

# Daily oppressions – a weekly news review

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Most Kurds could have told you that Turkish politics was no stranger to illegal activity, with close links to people and organisations openly acknowledged as criminal – and that the promises to get rid of corruption, made by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan when he first came to power, were nothing more than empty vote-catchers. But it has taken the YouTube confessions of a convicted mafia boss for this to become headline news.

Sedat Peker's viewing figures must be the envy of every serial producer, and he clearly knows how to put on a show, with calculated delivery, cliff-hangers, and props carefully arranged to fuel discussion. His credentials hardly

guarantee honesty, but his devastating accusations of murder and drug trafficking provide specific charges against leading politicians from within the government's inner circle. His main targets have been Interior Minister, Süleyman Soylu, former Chief of Police and Interior Minister, Mehmet Ağar, and Erkam Yıldırım, son of former prime minister Binali Yıldırım. Every revelation comes as a bombshell, and the drama is only enhanced by Peker's former closeness to those he now betrays, who, particularly in Soylu's case, he claims have failed in their promise to protect him. His accusations make especially riveting viewing because people's existing understanding of Turkey's political reality ensures that these are convincing. A poll has shown that over 50% of Turkish citizens believe them to be true.

Erdoğan has confounded speculations that he would let his interior minister take the brunt of the accusations and use this as an opportunity to regroup his supporters. On Wednesday, he finally came out in Soylu's support, and resorted to his favoured response to any setback by equating the attack on his government with an attack on Turkey. He blamed the United Arab Emirates, where Peker is believed to be based, and lashed out against all opposition politicians.

Peker's claim that Ağar was responsible for the murder of journalists and of Kurdish businessmen in the 1990s came just as a recent Appeal Court decision to reject his acquittal for these murders was made public. In December 2019, Ağar, (who had already served a year in prison in 2012-13 for mafia links) along with eighteen others, was found not guilty of killing nineteen people. The case will now go back to court. One of those killed was Savaş Buldan, husband of Pervin Buldan who is co-chair of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). Savaş Buldan was kidnapped, tortured and murdered in 1994. Pervin Buldan has commented, "We have said it for years and we are saying it again. Savaş Buldan and his friends were killed by those who ruled the state. Those who committed were put on trial only for show and were acquitted. Now we are going back to the beginning and we will take action for their trial."

Also on Wednesday, the HDP put forward a parliamentary motion calling for an investigation into Peker's allegations. They stressed the need to look into

the murder cases from the 1990s and at more recent massacres, as well as to investigate Peker's close links with the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and National Movement Party (MHP) alliance, for whom his high-profile support included organising rallies. The Republican People's Party (CHP) supported the HDP's motion, but it was – predictably – rejected by the combined AKP/MHP majority.

While all eyes have been fixed on Peker's YouTube crime drama, the Turkish state has continued with its usual round of oppression against its citizens. To try and give a sense of what this means on the ground, here are the Turkish news headlines from Mezopotamya News Agency's English language website for Monday to Friday this last week. In quieter countries, almost every one would be the cause of major scandal.

24 May: "Politicians detained with raids on their homes: 49 detained." (These raids were carried out in several cities and the detainees included executives of the HDP and the related Democratic Regions Party.) "Law suit filed against musicians singing Kurdish songs." (The artists, who performed at the Newroz celebrations in Van, sang a song recalling the PKK singer and guerrilla commander, Hozan Mizgîn.) "Hunger strike in prisons enters day 179." (Political prisoners are on a rotating hunger strike to protest the continued isolation of Kurdish leader, Abdullah Ocalan in İmralı island prison, where he is denied access to his family and his lawyers in contravention of Turkish and international law. There is also a supporting hunger strike in Maxmur refugee camp in South (Iraqi) Kurdistan, and an indefinite non-rotating hunger strike in Lavrio refugee camp in Greece.) "Şenyaşar Family: Killers are known but there is no prosecutor in sight." (Emine Senyaşar and her son Ferit have been holding a sit-in in front of Urfa Courthouse every day since early March. She is demanding justice for her husband and two other sons who were lynched in hospital after the family were attacked for asking the AKP politician, İbrahim Halil Yıldız, and his associates to leave their shop during the 2018 election campaign.) "Lawyers of Öcalan submits new application for a visit in İmralı." (The lawyers regularly submit applications, which are as regularly refused.) "İzmir Bar Association files criminal complaint against Peker, Soylu and Açar."

25 May: "3 people shot at border, not even statement was taken from victims." (In two separate incidents within a week, soldiers wounded civilians near the border with South Kurdistan, but the soldiers have not been required to give statements. Similar incidents have been going on for years.) "Hunger strike resistance in prisons enters day 180." "Our reporter Lezgin Tekay detained." (Tekay was on his way to visit family in Ankara. Journalism in Turkey is a dangerous profession – especially if you work for Mezopotamya News Agency.) "Campaign for imprisoned journalist Aslan." (Mehmet Aslan, another of the agency's reporters, had been held on remand since January.) "Attorneys of Öcalan submits new application for a visit in İmralı." "Proofs of torture Soylu denies." (Soylu had appeared on television evading questions and denying any torture had taken place under his term of office, despite copious evidence. The [article](#) outlines some examples.) "Kidnapped by MİT officers, our reporter Tekay was released." (The reporter told how he was forced into a white van without a numberplate by men who said they were from the National Intelligence Agency (MİT), and who asked about his contacts and invited him to work with them. This was the day after Soylu had said on television "I'll resign if there is any proof of people being abducted like they did in the 90's".

26 May: "37th group takes over the rotating hunger strike." "Police breaks arm of a 55 year old woman, knocked her teeth out." (Kevser Demir was protecting her drug-addicted son who was being violently detained.) "Petition signed by 768 lawyers demands Öcalan to meet his lawyers." "Brother of Sedat Peker confesses to the murder of journalist Adalı." (Atilla Peker was named in one of his brother's videos as part of an MİT-planned assassination in 1996 of a Cypriot journalist, who was actually murdered by 'another team'.) "83-year-old Özkan taken to prison in handcuffs." (This seriously ill Kurdish prisoner who can't walk unaided has been handcuffed to his hospital bed.) "Our reporter Aslan released at first hearing."

27 May: "The Ministry of Internal Affairs preventing the establishment of the PIA: They want rights for the Kurds." (For three years, the Humans and Freedom Party has been refused recognition because it has "right to self-determination, education in mother tongue and cultural rights" in its charter.) "DTK Co-Chair Güven sued for saying 'Mr. Öcalan' 9 years after Supreme Court

decision.” (Kurdish politician, Leyla Güven, who is already serving a 22-year prison sentence, faces new charges for referring to Öcalan with the title ‘Mr’, on the grounds that this ‘praises’ a criminal. The use of ‘Mr’ was deemed legal freedom of expression by the Supreme Court in 2012.) “Rotating hunger strike action in prisons on its 7th month.” “Attorneys of Öcalan submits new application for a visit in İmralı.” “Request of 34 times aggravated life sentence for defendant of Suruç bombing.” (33 young socialists died in this ISIS bomb attack. Many believe that the bombing could not have happened as it did without the knowledge of the state. “10 new summaries against HDP MPs.” (The Turkish government likes to ensure its dominance through multiple charges. The summaries against HDP MPs in this parliament add up to over 1,000.)

28 May: “Hunger strike resistance in prisons enters day 183.” “Journalist Aslan: My time in prison confirmed the reality of our news.” “Soldiers opened fire against villagers protesting marble quarry: Gendermerie forces us into migration.” “Şenyaşar family: We are sworn, we will not give up.” “Demirtaş sentenced to 2 years 6 months in prison for ‘insulting the prosecutor’.” (Frivolous cases are used to keep the HDP’s former co-chair in prison despite the European Court of Human Rights’ calls for his immediate release.) “Lawyers of Öcalan submits new application for a visit in İmralı.”

Oppression within Turkey continues to be accompanied by an aggressive foreign policy outwith its borders. Turkey’s military operations in the mountains of South (Iraqi) Kurdistan have been going on for over a month, with Turkey dropping bombs and troops, PKK guerrillas fighting back against the invaders, and villagers displaced and wounded. The guerrillas claim that Turkey has calculated on large scale casualties, preparing hospital space in readiness.

The Kurds understand these attacks as part of an existential war in which Turkey is determined to wipe them and all they have achieved off the map. Erdoğan’s neo-Ottoman dreams extend to include Kirkuk, Mosul and Aleppo, and everywhere Turkey occupies they replace the existing population with jihadi mercenaries whose outlook resembles that of ISIS and al-Qaeda. But the mainstream media has ignored the war in the mountains, and international

acknowledgement of what is happening remains minimal. Kurdish protests have hardly registered beyond Kurdish circles.

Lack of media coverage and international interest is even more startling when it comes to Turkey's water war against North and East Syria. Turkey is continuing to hold back the water of the Euphrates, depriving the population of safe drinking water, and devastating agriculture and electricity generation. The river that watered the roots of Middle East civilisation is being used as a weapon to destroy the possibility of civilised life of any kind.

And, while the Syria Democratic Forces (SDF), of the Autonomous Authority of North and East Syria, track down ISIS cells – separate operations on Monday rounded up 24 suspected ISIS members and uncovered an underground weapons depot – more former ISIS leaders have been identified as redeployed in Turkey's mercenary militias in occupied Sere Kaniye.

The Autonomous Authority refused to take part in the widely-criticised elections that have just seen Bashar al-Assad 're-elected' as President of Syria. They were not prepared to do anything that could be interpreted as giving him legitimacy, and argued that elections should not be held before Syria had come to a political solution and recognised equal rights of different groups. However, Turkey ensures that the Autonomous Authority is not even allowed at the table where the future of Syria is discussed.

Lack of international recognition has also made it difficult for the Autonomous Authority to get access to vital Covid vaccines, as well as other essential supplies, and the World Health Organisation has been criticised for failing to deliver the promised doses. While some vaccines have now come through, they are very far from enough.

Meanwhile in Turkey, the mafia state has ensured that government has focused on concealing the spread of coronavirus rather than preventing it. As the social and economic impacts of this feed back into popular discontent, we can expect the government to grow even more belligerent.