

Execution of PKK leader Ocalan postponed

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On January 12, following seven hours of intense negotiations by all the coalition parties, the Turkish government decided for the time being against allowing a vote in parliament to carry out the death sentence imposed on Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Abdullah Ocalan. Instead the government proposes to wait for the completion of proceedings by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).

In the Turkish parliament, where right-wing forces predominate, a clear majority for Ocalan's execution is considered to be certain. The ECHR is considering a lawsuit brought by Ocalan's lawyers disputing the legality of his trial. The proceedings could take up to two years before a decision is reached.

Ocalan was kidnapped from the Greek embassy in Kenya in a Mafia-style action last February and abducted to Turkey by members of the Turkish secret service (MIT). Following a degrading political show trial, the State Security Court sentenced him to death. This judgement was later confirmed by the Turkish Court of Appeal, but the sentence must also be ratified by parliament and the state president.

In Europe, and to some extent in Turkey, hopes are now being expressed that Turkey will abolish its death penalty before the completion of the ECHR proceedings. It is not at all clear, however, that the PKK leader can avoid execution before this takes place. Upon announcing the recent government decision Prime Minister Bulent Ecevit from the social-democratic Democratic Left Party (DLP) declared that, should any attempt be made to use this decision against the interests of Turkey, Ocalan's case would be immediately forwarded to parliament.

The January 12 meeting was preceded by a month-long conflict inside the ruling coalition between the DLP, the conservative ANAP (Motherland Party) and the fascist MHP (National Movement Party).

The MHP, which has close connections with extreme-

right Mafia gangs, death squads and special commando forces—and a history of involvement in numerous massacres, torture and murder—made a point of supporting the execution of the “terrorist” and “murderer” Ocalan. In order to put pressure on the government and force a possible split in the coalition, opposition Islamic forces and the conservative TPP (True Path Party) of Tansu Ciller recently sided with the MHP in its campaign for Ocalan's execution.

In opposition to these forces it is not only the PKK and the legal Kurdish-nationalist Hadep (Democratic Peoples Party) which have appealed to the Turkish government, NATO and the EU to arrive at a decision “in the interests of Turkey and its closer links with Europe”. The Turkish Organisation for Industrialists and Businessmen (Tuesiad), as well as the Islamic-oriented employers organisation (Muesiad), have more or less declared their opposition to the execution of Ocalan. State President Demirel and various influential media sources have expressed similar sentiments.

A sizeable section of the ruling class in Turkey fears that Ocalan's execution could re-ignite the Kurdish conflict and endanger Turkey's planned entry to the EU. Portugal, which at present presides over the EU council, again articulated the warning of such a possibility shortly before the meeting of party leaders.

The European bourgeoisie needs Turkey because of the latter's geo-strategical position as a bridge to the oil and gas of the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Middle East. Civil war in the southeast of Turkey is incompatible with the country's membership in the EU and a revival of the Kurdish conflict would have inevitable consequences for Turkish and Kurdish immigration throughout Europe.

The policies of the European countries have nothing to do with any concern for the democratic rights of the Kurds. This has been shown by the rush to finalise weapons deals with the Turkish army. On the same day

as the recent government announcement, editorial offices and apartments in Germany occupied by staff members of the pro-Kurdish newspaper *Özgür Politika* were searched and material confiscated. The raid is regarded as preparation for the banning of the newspaper, although police have denied this.

It is not at all clear, however, whether the calculations of the European countries will prove successful. Up until now the implementation of economic criteria dictated by the EU as the basis for membership, as well as demands made by the IMF, have led to an increasing opening up of Turkey to foreign capital and a corresponding increase in poverty. According estimates of the CHP (Republican People's Party), which no longer sits in parliament, Turkish workers have suffered a 20 percent decrease in real wages over the last year alone. This year has begun with an increase of electricity prices and painful cuts in the credits for peasants, and there is more hardship to come. The country still confronts the necessity of implementing an IMF “deflationary program”.

The debate over Ocalan shows how attempts are being made to divert social dissatisfaction and frustration into reactionary and nationalist channels. This could lead to a break-up of the present ruling coalition in favour of a coalition between the fascist MHP and either the TPP of Tansu Ciller or Islamic forces. Direct military rule is also an option—a scenario which is being publicly discussed by Turkish politicians and commentators.



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