

German government bans Kurdish paper and Palestinian association

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On September 5, German Interior Minister Otto Schily, a member of the Social Democratic Party (SPD) that governs in a coalition with the Green Party, banned the Kurdish daily *Özgür Politika* (Free Politics) and the Palestinian association “YATIM Kinderhilfe e.V.” (Children’s Aid).

A large contingent of police officers immediately implemented Schily’s ruling. Four staff members from the newspaper were arrested, including its managing director, publisher and editor-in-chief.

The reasons cited for this attack on the freedom of expression, the press and the right to organise were not only specious, but also expose the claims of the SPD-Green Party government to advocate a peaceful solution to world conflicts. The German government is seeking to muzzle Kurds and Palestinians, two oppressed peoples, and is acting on behalf of their oppressors.

Two weeks before the German general election, Schily is posing as a hardliner and law-and-order man, for whom fundamental democratic rights count very little. “The government will act decisively against all activities that have an extremist or terrorist background,” he announced.

However, he carefully evaded any explanation of what exactly made *Özgür Politika* an extremist or terrorist organisation. He merely claimed that the newspaper was “demonstrably” linked to the “organisation of the PKK [Kurdish Workers Party, now renamed Kongra-gel].”

What are these “demonstrable proofs”? Schily answered: The “kind of the reporting” they carry out! According to Schily, *Özgür Politika* provides its readers in Europe with information about the PKK and constantly passes on instructions from the PKK leadership.

The “kind of the reporting” objected to by Schily was described in a recent Secret Service report: “the Turkish-language daily paper *Özgür Politika* offers a forum to Kongra-gel by publishing interviews or statements from leading functionaries of the organisation. The paper

regularly reports about Kongra-gel meetings.”

On this basis, Schily maintains that Kongra-gel and *Özgür Politika* are “one and the same organisation.” According to this logic, whoever regularly reports on banned organisations or those the government deems disagreeable and relates what these organisations say and do is a part of these organisations and must suffer prohibitions and persecution.

In similar way, the Bush administration has slandered the Arab broadcaster *Al Jazeera* as a “mouthpiece for the terrorists” because it regularly transmits statements by armed resistance groups or conducts interviews with their members, including Al Qaeda. *Al Jazeera* staff members have been killed by US armed forces in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The German journalists’ union DJU has criticised the banning of *Özgür Politika*, saying, “Police action against a newspaper is particularly serious. It endangers the confidentiality of informants in relation to the press and, at the same time, the constitutionally guaranteed protection of the press.” DJU called the ban a “complete overreaction.”

Özgür Politika has appeared for over 10 years, publishing over 10,000 copies of each edition. It is practically the only Turkish-language daily paper in Europe that does not support Turkish nationalism, and is the only one to regularly discuss the problems of the Kurds in Turkey.

Its perspective is that of Kurdish nationalism, and it is close to the most important Kurdish nationalist organisation, the PKK. Fundamental and unbridgeable political differences with the PKK and with Kurdish nationalism notwithstanding, the *World Socialist Web Site* and Socialist Equality Party (Germany) condemn the ban as a malicious attack on elementary democratic rights.

Schily did not even try to furnish any concrete proof to justify his claim that *Özgür Politika* is an extremist or

terrorist tendency. He would find this difficult. For more than five years, the newspaper has gone along with all the political twists and turns of the PKK leadership. It defended the PKK's glorification of the Turkish state ideology of Kemalism, and supported the US invasion and occupation of Iraq.

As far as the claim of "terrorism" is concerned, since 2000, the PKK—supported by *Özgür Politika*—formally relinquished its guerrilla strategy. According to the High Court, since 1996, the paper is not to be regarded in Germany as a terrorist organisation. Even the Secret Service admits that its propaganda since 1999 has been to advocate the "cultural autonomy of the Kurds within the borders of a democratic Turkey" and that its activities concentrate on improving the prison conditions for the arrested PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan as well as "demands for the acknowledgement of the political and cultural identity of the Kurds in Turkey and the inclusion of the Kurdish question in discussions about Turkey's entry into the European Union."

This line is also put forward by *Özgür Politika*. Schily did not explain what is extremist about this. His arguments resemble those of the Turkish generals and state attorneys, for whom any critical expression concerning the Kurdish question is tantamount to separatism and support for terrorism. Against this background, Turkey is one of the countries with the most imprisoned journalists and bans on the press.

Officially, the European Union also urges Turkey—which is seeking full EU membership—to exhibit more democracy and grant minority rights. For this reason, Kurdish nationalists, including the PKK and *Özgür Politika*, have always placed great hopes in the European Union.

The fact that Schily is now doing the opposite, encouraging the most right-wing forces in the Turkish state apparatus, only appears to contradict this. Germany, like other European countries and the US, endorses Turkey's EU membership, not because it would bring liberty and prosperity but, as Chancellor Schröder recently put it, due to the "geo-strategic significance of Turkey." The country borders on the oil and gas reserves of the Middle East, the Caucasus and Central Asia, where the West has considerable "foreign and security interests." In other words, Turkey is regarded as a military and economic outpost. This cannot be reconciled with democracy and prosperity for the mass of the population—either Turkish, Kurdish or Arab.

This could be seen in the other ban implemented by

Schily on the same day. He justified the actions against "YATIM Kinderhilfe e.V." by saying this organisation collects donations for the social activities of the Islamic organisation Hamas in the Palestinian areas. This is to be regarded as "indirectly" financing their terrorist activities. Schily explained that Germany's repressive action thereby contributes "substantially to protecting peaceful communication between the peoples from a disturbance by terrorist groupings in the crisis-ridden areas of Israel."

This choice of words is remarkable. It does not correspond to international law, according to which Palestinian areas have been illegally occupied by Israel, but repeats the line of the Israeli extreme right, which regards these areas as belonging to Israel and insists that their crisis is a function not of occupation, but rather of the actions of "terrorist groupings."

The words "occupied" or "occupation" did not feature once in Schily's press statement. The fact that Islamists like Hamas, who endorse suicide bombing, have won considerable influence among the Palestinians through establishing a broad network of social support mechanisms rests on the misery, despair and oppression created by the occupation.

For the first time, Hamas stood in elections in the spring in Gaza and the West Bank. It received approximately one third of the vote in the local elections, and in a number of larger cities, particularly in Gaza, won a majority. Schily's ban aims to suffocate political debate among the occupied Palestinians through the force of the state, plunging layers of Palestinians into social misery as punishment for their political preferences.

Schily's possible successor, should the SPD lose the September 18 general election, the present Bavarian Interior Minister Günter Beckstein (from the right-wing Christian Social Union), welcomed and supported the bans.



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