

Three Kurdish nationalist activists assassinated in Paris

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Three female Kurdish nationalist activists were found dead early Thursday morning in the Kurdistan Information Centre in Paris.

The victims were the co-founder of the Kurdistan Workers' party (PKK), Sakine Cansiz, close to jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan; Fidan Dogan, a member of the Brussels-based Kurdistan National Congress; and a young woman, Leyla Soylemez.

The killing reportedly occurred on Wednesday, in a secure building in a busy area of central Paris. Leon Edart, the head of the Federation of Kurdish Associations, said: "The three women were alone Wednesday in the premises of the information centre—which was on the first floor, had a doorbell, and was guarded by a digital code that had to be keyed in to enter—in a building at 147 Lafayette Street in Paris' 10th district."

Late Wednesday afternoon, friends who could not contact them went to the centre. Police were ultimately called and discovered the three bodies in the premises, with shell casings next to them.

According to the Kurdish Association, "two of the women apparently were killed by shots to the back of the neck, the third was shot in the stomach and the forehead." French radio reported they were shot in the head.

French Interior Minister Manuel Valls visited the scene and commented: "These three women were shot, killed, executed without a doubt. It is a serious crime, which is why I am here."

President François Hollande called the murders "horrible," adding that he and other politicians had met regularly with one of the victims.

The murders occurred amid on-going talks between Turkish intelligence officials and PKK leader Öcalan, The Istanbul-based *Today's Zaman* wrote: "Last week,

talks that had begun earlier were resumed, and National Intelligence Organization (MİT) Undersecretary Hakan Fidan has been meeting with Öcalan on İmralı Island, where the PKK leader has been jailed since his capture in 1999."

The talks are part of an effort to integrate the PKK into the Turkish political establishment, in exchange for the PKK dropping its demand for separate homeland for Kurds living in Turkey.

Since it was formed in 1984, the PKK has been in conflict with the Turkish government, demanding a state in Turkey for the Kurds, which comprise about 20 percent of the population. Over 40,000 people have been killed in the civil war. The PKK has been branded a terrorist organization by Turkey and its allies, including the US and the European Union.

Zaman cited Abdülkadir Selvi, a columnist of the conservative daily *Yeni Afaak* who is knowledgeable of the talks, writing: "one of the first questions during the talks—aimed at initially disarming the PKK, according to government officials—from MİT's Fidan was whether the PKK insists on having a separate homeland." Selvi writes that Öcalan was very clear on this, stating that there are no demands for independence.

There is widespread speculation that the Paris shooting was an attempt to undermine the talks. Forces mentioned as possible suspects include PKK factions hostile to the talks, or elements in the Turkish state hostile to a settlement with the PKK.

The deputy chairman of the ruling Turkish Justice and Development Party, Huseyin Celik, suggested that the murder could be an internal feud within the PKK over the peace process.

Zubeyir Aydar, an exiled PKK leader, claimed that it was the responsibility of "dark forces" within the

Turkish state who wanted to see the peace initiative fail.

Several hundred Kurds and PKK activists gathered outside the Kurdistan information centre in Paris with Öcalan banners, blaming both the Turkish government and the complicity of France for the murder. Protests also took place in the south-eastern Turkish city of Diyarbakir.

In Paris, protesters blamed French President François Hollande as well as Turkey for the killings, chanting: “We are all PKK! Turkey assassin, Hollande accomplice!”

Talks between Turkish officials and the PKK are taking place as the US, the European powers, and their regional allies including Turkey are fighting to topple Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, stoking a civil war in Syria by arming Islamist-led opposition forces. This is aimed at mobilizing Syrian Kurds behind the imperialist-led war against Assad. Until now, the Syrian Kurds had taken a neutral position.

Since the conflict began, Western-backed opposition forces have repeatedly attacked the Syrian Kurds, which mainly live in northern Syria.

The ally of the PKK in Syria is the Kurdish Democratic Union, or PYD, together with its armed wing, the People’s Defense Units (YPG). After fighting with Syrian opposition forces in the northern Syrian city of Aleppo last October, the PYD had issued a statement, declaring: “We have chosen to remain neutral, and we will not take sides in a war that will only bring suffering and destruction to our country.”



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