

# German foreign policy and the abduction of PKK leader Cevat Soysal

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Five months after abducting Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan from Kenya, the Turkish secret service kidnapped another political representative of the Kurdish minority. On July 13 Cevat Soysal, a functionary of the Kurdistan National Liberation Front (ERNK), living in Germany, was overwhelmed while visiting the Moldavian capital Chisianu and taken to Turkey. ERNK is a political arm of the PKK.

In contrast to Ocalan, who for weeks had vainly sought asylum in Europe, Soysal is a recognised refugee in Germany possessing the appropriate papers. On July 2 he flew legally to Moldavia, where he was kidnapped in a mafia-style action.

Later, in a state-supervised discussion with his lawyers, he told how his kidnapers placed a bag over his head and dragged him into a car. Then he was taken to a waiting private air plane which brought him to Turkey, where he was tortured for 11 days. He received electrical shocks and injections and was hosed down with a high-pressure water jet. He was also forced to stand naked on a block of ice while his persecutors applied the so-called "Chinese water torture"—dripping water onto his head for hours on end.

Only afterwards was his arrest made public. His lawyers reported that they found signs of wounds on his arms, legs and back. He also appeared forgetful and unable to concentrate.

To what extent the Moldavian government had a hand in Soysal's kidnapping is not clear. PKK representatives declare that after his disappearance on July 13 the Moldavian police stated they had arrested him, but then denied this two days later. It is also unclear whether any German agencies were involved.

The private Turkish news station NTV announced on July 21 that Soysal had been brought from Germany to Turkey, a statement which was immediately disclaimed in a joint appearance by members of the secret service and Turkish Prime Minister Ecevit. They said he had come not from Germany, but rather from "a European country".

Contradictory messages were broadcast in Germany.

According to the German newspaper *Taz* of July 22, the Federal Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of the Interior and the Federal Criminal Investigation Office knew nothing about the abduction.

However, the authorities in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) seemed to be very well informed. The NRW Interior Ministry announced that Cevat Soysal was a recognised asylum-seeker, in possession of a German passport. He had appeared in Brussels as a member of the European leadership of the PKK, under the pseudonym "Mehmet Hodcha". And the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (secret service) was aware that Soysal had been arrested in Moldavia.

Soysal's kidnapping was a blatant violation of basic international law. The actions of the Turkish government have rendered the right of asylum, granting protection to those suffering political persecution, virtually meaningless. Nevertheless, none of the governments that recently organised the bombing of Yugoslavia, on the pretext of protecting refugees and national minorities, have raised even the tamest protest at the actions of the Turkish state.

In an open letter to the heads of state and government leaders in Turkey, Germany and Moldavia, Soysal's wife, Bahar, who lives in Moenchengladbach, accused them of violating the right of asylum. She wrote: "I want to say to you that my husband has already been tortured. For seven years, Cevat Soysal suffered terrible torture in the notorious prison of Diyarbakir. His right leg was broken. His hepatitis originates from this time, as does his tuberculosis and his depression.

"My husband, Cevat Soysal, is a political refugee who has suffered the worst tortures. Once again he has been raped. Is there no longer any protection in Europe for the politically persecuted victims of torture? Can someone just kidnap and abuse these people again and again?"

On the same day that Soysal's kidnapping was announced, Joschka Fischer, the German minister for foreign affairs, travelled to an official gathering in Turkey. It is presumed that the Turkish government deliberately announced the

capture of their victim a few hours before Fischer's arrival.

Fischer was not deterred by this fact. During his two-day visit he did not mention the incident and refused to answer any questions about Soysal. He proceeded from the assumption that the man was being treated in a constitutionally correct fashion. That was all he said—a bit of utter hypocrisy, in view of the obviously illegal capture and reports in the Turkish press that "under fear of death" and "torture" Soysal had made "every possible confession".

Had an Iranian, Iraqi or Serb opposition figure been kidnapped in this way, sharp diplomatic reactions would have followed, if not American cruise missiles aimed at the offending capital. In the case of Soysal, however, the German Foreign Office rushed to protest that it rejected any responsibility for a man to whom Germany had granted asylum.

During his stay in Turkey, Fischer omitted any mention of the case of Ocalan, who is threatened with the hangman's noose. He merely stated that the German Federal Government generally opposed the death penalty. At the same time he professed that Turkey had the right to fight terrorism and separatism "with constitutional means". He declared that Germany regarded the PKK as a terrorist organisation and rejected all forms of separatism. (How this can be squared with German support for the Kosovo Liberation Army remains Fischer's secret).

Fischer even adopted the official phraseology of Ankara, a fact noted positively by the Turkish press. Thus he spoke not of the Kurdish question, state terror or widespread torture, but, after the manner of the Turkish generals, referred only to a "problem in southeast Turkey" where "Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin" live.

Fischer's behaviour is all the more remarkable when one considers that he is a leader of the Green Party, many of whose members actively engaged in protests on behalf of the Kurds. Fischer had justified German participation in the Balkan War on the grounds that one had to sacrifice pacifism in favour of human rights for the Kosovars. Now he is sacrificing the human rights of the Kurds, but in favour of what? Evidently in favour of unstated economic and strategic interests, the very existence of which were denied by all of the governments that prosecuted the war against Serbia.

A close relationship with Turkey is important for the German government for several reasons. First, the country is an important trade partner. Second, it occupies a key position in a region which is increasingly claiming the attention of all of the great powers. Third, Germany, with 2 million immigrants from Turkey, fears the emergence of difficulties in the sphere of domestic affairs should relations between the two governments worsen.

In recent years relations between Germany, the European Union and Turkey cooled noticeably. The refusal of the EU to accept Turkey as an entry candidate led to bad blood.

As a result of the Kosovo war, the specific weight of Ankara increased. Whereas Turkey has always leaned economically towards Germany, militarily it has traditionally supported the US. With the Balkan conflict, the military factor gained in significance. At the same time Turkey is the most important strategic partner of the US in Washington's drive to penetrate the Caucasus and the Caspian sea, where large unexplored oil reserves are to be found.

Fischer's journey had the aim of improving relations with Turkey, no matter what it took. At his last press conference in Turkey he called the discussions "very constructive" and indicated he was entirely in agreement with his Turkish counterpart, Foreign Minister Cem.

Turkey, according to Fischer, is ready "to think about the future". Europe must ensure that the country is not "left to drift away". He promised that Germany would agitate for "full membership of Turkey" in the EU.

At the same time German Chancellor Schröder received a high-ranking Turkish economic delegation, with whom he agreed to close co-operation for the reconstruction of the Kosovo.

For its part Turkey made clear that its price had risen and that it would no longer allow itself to be pressured by demands for human rights. This was made clear by its provocative declaration of the abduction of Soysal directly before Fischer's arrival. Fischer left no doubt that he had gotten the message.

The Turkish Minister of State for European Affairs and Human Rights, Irtemcelik, spoke quite openly about these issues after a detailed discussion with Fischer. In an interview with Reuters (July 22) he said: "The links between Turkey and the EU are important and of strategic importance. They can be damaged if they are overshadowed by a subject [i.e., Ocalan] which will have soon disappeared from the agenda.... In Turkey there is no Kurdish question and we cannot accept such statements. We have no interest in inventing a minority here.... If Turkey receives [EU] candidate status, it will be purely on the basis that all criteria are fulfilled."



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