Kurdistan Oil & Gas'  
10 December 2012*

Turkey'. The conference was sponsored by the United European Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) political group, with support from Greens and Socialists. It had the sub-title, 'time to renew the dialogue and resume direct negotiations'. Notwithstanding attempts by the Turkish authorities to restrict Kurdish participation, the conference heard from many speakers of diverse backgrounds and nationalities. They included two prominent Kurds, Leyla Zana, now a member of the Turkish Parliament, who was previously imprisoned there, and Zübeyir Aydar of the KNK, who participated in the aborted negotiations with the Turkish intelligence services (the so-called 'Oslo Process') that ceased in 2011. We publish their papers here, alongside Ayse's own statement from prison on receiving an award from Turkish PEN, part of an international organisation which supports persecuted authors. Our Dossier section includes eyewitness accounts from some of the ongoing KCK trials.

Early in 2013, it seems that negotiations between the Turkish authorities and the Kurds may resume, once again. Might there be a constructive outcome this time? The day after the Turkish media reported that the Turkish government was discussing a ‘road map’ with Mr Öcalan, three Kurdish women activists were killed in Paris. They included Mr Öcalan’s long-time comrade in the Kurdish Workers’ Party (PKK), Sakine Cansiz. These ‘executions, as they were described by the French authorities, seem calculated to undermine any ‘road map’ or other negotiations.

Some weeks earlier, Mr Öcalan had called for the end of hunger strikes amongst hundreds of Kurdish prisoners, which received an immediate and positive response from the strikers. These had threatened a major crisis in Turkey. As Leyla Zana reminds us, ‘there can be a war without Öcalan, but there cannot be peace without Öcalan’. And there is already much war in the region, particularly in Syria. At the same time, the West wants to exploit Iraqi Kurdistan’s massive oil reserves and export them through a new pipeline via the Kurdish areas of Turkey’s south-east (see box). This may help to explain the somewhat more sympathetic hearing the Kurds are now receiving internationally.



*Ayşe Bertay*