

Little peace and goodwill – a weekly news review

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Sarah Glynn

As the Christmas music plays, I write of economic despair and prison torture, of international intrigue and international indifference, of floods and drownings. None of these things take a seasonal holiday, and neither does Kurdish resistance. But in a concession to the season, I will keep this week's news review brief.

Turkey's economic roller coaster has continued to dominate international headlines. On Monday evening, after his insistence on interest rate cuts had

left the Lira plummeting below eighteen to the dollar, President Erdoğan announced his rescue plan. The Turkish Government has given a guarantee that if Turks move investments back into Turkish Lira for at least three months, and this results in a loss due to exchange rates, the government will make up the difference. Experts told the Wall Street Journal that any short-term stability would come “at the expense of exposing public finances to potentially unlimited risk”, and that this was a “huge income transfer to the banking sector”.

At the same time, Reuters reports that the state banks, backed by the Central Bank, have supported the Lira through selling off over 8 billion dollars in reserves. While Turkish investors seem to have been unconvinced by Erdoğan’s offer, the bank’s intervention enabled an impressive rally. He is looking for a reprieve that will reverse his party’s declining ratings and enable him to call and win an election; however, the value of the Lira is still well down on last year, and economic problems are far from over. The fall in the Lira has been responsible for big increases in the already high inflation, as it affects the cost of everything that has to be imported, and this has led to real and widespread suffering.

International media is much less concerned over Turkey’s plummeting human rights. On Thursday, politicians and activists in Istanbul protested prisoner deaths. Seven political prisoners have died in just the last few days. Their rally was banned and eleven protestors were taken into custody.

In Izmir, eight political prisoners have been on hunger strike since 28 November in protest against a new Warden who “behaves as if it were his private dungeon”, and is “driven by his ‘hatred of Kurds’”.

Turkey has also confiscated the assets of 770 people whom they accuse of being close to “terrorist organisations”, including 108 said to be close to the PKK, and a further 89 said to be close to prescribed leftist organisations. Some of those affected are in exile.

Fehim Tastekin points out in Al Monitor that the collapse of the Turkish Lira has also impacted the Turkish-occupied areas of Syria, where mercenaries are paid in Lira and it is the de facto currency. He writes that “The meltdown in the Lira has heated up the in-house rivalries over financial resources between armed opposition factions and fueled public discontent in opposition-held areas,” and comments that this could erode the control of the Turkish-backed militias.

North Press Agency reports the Syrian Government’s strong criticism of Turkey and of Turkey’s support for terrorist organisations, as well as Syria’s strengthening ties with Russia and Iran.

Continued Turkish attacks on North and East Syria, in defiance of ceasefire agreements, last week claimed the lives of four civilians.

The Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria has announced that financial shortages have prevented the implementation of a range of vital planned projects, including supporting farmers and building medical centres. Although the US recognises that stability is central for the fight against ISIS, North and East Syria’s financial difficulties are made much worse by US sanctions, which affect the whole of Syria.

And now the Kurdistan Regional Government has announced the continued closure, for a further two months, of the one crossing through which humanitarian aid can reach North and East Syria. This is far from the first time that the Kurdistan Regional Government, which has close links with Turkey and no sympathy with the Autonomous Administration, has kept the crossing closed.

Political intolerance in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq was demonstrated this week through the censoring of Ersin Çelik’s film, ji bo Azdiyê, which was removed from the Suleimani Film festival. The film was made in Rojava, and tells the story of the Kurdish resistance in the Sur district of Diyarbakir in Turkey against the siege by Turkish Government forces in 2015-16.

Meanwhile, last week's fatal floods in Hewlêr (Erbil) have highlighted yet another aspect of the corruption that pervades the Kurdistan Region. The disaster killed twelve, with a further two unaccounted for, and opposition MPs have blamed it on projects by private developers linked to government elites, which have diverted and blocked vital drainage routes.

It is this debilitating corruption and growing authoritarianism that is driving people to escape the region. On Tuesday evening, a boatload of would-be migrants went down in the Aegean Sea on its way to Greece. Twelve people were rescued, but there are believed to have been very many more on board – perhaps even 70 in total, mostly from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

While recent focus has been on refugees pushed back from the Polish border, Open Democracy has reported that, "since May 2021, 233 Turkish nationals seeking asylum in Greece have been illegally forced to return to Turkey where they risk political persecution".

Peace and goodwill seem in very short supply.