

Turkish police storm opposition media in run-up to Sunday's election

Alex Lantier
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In a blatant attempt to silence opposition media in the run-up to Sunday's general election, Turkish police stormed the headquarters of the Koza-Ipek corporation and took its broadcasts off the air, allowing them to resume only after the media company was under government control.

Early yesterday morning, police fired water cannon and tear gas at employees and supporters of the media firm and smashed their way into the building, interrupting the broadcasts of Kanaltürk TV, Bugün TV, and other Koza-Ipek outlets. Employees barricaded themselves inside the building and continued broadcasting for some 10 hours as police tried to shut them down.

"Dear viewers, do not be surprised if you see police in our studio in the coming minutes," said a Bugün TV anchor as he described the police attack on the station. Ultimately, however, police cut the TV cables. Kanaltürk then broadcast the text, "Our broadcast has been shut down."

At least two reporters were hospitalized after the police assault, including one with internal injuries and another with a broken leg.

The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which is fighting for its survival in Sunday's elections, made no secret that it was seeking to intimidate and silence opposition media.

Speaking to the pro-government A Haber channel, AKP legislator Aydin Ünal declared: "After November 1, we will hold them accountable. The *Sözcü* newspaper insults us every day. There is a lot of pressure on Turkey. If we say something, the world accuses us of interfering with the press, so we're not in a comfortable position now, but after November 1, we will settle up with all of them."

The police storming of Koza-Ipek comes as the

Turkish elections descend into violence. For the first time since 2002, the AKP failed to assemble a governing coalition after the June elections, forcing new elections just as the AKP's shaky "peace process" with the Kurdish minority disintegrated into a civil war, driven by Washington's proxy war in neighboring Syria.

The pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (HDP) is on the verge of obtaining over 10 percent of the vote and entering parliament. This has made it a target of repeated attacks. A June 5 bombing hit an HDP rally in Diyarbakır, killing four; a mob attack in September destroyed the HDP headquarters in Ankara as police stood by; and a bomb attack hit an HDP-led rally in Ankara on October 9, claiming 128 lives.

While Turkish officials have blamed the attacks on Islamic State (IS) terrorists fighting Kurdish militias across the border in Syria, growing numbers of Turks accuse the AKP of working in league with IS to crush the HDP so as to hold onto power.

Koza-Ipek became a key AKP target after emerging as the main outlet in the election campaign for opposition parties such as the HDP, the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP) and the far-right Nationalist Movement Party (MHP). Turkish police raided it in September after the *Bugün* newspaper ran a front-page story on AKP assistance to Islamic State (IS) militias in Syria.

With the AKP's chances of obtaining a parliamentary majority on Sunday appearing ever slimmer, the government moved to shut down Koza-Ipek outright. On October 26, the Ankara prosecutor accused Koza-Ipek of being "involved in the activities of the Fethullahist terror organization," referring to the Hizmet network of US-based Islamist preacher Fethullah Gülen. The courts named pro-AKP "trustees"

to oversee the media firm's activities. The police handed over control of Koza-Ipek to the trustees yesterday after storming the building.

Turkish opposition politicians joined US and European officials in criticizing the police raid. HDP Co-Chair Selahattin Demirtas said, "This is 'AKP Turkey.' It is not an acceptable practice. At first it seems like oppression of a media outlet, but, in fact, it targets the entire society."

Several CHP legislators visited Koza-Ipek headquarters in support, with Baris Yarkadas declaring: "Today is a shameful day. Everyone who made this decision and those who implemented it will have to answer for their crimes."

US State Department spokesman John Kirby called on Turkey to "uphold universal democratic values... including due process, freedom of expression and assembly, and, of course, access to media and information."

The European Union (EU), through spokeswoman Catherine Ray, called for "the rule of law and media freedom" in Turkey.

The criticisms by the US and the EU of their AKP ally reek of hypocrisy. The major factor in the AKP's attempt to erect a presidential dictatorship around Erdogan is the intense international crisis caused by its own disastrous policies of war and austerity.

Economically, Turkish capitalism is reeling from the collapse of its main export markets in Europe under the weight of EU austerity measures.

And despite the bloodthirstiness of its policies, the AKP has proven incapable of adapting to the twists and turns of Washington's incoherent Syria policy. The AKP played a key role in arming Islamist militias against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, but it was taken aback when the US turned against IS in the summer of 2013, after IS attacked the US puppet regime in Iraq.

This sudden shift provoked a deep crisis in Turkey. The AKP launched a large-scale purge in the media and political establishment, ostensibly aimed at the Gülen movement, which it accused of trying to carry out a US-backed overthrow of Erdogan.

The AKP became terrified when Washington began relying on Kurdish militias to fight IS in Iraq, fearing that Kurdish forces might place territorial demands on majority-Kurdish areas of Turkey.

In July, Ankara seemed to obtain a green light from Washington for war on the Kurds in the form of a plan for Turkey to invade northern Syria to prevent the Kurds from seizing the area. At this point, a bombing in the Turkish city of Suruç targeting people preparing to fight with Kurdish forces in Iraq claimed 28 lives and wounded over 100. Ankara blamed the bombing on IS, but large sections of the Turkish population blamed it on the Erdogan government.

Washington seems to have walked away from the plan for a Turkish invasion of Syria, however, after this threat of escalation prompted a Russian military intervention in Syria. This month, the US has announced plans to again rely on arming the Kurds as shock troops in the US war for regime-change against Assad.

With Syria engulfed in civil war and millions of refugees fleeing to Turkey and Europe, Turkey itself is descending into civil war. There is growing concern in the European bourgeoisie that such a conflict could spread uncontrollably, including into Europe, and force even larger numbers of refugees to flee the Middle East.

"Pushing Turkey towards a Turk-Kurdish civil war, as [Erdogan] is doing, means pushing the country towards catastrophe," political scientist Michel Naufal told *L'Orient Le Jour*, adding: "If he resumes the process of peace and reconciliation with Kurdish society, the internal situation can, probably, be stabilized."

Bay-Ram Balchi of France's International Research Center told RTL television, "I do not want to start crisis-mongering, but it would really be better for us if Turkey did not transform into a second Syria. Then we in Europe would have both Syrian and Turkish migrants."



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