

HDP ELECTION DELEGATION REPORTS: UK

On the call of the HDP, several election observers travelled to the south of Turkey to witness November's snap General Elections. The delegates included Margaret Owen, human rights barrister, Melanie Gingell, barrister, John Hunt, journalist; and Kawa Besarani, human rights advocate and political analyst; and academic David Graeber, among others.

Lord Hylton election observation report, 3 November 2015.

Sur, Diyarbakir.

Witnessed several security forces vehicles around the district and next to polling stations, including Landrovers (Types 21 A 0224, 0225) and armoured vehicles, with a top-mounted machine gun (Type 21 A 0957, 1007, 0999). Some of these had "Cobra" marked on the body. Usually they were operating in pairs, with one Landrover and one armoured car.

At one polling station at a school, two of those vehicles were removed from the schoolyard and parked outside.

At a school next to the markets, plain clothes agent No. 2372 explained to us that the vehicles could not be moved out because they would block the narrow roadways. This pair of vehicles was neatly tucked in at the end of the school. (Iskander Pasha [?])

Please pass this information on to the HDP in case it is useful for them.

I will make complaints about the damage to the Fatih Pasa Camii Mosque (dated 1512) and to the houses in Sur.

Altogether the visit went well and we had a simply splendid woman interpreter.

Margaret Owen: Observations monitoring the election in Diyarbakir

5 November, 2015



The results, that came in on Sunday night took many of us, the international observers of the election, by surprise. Last night we

wept, as the first fireworks, music and song, of what everyone thought would introduce a night of celebration, turned into dark hours of grief and anger, which ended when the armed police arrived with their tear gas and water cannon, stone throwing from the youth, arrests and more violence. How will the peace process with the Kurds be resurrected after this result? When Erdogan himself has stated that it is in tatters. But perhaps all is not lost for ever. The AKP got a majority but not a "super" majority in numbers. He will still need support from the other parties to rewrite the Constitution in the way he wants, that is, to give himself a life presidency and in reality, a dictatorship, far removed from Ataturk's creation of a secular republic. At least the HDP kept its 10% threshold. Although they lost many votes they still have representation in parliament. It could have been worse.

Our UK delegation had been in Diyarbakir for the previous 2 days, having meetings with the HDP, with Kurdish lawyers Bar associations and with civil society and Kurdish Womens organisations. Not one person during our many hours of discussions predicted that the Erdogan's AKP party would increase its vote and obtain the majority the President needed to govern

without having to form a coalition. So of course it was a shock and a grave disappointment when there had been such optimism.

The general forecast was that either the results would be the same as in the June election, or that the HDP would increase its votes and numbers of MPs. It was hoped that many intelligent Turkish citizens having growing concerns about the increase in authoritarianism, the move from a secular state to one much more Islamic, issues with corruption, and concerns about Erdogan's ambiguous connections with ISIL would vote HDP.

There was increasing evidence the justice system was a disgrace, lacking any independence, and that use of torture by police and security personnel during arrests, in detention and in prisons was making Turkey a target for condemnation by international human rights organisations and liberal thinkers. The thousands of political prisoners including lawyers, politicians, trade unionists, journalists and teachers, the attacks on the press and the collapse of the peace process with the Kurds, when most people wanted peace, would bolster extra votes for the HDP.

Alas this did not happen. So fearful were the AKP of possible defeat that the week before



the election they raided and closed down several media outlets, blocked mobile phone communication, and we were told, used a variety of intimidation tactics, as well as "buying votes" by dispensing money bribes to poor people in some of the villages.

Before the election, and around the time of the massacres in Cizire and Sur, Turkish governors in the Kurdish regions were ordered to dismiss their Kurdish co-mayors,

and 22 of these men and women, have been arrested and imprisoned under the anti terror act for allegedly supporting the PKK and their cousins across the border in Rojava. Our group observed the election process by visiting 6 schools in Sur, a poor area of Diyarbakir. We were able to enter the classrooms where the voting room place. And watch how people came with their IDs, and were instructed how to stamp the voting slips, which contained the flag symbols of 16 parties. We also managed to remain in the room in one school where the count took place. In this South East part of Turkey, by decree, that clocks had not turned back as in the rest of the country, adding to confusion and uncertainty.

The polls opened at 8 a.m and closed at 5 pm in the west, but here the hours of voting were from 7 am to 4pm, and it was expected that some voters, especially the old and



illiterate, would get to their voting venue too,late. Here are just some of the concerns we had about the fairness and transparency if this election.

1. The presence of armed police and of armoured tanks within the school precincts. Police were not, under the election management rules, allowed to enter the rooms where people came to vote, nor park armoured tanks within the school playgrounds, In 3 of the 5 schools, the tanks were there, surrounded by police with their fingers on the trigger.

2. The tension and the fear the presence of the armed police was palpable. For the people were still traumatised by the violence of the police raids, the bombing and shootings of September in Cizire and Sur, and the deeply distressing and unjustifiable

desecration of Kurdish cemeteries. We were told that many residents, registered to vote here, had left the area as their houses were destroyed, or they were too frightened to stay. These poor people did not return to vote, partly because such a journey would be expensive, because they had lost faith in the process and also because they were frightened.

3. The police, in one school where they refused to move their tanks to the road outside claimed that they were "defending the people as this district was a terrorist zone" and that their armoured tanks would block traffic if parked in the lanes outside. There were rumours that police snipers were staking out positions on school roof tops, which impelled some of the people to break down a locked door on the top floor and go up to ensure no police were up there. This reaction indicated the intensity of the fear among the voters.

4. We learnt that the AKP had flooded the villages with money bribes and with white goods, to "buy" votes. We heard several accounts of intimidation, threats to take away benefits, jobs, etc. unless they voted for the AKP.

5. Although the abolition of the Village Guards was one of the several conditions set out in the Copenhagen criteria (for accession to the EU), last month the Government appointed another 5,000 village guards, these people would have been used to bolster support for the AKP, in the rural areas, using any means they chose.

6. Shortly before the election, it was ordered that there should be "consolidation of the ballot boxes". In some towns, and villages deemed areas of violence and instability the boxes would be removed and residents there would need to travel to wherever their boxes had been relocated. Illiteracy, poverty, and transport problems were likely to have caused some loss of votes for the HDP as in every polling booth room there were many registered to vote who failed to turn up. Or maybe they came after 4 pm, not realising that the clocks in the South East were still on summer time.

7. We were never refused entry to the schools nor to the voting rooms, and indeed were greeted warmly by the municipal officials who were managing the voting process. People were frightened that the police would target them if they saw them talking to our delegation. The HDP and the Human Rights Association told us "make your presence known" and we did. But monitoring elections for fairness and transparency really requires observers to be around some weeks before and some days after. We only had 2 days, so our observations were necessarily limited.

Our principal concerns on the day of the election was the heavy presence of the armed police and the tanks in places they should not be, if elections are to be fair, and voters are not intimidated.

Margaret Owen, human rights barrister and Peace in Kurdistan Campaign patron

Siirt election monitor report: Armed intimidation in North Kurdistan

NOVEMBER 4, 2015 ~

by KURDISHSOLIDARITYNET

**Pictures:

<https://kurdishsolidaritynetwork.wordpress.com/2015/11/04/siirt-election-monitor-report-armed-intimidation-in-north-kurdistan/>

On the 1st of November 2015, we travelled from the UK to Siirt, in North Kurdistan – the mostly Kurdish region in South Eastern Turkey – as one of several delegations who arrived there to observe the Turkish elections.

These were the second elections of 2015, after the ruling AKP lost their absolute majority and the HDP – a pro-Kurdish party – won parliamentary representation in the June election. The November elections were held in an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty following renewed attacks on Kurdish groups from both state and non-state forces within Turkey, alongside

widespread repression of opposition media and political forces.

Volunteer electoral monitors came at the invitation of the HDP, who had been concerned about the very real possibility of fraud and intimidation of voters on polling day. One of our groups was sent to Baykan and Kurtalan areas, to the north of Siirt. During election day this group visited nineteen polling stations. Another of our groups was sent to the Pervari regions, east of Siirt, and visited three polling stations. The findings of both groups are detailed below. In the Baykan and Kurtalan areas, we accompanied a delegation of elected officials from the HDP party. A strong police and military presence was witnessed all across these areas, with police concentration in cities and larger towns, and military and village guards in villages and rural areas.

In a total of three places in the Baykan area, we were denied entry by police or military, each time told that our names were not to be found on the list of people who were allowed to enter the polling station. At Cumhuriyet primary and secondary school in Baykan, police demanded to see our passes to prove that we had permission to enter. HDP party delegation members debated with the police, and we were briefly granted entry. We made it as far as the first voting room – in time to see a soldier in full combat uniform drop his vote into the ballot box whilst uniformed and plainclothes police removed us from the school.

The second station that we were denied entry to was near Cumhuriyet Ortaokulu, a school called Baykan İlçe Halk Kütüphanesi. Some of the same plainclothes police from the previous school had followed us there. We were told that we could not enter because we were not on their list, and that we should not attempt to enter any other polling stations.

The third station that we were denied entry to was in a village in the Siirt-Baykan area, a school called Sarısalkım Ortaokulu/ İlkokulu – both a primary and secondary school. A group of six soldiers armed with Heckler & Koch G3s were sat on small hill immediately

adjacent to and overlooking the school. This was the first time we had seen soldiers next to a polling station. Two of the soldiers entered the courtyard just after we had arrived with the delegation, and told us that we were forbidden from entering the building.

The police we saw in the Baykan areas were almost all armed with handguns, and some carried automatic rifles. At the first school we were denied entry to, two automatic rifles with grenade launchers attached were propped up against a wall behind four police sat at the school's main entrance. The village guards we saw – in both the Baykan and Kurtalan areas – generally carried Kalashnikov rifles, and the soldiers in the same areas carried Heckler & Koch G3s. In front of one school in the Kurtalan area – Kayabağlar Çok Programlı Anadolu Lisesi – a light machine gun stood on the ground with a British-Canadian Arwen 37 grenade and tear gas launcher behind it, and four soldiers carrying G3s sat to the side.

At several of the polling stations in the Siirt-Baykan area, we saw police or military vehicles parked within the grounds of the schools, often close to the entrance.

At the Arınç İlkokulu – a primary school in the town of Ziyaret near Baykan – a 4x4 with a machine gun turret was parked right in front of the main entrance to the school. We saw another similar vehicle parked outside the polling station at Baykan İlkokulu, another primary school.

A police car was parked right next to the entrance of the Gazi Mustafa Kemal primary and secondary school.

An armoured personnel carrier (APC) was parked in front of Kız Yatılı Bölge Ortaokulu, a secondary school in the Baykan area. Police were also nearby.

Of the nineteen polling stations we visited in the Siirt-Baykan and Siirt-Kurtalan areas, most were schools, and without exception, outside all the stations we saw either police or military.

Along with the APC mentioned previously, there were several police in the courtyard of Kız Yatılı Bölge Ortaokulu secondary school in Baykan.

Over ten police were noticed in the courtyard of Veysel Karani Ortaokulu, a primary school in the town of Ziyaret, Baykan.

In the courtyard of Atabağı Ortaokulu, a secondary school in the Baykan area, we counted three soldiers and five village guards standing in the courtyard.

At 30 Ağustos Zafer İlkokulu, a primary school in the Baykan area, we noted two soldiers and three village guards stood in the courtyard.

In the courtyard of Vakıfbank Nizamettin Sevgili Ortaokulu, a secondary school in the Kurtalan area, we noted six soldiers with blue berets carrying G3s, two of whom entered a polling room as we were leaving. This school was next to the Kayabağlar Çok Programlı Anadolu high school, with the heavy weaponry depicted earlier.

At least six military were seen in the courtyard of Aktaş İlkokulu, a primary school near Siirt.

In many cases, the security forces presence in the courtyard of the polling stations were clearly visible from voting room windows, some of which were very close to polling booths.

The military and police presence we saw in these regions served not only to intimidate us as election monitors – so much so that after being removed from and then refused entry to two schools, come the third we voluntarily didn't attempt to enter, to avoid any potential confrontation with the police there – but locals told in several places of as many as fifty people in their town or village who hadn't come to vote because of the security forces presence. In one instance, we entered a polling station at Yukarı Tütenocak İlkokulu primary, only to find a room of soldiers and village guards sat at tables eating lunch, right next to the polling booths.

A local official, required to remain present at the voting table throughout the election, was not at the station, as rather than have his lunch there amongst the soldiers and village guards, he chose to disregard his duty and left to eat at his home.

As the group of election monitors sent to Pervari, we were refused entry into the first school that we went to. We were told that we were not on a list to monitor the elections, and that we should have arranged to be on the state-approved list. An hour later, we walked to a second school, where a massive armoured personnel carrier waited outside the school gate. We tried to go inside and were immediately turned away. The police officer told us that it would be impossible to gain entry.

We were told about problems with fraud in Pervari earlier on in the day. A man had managed to vote without showing his identification and had been spotted doing this and was reported.

Throughout the Siirt-Baykan, Siirt-Kurtalan and Siirt-Pervari areas of North Kurdistan, marked intimidation by the mere presence of police and military at polling stations was clear to those of us acting as election monitors this November 1st 2015 election in Turkey.

**Election Observation Notes by
Prof. David Graeber, Cllr Aysegul Erdogan,
Elif Sarican & Rebecca Coles**

We arrived in Diyarbakir in the late hours of Friday 30th October. There was an uncomfortable quiet in much of the city, several streets lined up by armored vehicles. Whilst the previous election campaign was conducted amidst a festival feeling, the November 1 snap election lacked any normal signs of rallies or expected election campaigns. (The only thing that resembled a campaign event that we witnessed the entire time we were there was a group of chanting AKP supporters who marched down the

street of Siirt, the night before the election, followed by a tank.)

That evening we met with other observers from the UK, as well as members of the Swiss and Austrian teams. Some of stayed in Diyarbakir; another team set off for Siirt by car by the next morning, stopping briefly at Silvan, a municipality that had recently declared self-rule. The HDP office there was bustling with activity, and we were greeted warmly (with endless portions of tea), and given some background on the local situation. By mid-afternoon we had arrived in Siirt itself, where we met at the offices of Elif Akgül Ates, co-vice chair of the Municipal Authority. There we divided into three groups, each being assigned a different town for the next day's polling observation.

The team sent to Sirvan arrived the next morning around 10am. The town was calm, without a substantial military presence, with the HDP offices a beehive of activity. Endless portions of tea were served. The directors apologized for the run-down condition of the surroundings, explaining that alone among the major political parties, the HDP was systematically denied government campaign funding: since 2002, laws had to be changed on three different occasions in order to disqualify them.

We visited two polling places in the town itself, and four in villages in the countryside around it. The two urban polling stations were calm, with police outside the buildings, and armored vehicles parked in the school playgrounds in one case, but otherwise we were told by the local HDP officials that everything was proceeding normally. We then visited the villages of Hesgo, Orek, Osyak, and [Turkish name] Nallikaya. In each of the first three, members of Village Guards units armed with automatic weapons were positioned ostentatiously outside the polling places. At Hesgo, we asked the armed men stationed at desks by the main door of the school why it was necessary to maintain an armed presence: they replied that there was the danger of clashes between HDP and AKP voters, and that they were instructed to separate and thus protect both sides to any conflict.

While on the road, we received reports from one village where HDP support was particularly strong, that voters were protesting the removal of their polling station from the school, where it had always been in the past, to a distant health center, making it impossible for them to vote. Reportedly, no votes at all were cast from that particular village.

At the final village on our itinerary, Nallikaya, we found not only Village Guards but armed Gendarmes, positioned inside the building at the door of the polling station. At this station we were at first allowed to observe the voting, but, after a local political representative approached the gendarme commander, were suddenly informed that our observer registration numbers did not match their list, and that if we did not leave the premises immediately we would be subject to arrest. When the Sirvan HDP co-chair, who was present, asked the commander why he had been positioned inside the building contrary to law, he responded extremely aggressively accused her of lying and stated he had never been inside the building.

The same day, our Diyarbakir team visited the DBP and HDP offices in the city, and met the DBP co-chair Ali Simsek, who gave us some background on the AKP's military campaign in the city and Kurdish region more generally. We asked him where the other, female co-chair (Hafize Ipek) was, he explained she had been imprisoned for the last three months, accused of giving statements in support of the Kurdish movement. We subsequently met with two MPs for Diyarbakir – Caglar Demirel (HDP) and Ziya Pir (HDP), and Omur Onen and Gulsan Ozer, co-chairs of the HDP's Diyarbakir Office. They explained the HDP was not able to conduct normal election campaigning as their hands were full supporting the wounded, and families of the killed, from the Ankara bombings. They also expressed concern about the placement of over 5000 "Village Guards" hired through AKP-controlled Ishkur (job centres) in rural communities throughout the province, and

also noted the government's refusal to provide normal campaign funds and the fact that rallies and other campaign events had become impossible for security reasons. Finally, they expressed serious concerns about the Supreme Electoral Board (YSK), whose named the chairs of the various polling committees – while members of NGOs and trade unions had been rejected from such positions, many of those named were local imams who are constitutionally forbidden to take such roles. 1,800 activists, journalists and elected officials, we were told, had been arrested since June, including 40 co-mayors, throughout the whole of the Kurdish regions.

Our team proceeded to Çermik, where we visited six polling places, all located in schools, all surrounded by armed men. The largest was Çermik Anadolu Lisesi, where we encountered numerous police and gendarmes. Inside this particular school, we attempted to question the chair of the polling station, an imam, asking whether his presence was in accord with constitutional principles, the AKP MP candidate Beran Çelik, entered the room with a coterie of supporters, and protested our presence, saying in a very aggressive fashion “our country is a democratic country. We do not want you here.” As the conversation became heated, a crowd gathered behind him, and he insisted that we leave at once. The delegation attempted to de-escalate the situation, explaining that our presence was a normal procedure, but as larger numbers gathered and many began shouting at us, our HDP escort convinced us to withdraw. (We had just received news that one member of the HDP escort of another delegation had been arrested in a nearby town, and we feared for the safety of our own guides.) Every school we visited in this region were “protection” by heavily armed government representatives, either soldiers, Village Guards, or both.

General Reflections

We heard numerous stories while we were in the region of various forms of pressure and intimidation wielded by government

representatives to influence the vote. These ranged from reports of workers in state institutions or those with large state contracts being informed they would be fired if they did not vote AKP, to polling places being relocated “for security purposes” to inaccessible locations, to stories of Village Guards openly intimidating HDP voters, but being represented in the official press as PKK guerillas intimidating those who wished to vote for the AKP.

According to these accounts, the bias of official institutions in favor of the ruling party was explicit on every level. For instance, in the June elections, the AKP granted itself \$330 million for campaign expenses, and all other parties received such funds, except for the HDP, which received nothing. Even the MHP, which had in fact received a smaller share of the vote, was granted \$100 million. All institutions were said to show a systematic bias against villages or neighborhoods known to be HDP strongholds: we were even told that municipal authorities would not collect the trash in such areas. One frequently mentioned problem was that the structure of government allowed for Ministerial Offices to override almost any decision made on lower levels, or for that matter, even constitutional principles (such as those banning any military presence in polling places) more or less at will - as a result, even when the HDP received 95% of the vote in certain districts, and all locally elected officials were HDP, ministerial representatives could simply overrule all local decisions rendering such elections effectively meaningless.

This was one of the main reasons many such communities had made declarations of self-determination, which of course were represented as illegal uprisings by the Turkish state. Such declarations were regularly met with the imposition of curfews and sieges by the Turkish military, often leading to numerous casualties. We witnessed many neighborhoods where walls were pock-marked with bullet holes as a result of such operations.

In conclusion, we were impressed by the determination of so many opposition voters to attend the polls despite what was clearly in many cases the clear intention of the government to discourage them from doing so, using both the implicit threat, and in some cases at least, the explicit use of physical violence.

Erdogan Won Bloodstained Election, But HDP Hope Lives On

By John Hunt:

The author was an elections observer in Turkey on 7 June and 1 November 2015

Tear gas and water cannon, fired against angry Kurdish youth, marked the end of the 1 November elections in Amed (Diyarbakir), in stark contrast to the heady celebrations that followed the 7 June polls. This time the results were disappointing for the pro-Kurd HDP, which lost more than a million votes and 21 parliamentary seats while, against expectations, the ruling AKP got more than 4 million extra votes and regained its parliamentary majority. Fundamentally both elections were not really about parliament, but the powers of Turkey's president. Recep Tayyip Erdogan craves more power and has masterminded a shockingly effective campaign to secure it.

'We Are Scared ...'



Bullet holes on the front and inside of the Fatih Pasha Mosque, Sur

"We are scared of what will happen after the election and expect horrible things", said an old man the night before the latest poll. He lives in Sur, a working class district within Amed's old city walls, which went through days of terror in September when state forces surrounded the area with paramilitary police, soldiers, armoured vehicles, tanks and helicopters, seeking to crush the armed youth of the YDG-H (youth wing of the PKK guerrilla movement) who'd built barricades and declared local self-rule. The military stormed into people's homes and put snipers on rooftops, targeting young guerrillas and anyone that moved, while residents cowered in corners of their rooms. The military blasted [Sur's historic Fatih Pasha Mosque](#) with shellfire and one of them sprayed graffiti on a nearby wall proclaiming, "Allah is great and so is Turkey". The YPG-H withdrew, but the state maintained its ring of steel during a four-day curfew. People got hungry. When 10 year old Helin Sen popped out with her aunt to buy some bread, a sniper shot her in the head.

Her father, Ekrem, was at his brother's because the military wouldn't let him go home through their checkpoints following a stay in hospital. At 8.15 that morning he spoke to his daughter on the phone. "I am going out to the bakers", she told him. At 8.30 his phone started ringing as his neighbours gave him the dreadful news. For a while Helin lay shattered, bleeding in the street. People were frightened but someone ran out, waving a white cloth, and carried her home. Ekrem kept calling for an ambulance but was told they couldn't get into the area. Eventually three turned up but

were kept outside the 'security zone'. Ekrem argued with the military who let him through to walk home with his hands held up. With neighbours' help he carried his daughter's body in a carpet out of Sur and to an ambulance.



Ekrem Sen, holding photo of his daughter Helin (Pic – Kawa Bessarini)

“They called her a terrorist but she was only a child,” said Ekrem. A team of lawyers is

trying to pursue a case against his daughter's killers.

Civil War Climate

Helin's cruel demise illustrates the oppressive conditions under which these elections were held. The 7 June result deprived the AKP of its parliamentary majority, blocked Erdogan's ambitions for an executive presidency, and confronted him with a vibrant and radical new party, the HDP, which won by a landslide in the south-east and was successfully appealing beyond its core Kurdish constituency to significant numbers of Turks and others yearning for a democratic and inclusive society. People were inhaling solidarity and hope and, for Erdogan and the AKP, this was like sunlight on a vampire. They set out to poison the atmosphere and re-run the vote. To suppress the HDP's message of peace, they manufactured a climate of civil war.

Their strategy had twin objectives. One was to cripple the HDP's ability to campaign through terror and repression, frighten off many of its Turkish supporters and re-establish the AKP in Turkey's south-east (Kurdistan). Their parallel goal was to stoke the fears and prejudices of millions of Turkish nationalists and Islamists and rally them to the 'strong man' president and his party with a promise of stability. Erdogan

fostered division and death and said, “Look, this is what happens when we don't have a majority”. He steered coalition talks between the political parties into an impasse and called fresh elections having reignited the state's war on Turkey's Kurds.

The period between the elections was defined by two terrorist atrocities, in Suruc on 20 July and Ankara on 10 October, killing 135 people. The Suruc blast murdered 33 young socialists — Kurds, Turks and others planning to cross the Syrian border to bring toys for Kobani's children and help with the reconstruction of that war-ravaged city. Mindful that the AKP had backed ISIS against YPG guerrillas during last winter's siege of Kobani, many blamed the state for the bombing and, two days later, two Turkish police officers suspected of collaborating with ISIS were shot dead in the border town of Ceylanpinar. Reportedly a PKK-aligned group claimed responsibility although, in an [interview with The Pasewan](#), PKK leader Cemil Bayik has denied their involvement. The AKP seized the pretext to launch waves of intensive air raids on PKK bases in the Qandil mountains, destroying a peace process that was boosting HDP popularity at its expense. Inevitably, the PKK ended its ceasefire and hit back at state forces, taking significant casualties and killing around 200 soldiers and police in several clashes.

On cue, Turkish nationalists and fascists turned their ire on the HDP, [ransacking and burning 128 HDP party offices](#) during a 48 hour period in September, often while police looked on. There was also an upsurge of racist attacks on Kurds in Turkish cities. The state stepped up its repression of Kurdish activists: around 1,800 HDP supporters were arrested, including dozens of elected co-mayors. In areas where the YDG-H is strong and there were declarations of self-rule, such as in Sur, Cizre, Silopi and Şırnak, the state imposed shoot-to-kill curfews and terrorised residents. In [Cizre](#), 21 civilians were killed. In Şırnak, the body of 24-year-old actor Hacı Lokman Birlik was tied by the neck to the back of an armoured vehicle and dragged through the streets.

On 10 October terrorists attacked a peace rally in Ankara called by trade unions, professional associations and the HDP. 102 were killed and more than 500 injured in two explosions. Following the blasts police fired tear gas at the survivors and delayed ambulances getting to the wounded. Who was responsible? Cynically prime minister Ahmet Davutoglu tried to blame the PKK, claiming it was working with ISIS. However, it was soon revealed

(by [‘Radikal’](#) and [investigators from the opposition CHP](#)), that the state had known the culprits for some time: they were on a watch list of people who had trained in Syria as suicide bombers. Apparently the security forces received intelligence of a bomb plot three days before the Ankara attack naming, among others, the two men who carried it out. They had belonged to a jihadist group in Adiyaman, near the Syrian border, whose members — all known to the security forces — were also involved in the 20 July Suruc attack and the 5 June bombing of an HDP rally in Amed. The state of Erdogan and Davutoglu may carry on ‘investigating’ these crimes but the cats in the streets know they are guilty, at least, of wilful negligence leading to mass murder.

Mass protests and strikes followed the Ankara attack but its net effect was to push the HDP off the streets. The party cancelled rallies for security reasons and relied on low-profile door knocking in contrast to its high-profile run-up to 7 June when HDP candidates toured Turkey’s towns and cities in campaign buses with sound systems. Meanwhile, [reports the ‘Economist’](#), in the first 25 days of October Turkey’s state-run TV station gave the AKP 30 hours and Erdogan 29 hours coverage, while the HDP got 18 minutes.

In Kurdistan, the HDP was prevented from campaigning in ‘security zones’ and had to contend with the mergers of many polling stations, forcing people to travel beyond their villages and neighbourhoods to vote. The Islamist Hudu-Par decided not to stand this time, encouraging its supporters to vote AKP. Through its ‘employment agency’ the AKP reportedly recruited 5,000 extra village guards last month, buying more votes and increasing the militarisation of the region.

Kurdistan’s Militarised, Crooked Election

Tanks in the playgrounds and gunmen in the corridors: that was the scene in Sur’s schools serving as polling stations on 1 November. Armed police told a group of international election observers, including the UK’s Lord Hilton, that “This is a terrorist zone” and “We can’t park our vehicles outside the school because there isn’t enough room on the street”.



Polling day in Sur (Pic – Kawa Bessarini)

At 22 polling stations in Sirit, [election observers recorded a heavy military presence](#) and were several times denied entry and unable to see what was happening inside.

Like many crimes of deception, voter fraud can be hard to prove, especially when the perpetrators control the entire electoral process, making it easier to cover their tracks, and they have armed forces at their disposal to intimidate witnesses into silence. In such circumstances you want to strike lucky and catch the criminals in the act.

When election observers, including human rights barrister [Melanie Gingell](#), arrived at the Karabas village school there was immediately a difficult atmosphere. It appeared that all the election officials were AKP supporters and that illiterate women were being ‘assisted’ to vote. When the observers suggested that any assistance should be given by an independent person, they were surrounded by AKP supporters “with obvious hostile intent”. A group of local women arriving to vote were ushered into a side room and the door shut, as a mob of 20-30 men forced the three visiting women (two observers and a translator) and their male driver out of the

building. The driver was punched and kicked and taken round a corner to be roughed up some more before they were all made to leave the village. On 7 June Karabas village had backed the HDP, at the expense of the AKP; on 1 November that result was reversed in a microcosmic expression of democracy Erdogan-style: if people don't vote the way you want, change the game and try again.

In how many other villages — where there were no observers or they turned up at less revelatory moments — did similar or worse abuses occur?

The argument that the village women should be 'assisted' because they were illiterate was refuted by the local election committee chairman in another village, Qarto, who called in the soldiers when an argument developed after a man tried to insist on his right to help his elderly, illiterate father to vote. Questioned later by election observers, the official showed us two paragraphs in an official manual stipulating that voters could be assisted on the grounds of their physical disabilities but not illiteracy. Evidently the application of the rules depended on which party would benefit.

Before the June poll, the independent teachers' union could nominate some of their members to chair local election committees. Not this time: instead mainly pro-AKP and male teachers and other public employees were appointed by a tamed YSK (Supreme Elections Board). In one polling room, in Cernik, the definition of 'civil servant' was stretched to cover an imam who was given the job of overseeing the voting by his congregation. When election observers, including London councillor Aysegul Erdogan, questioned him we were surrounded by an irate group of AKP supporters, including the local MP who told us, "You have no right to be here" and "There is no such thing as Kurdistan". We went back at 4pm and caught the imam allowing someone to vote after the official close of polling.

The teams of volunteer observers, who came from several European countries at the HDP's invitation, could make only a limited

impact although, as one HDP activist mused, perhaps we slightly reduced the AKP's tally of stolen votes. Our concerns were echoed by [Andreas Gross, head of the European Parliamentary observers delegation](#), who said: "Unfortunately, the campaign for these elections was characterized by unfairness and, to a serious degree, fear".

The [international election observer mission of the OSCE](#) expressed its "serious concern" over the [curbs on the media](#), and noted restrictions on "some contestants' ability to campaign freely" and the "increased number of attacks against and arrests of members and activists, predominantly from the People's Democratic Party (HDP)" before the vote.

Results – and 2.1 Million 18th Birthdays?

Erdogan got his way. The right wing Turkish nationalist MHP lost 2 million votes, many of which likely transferred to the AKP, which also grabbed votes and seats from the HDP, while the secular, quasi-Kemalist CHP secured an extra half million votes, some probably from Turks who had backed the HDP last time.

The HDP's 5.1 million votes was 1 million down on June but better than the 3.9 million it got in the 2014 presidential election. Despite the terror campaign against it, the HDP has retained a presence in the mainly Turkish cities in the west and still has [several MPs from Turkey's non-Kurdish minorities](#). It won by a reduced but big majority in Kurdistan. Nationally it crossed the critical 10% threshold, with 10.75% of the vote, and is now the third biggest party in parliament.

Did the Kurdish movement make mistakes that electorally damaged the HDP?

A ['Guardian' editorial](#) argued that rivalry between the PKK and HDP "probably played a part in the return to war between government troops and PKK fighters". However [PKK leader Cemil Bayik has rejected this](#) saying that "the HDP project was initiated by Apo (*the jailed Kurdish leader Abdullah Ocalan*) and the PKK" and that, despite the peace process, Erdogan was

planning a renewed war on the Kurdish movement from last October, when the Kobani siege was at its height.

Another factor is the impact of declarations of self rule in Kurdish areas which, [according to reports](#), cost the HDP votes due to the ensuing repression and disruption of local businesses. The declarations partly reflected pressure from alienated youth eager to take on a brutal state and achieve rapid change: for example, in Amed on the night of 1 November, young Kurds briefly confronted police while chanting, “We don’t want peace, we want to fight, fight, fight!” Perhaps some business votes were lost, but not all of them. A restaurant owner in Sur told us: “We are not ready for self rule, it was premature and meant I couldn’t get to my restaurant for nine days. But, despite this mistake, when I went to the polling station I put my hand on my heart and knew I couldn’t vote for anyone but the HDP”.

Against the background of chicanery, intimidation and murder it was probably inevitable that the HDP lost ground. “Maybe we lost one million votes, but we are a party that managed to stand up against all massacre policies,” said HDP co-leader Selahattin Demirtas, adding that their biggest ‘mistake’ was to be successful on 7 June and frustrate Erdogan’s plans.

The unexpected huge rise in AKP votes cannot be fully explained by people switching from the MHP or HDP. Michael Rubin has [highlighted a glaring irregularity](#) at the first stage of the electoral process. In Turkey, people are automatically registered to vote on their 18th birthday. Between 7 June and 1 November the numbers registered increased by 2.1 million (from 54.8 million to 56.9 million), a slightly bigger rise than in the previous four years. It doesn’t add up. Rubin argues that: “It appears that AKP supporters were registered at multiple sites and so, in effect, voted two or more times ...Numbers don’t lie. Erdoğan stole this election, plain and simple”.

What Next?

Hard times lie ahead for millions — Kurds and other minorities, women, workers and progressive Turks — following the AKP’s victory. Discussions have started on a new constitution and Erdogan’s messianic ambition for executive presidential powers is firmly back on the agenda. The AKP is 13 seats short of the three-fifths parliamentary majority it needs to call a referendum on the presidency, but it can probably corral extra votes from the MHP. That would mean yet more repression of the Kurdish movement and there will anyway be scores of trials of those detained before the elections. The air raids on the Qandil and state killings in Kurdish towns continue and the PKK has called off its latest, one-sided ceasefire. Erdogan talks of “liquidating” the PKK but may in future consider some kind of renewed peace process if he feels sure of being the beneficiary — for example, by sowing divisions among Kurds.

The Turkish president is eager to invade Syria and attack the remarkable Kurd-led Rojava administration. Although constrained by the US and Russian involvement there, he will seek pretexts to seize territory around Tel Abyad and Jarabulus with the objective of strengthening his hand in the Syrian imbroglio while disrupting, then destroying Rojava’s contagious experiment in equality and grassroots democracy which has helped inspire the rise of the HDP.

Across the Iraqi border is another ruler who doesn’t hesitate to break the rules to retain power. The Kurdistan Region’s technically superannuated president Barzani no doubt breathed a sigh of relief at Erdogan’s triumph. However, Sulaimaniya-born political analyst Kawa Bessarini (an election observer in Turkey on 1 November) argues that South Kurdistan’s democrats can learn from the HDP’s achievements. “It’s the first time in recent Kurdish history that one strong and dominant Kurdish political party allies itself with the Left and other oppressed people and pressure groups of the dominant nation to create a platform not only for the Kurdish national and democratic rights but for democracy and human rights in the whole of Turkey”, he says.

“After the toppling of Saddam in 2003, instead of encouraging and supporting progressive forces in Iraq, Kurdish leaders decided to go for the so-called Kurd-Shia alliance according to the demands of their backers”, adds Bessarini. “I believe the HDP project needs to be supported and emulated because, whatever your strength and political aims, you need to negotiate with the central government and, unless you have a democratic government, it will be difficult to achieve your goals — that is exactly what the Kurds in South Kurdistan are suffering from now, a reactionary sectarian Iraqi government with a chauvinistic policy towards Kurds”.

Bloodied but unbowed, the HDP emerges with a daunting responsibility to lead the resistance to one-man rule, while promoting its [“civil, democratic and libertarian”](#) alternative. Across the country millions dread an Erdogan dictatorship and the HDP can continue to inspire them with its vision of a Turkey for all its peoples. In the south-east, the Kurdish movement will defend itself while seeking to develop Rojava-style structures of ‘democratic autonomy’ circumventing the authority of the state.

Following a grisly contest that consumed perhaps a thousand civilian, guerrilla and military lives, Ergogan can sit comfortably in his [vast palace](#), enemies vanquished, corruption scandals evaded, basking in the glow of Putinesque success. But he may yet face blowback — from the ISIS monster he has fostered, the deteriorating economy and, more hopefully, the resilient Kurdish movement and its allies.

Main photo – masked soldier outside polling station in Sur (Pic – Kawa Bessarini)

Assaults on the Living and the Dead in Turkey

In September and October 2015 the Government of Turkey, headed by President Erdogan, launched attacks against their presumed enemies and opponents. These took place in the run-up to the general

election of 1st November. The PKK, or Kurdistan Workers Party, has been involved in political and armed struggles against the state. Many ceasefires have been offered, especially since 1999, the date of the capture and imprisonment of the party leader, Abdullah Ocalan. The PKK, with the constitutional pro-Kurdish party, the HDP (Peoples Democratic Party), and other cooperating groups including trade unions, different ethnic and religious communities, human rights and women’s organizations, and opposition parties etc, had long since declared in speeches and in writing that they did not seek to become independent or to separate from Turkey. They only wanted cultural and social autonomy within Turkey. The PKK made a unilateral ceasefire declaration on 10th October to avoid prejudice to the elections.

Instead of offering constitutional negotiations, the Turkish state chose to use brute force. The south-eastern town of Cizre was closed for nine days, followed by a total curfew from the 9th to the 12th September. Access to water, electricity and food was cut off. Mobile phones were blocked, as were the pharmacy, bakery and communal ovens. Twenty-one people were killed and many more injured. Three hundred lawyers from the region went to see what was happening. Their approach was blocked many miles away by police and Special Forces. They were only able to reach Cizre at 7.15 am on 12th September, as the total closure was ending.

Sur is a distinct neighbourhood on the edge of the city of Diyarbakir, adjoining the ancient city walls. It includes the traditional market area and is served by several primary schools and two lycées. The people come mainly from the poorer part of the Kurdish community. Near one entrance stands the beautiful Fatih Pasha Mosque, also known as Kurşunlu, by the celebrated Ottoman architect Sinan, dating from about 1520 CE.

At 8 or 9 am on 12th September, military and police forces, backed by at least three armoured vehicles and a helicopter, attacked the neighbourhood, firing into private houses and public buildings. Bullet marks

were still visible on walls at the end of October. One hundred or more bullets appeared to have struck the left-hand side of the façade of the famous mosque mentioned earlier. In addition, its ornamental outer iron gate has been removed. Much damage was done to private houses, both by live ammunition and by security forces searching for concealed weapons. The inhabitants have been told that necessary repairs will be done “after the elections”. The curfew lasted four days. The treatment of Sur reminded me of the brutal and illegal “closures” frequently imposed by Israel on Gaza and on Palestinians towns and villages in the Occupied West Bank, as “collective punishments”.

The Diyarbakir Branch of the Turkish Human Rights Association told me that since the 1st July, 104 PKK members had been killed, as against 105 members of the Security Services. More than 60 non-combatant civilians also lost their lives as a result of the violent conflict. President Erdogan reacted to the situation by approving the arbitrary arrest of some 1800 people. Besides councillors, party officials and human rights defenders, these included about one hundred elected mayors, of whom twenty or more are still in custody. They have usually been held in prisons, remote from their families. The President and his party have almost total control over the public media. The main independent TV channel was taken over since last June and now has state appointed managers.

The President thus created an atmosphere of tension and fear and refused a unilateral ceasefire offer. It is therefore hardly surprising that he was able to engender a voting swing in his favour on 1st November. This was most marked in central Anatolia and in Ankara. It is perhaps fortunate that he has failed to gain a “super-majority” in the Turkish Parliament, which would have allowed him to change the constitution to suit his purposes.

The President may yet over-reach himself. For example, he approved the destruction and desecration between 11th September and 23rd October of cemeteries in which PKK

members have previously been buried. This was systematically done by the army and security services in the following cities: Agri, Muş, Van, Bitlis, Mardin, Hakkari, Kars, Erzerum, Diyarbakir, Sür. The Free Women’s Association documented these unworthy acts, even stating that autopsies had been carried out on some disinterred corpses. Photographs of the devastation are available on <http://www.kongreyajinen.azad.org.tr>

Such action is, of course, totally contrary to Muslim faith and traditions, whose tenets the President claims to uphold. It probably contravenes Articles 77, 94 and 130 of the Turkish Criminal Law. It is hardly behaviour expected in a country which is a long-standing member of the Council of Europe, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

(I visited Sur on 31st October and 1st November)

Lord Raymond Hylton
November 2015

Voter intimidation in Turkey’s Kurdish villages

By Melanie Gingell, barrister

The re-run election of 1st November was carried out against a backdrop of extreme state violence particularly in the South East of the country. Thousands of HDP and civil society activists had been arrested and hundreds of HDP offices had been attacked in separate incidents across the country. The mood was extremely sombre and there was little evidence of campaigning by any of the political parties. The two suicide bomb attacks in Suruc and Ankara had inflicted a terrible price on HDP supporters and progressive groups. HDP officials in Diyarbakir said that they had been busy organising funerals in the run up to the election, not campaigning.

Serpil Ersan I were deployed with a local interpreter and driver, to the villages around Diyarbakir city.

Our first stop was Karabas village, which had voted, by a sizeable majority, for the HDP in June. The polling station was situated in the village school. As we approached we could see a steady flow of people arriving to vote. We entered the school and exchanged friendly greetings with the woman running the voting room.

Ballot box committees¹ are responsible for setting up polling in their respective jurisdictions and for the running of polling station on the day. The polling booth is a small area in the corner off the room with a screen around it. The voters find their name on a list, collect one of the ballot papers which consists of a row of boxes listing the political parties accompanied by the party's logo, followed by: the abbreviation of the name of the political party; the full name of the party; the name of the party's leader; the list of party candidates; and an empty circle where voters will indicate their selection. Voters receive a stamp, inscribed with the word "YES" ("EVET" in Turkish), used to mark the circle of the political party for which they are casting their vote. They then move to the booth where they should cast their vote in secret.

The first voter we saw was a woman who could not read and write. We observed the election official go into the booth with her to help her cast her vote. We were concerned about this assistance, as although the election regulations offer no guidance as to how illiterate voters should be assisted, it seems pretty obvious that if someone goes into the booth with such a person, this is open to abuse. The concern was heightened because of the high proportion of illiterate voters in this village.

We raised our concern politely. The immediate response was aggressive and hostile, and group of men started to gather around us. Most of the women waiting to

vote were separated from the men and pushed into a room and the door shut. The election officer was shouting aggressively at the two women remaining in the room. Our driver intervened to ask people to calm down but the situation escalated quickly; there was shouting and he was punched and kicked and pushed out of the building. We followed in the melee and saw him being pushed around the corner of the building.

After several minutes the situation calmed and we were allowed to go to our vehicle and leave. The driver was shaken but not seriously injured as far as we could tell.

The result at the end of the day was that the June result was reversed and a majority for the AKP was recorded. We have serious concerns that there were irregularities in the voting at this polling station and invited the HDP to make a complaint to the Supreme Board of Elections.

At Doganli village we were informed of concerns about voter intimidation earlier in the day. There were several armed village guards standing around the entrance to the polling station and the atmosphere was one of intimidation. The village guard system was initiated in the 1980s when the state needed an armed militia to assist them in the conflict. The guards are usually given a weapon and a salary but sometimes just a weapon, usually a Kalashnikov (AK47). The system is inherently anti-democratic and certainly should have no place in an election process.

The next village was Buyukakoren where there was a heavy village guard presence at the polling station. There were approximately 10 of them, some in uniform and some not, but all carrying AK47s. Again, this was an intimidating situation.

Our next stop was the village of Ozekli, which we had to approach on foot as the main road in to the village was closed by the army following an attack on 12th august in which 3 soldiers were killed. The road route was now 16 kilometres instead of the normal 3.5km. In June the result had been 1295 to the HDP and 89 to the AKP. The approach was past an army base and watch-tower and

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<http://www.refworld.org/docid/4c4460ee2.html>

we were aware that weapons were trained on us as we walked past. Despite these obstacles and the tense atmosphere the vast majority of people cast their vote.

The last stop of the day was at Alicik, where no concerns were noted and we remained to see the count and hear the result of a reduced HDP majority, down from 342 votes in June to 286 in November.

The election was unfair for a variety of reasons including severe restrictions on the media, the lack of independence of the judiciary, unfair funding systems for political parties and the extreme violence in the South East of the country. The election was unfair because of the five months of killings, the coordinated attacks on the political opposition and the detention of elected officials. All of these factors rendered the opposition weakened and injured. Add to this the allegations of specific irregularities on the day and the conclusion of unfairness is clear and unequivocal.

An election observer from the OSCE commented, "The violence in the largely Kurdish southeast of the country had a significant impact on the elections, and the recent attacks and arrests of members and activists, predominantly from the HDP, are of concern, as they hindered their ability to campaign."

Despite this picture of violence, fear and violations, the HDP managed to repeat its spectacular achievement of June and break through the 10% electoral threshold once again. The task ahead of leading the resistance to increasing authoritarianism is daunting but the HDP seems committed to the struggle.

My observations on the election of 1st of November
By Kawa Besarani

I joined the British delegation in my capacity as a human rights advocate and writer on the politics of the Middle East, particularly Iraq and Kurdistan. I joined the wider group of international observers, from countries like Greece, Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Cyprus Italy in order to monitor the general election in Turkey held on 1st of November

I arrived in Diyarbakir by road from Iraqi Kurdistan, as I was already there undertaking political and research work.

On my way to Diyarbakir, I travelled through a whole number of cities and villages and was acutely aware of an unusually tense atmosphere, as well as a heavy military presence throughout the whole of the south eastern area, which is overwhelmingly populated by Kurds, living in cities like Nusbayin, Cizre, Silopi and in parts of the city of Diyarbakir.

The tension I observed was also reflected in other parts of Turkey as a result of the increased militarization undertaken since the last June election in which the ruling AKP party lost its majority in parliament. This situation was characterized by the following:

- A climate of intimidation, arrests and physical attacks on the supporters of the HDP
- A climate of fear and instability throughout the country.
- Putting an end to the peace process and renewing the military campaign against the PKK both in south east Turkey as well as into Iraqi Kurdistan.
- A clamp down on the independent media through the arrest of journalists, the closing down of newspapers and sacking independent journalists, as well as intimidation.
- The promotion of a campaign of hatred against the Kurdish people, encouraging attacks on their property, businesses etc.
- The exploitation of the refugee crisis in order to put pressure on the European Union and obtain their political and financial support. This was clearly shown by the visit of

Angela Merkel to Ankara, which was widely seen as giving political support to Erdogan.

- Military attacks on the town of Cizre.

This was the political situation in which Turkey was plunged by the Erdogan government since the June election and which continued right up to the eve of the polling day.

Prior to the day of the election, we held several meetings with political parties and many NGOs: Lawyer groups, human right organizations, women's organizations as well as individual politicians to hear first hand about their experiences since the June election. We also undertook a tour through the Sur neighborhood, which is a shanty town on the outskirts of Diyarbakir and we saw first hand evidence of earlier military attacks and activities in this area.

We also saw the damage done to the 16th century FATAH PASA mosque as a result of military attacks. We listened to the descriptions given us by local people, about their horror when the army came and took control of the whole area and how snipers were shooting wildly and intimidating the population.

We also met the father of Helen, the 10 year-old girl, who was shot while going to buy bread and how her body was left lying in the street for half an hour before an ambulance was allowed to come and take the body.

More than 25% of the population was forced to flee the area as a result of these attacks, and it will be very difficult for many of them to return to vote if they wish to do so, thus effectively disenfranchising many of the Kurdish population.

The main concerns of all those groups and individuals we met and spoke to from political parties and NGOs were:

- The whole climate of fear and intimidation, which had been created since the June election and the affect this, has had on the free participation of people in the election.

- The people in this area were not able to concentrate on or even become involved in any election campaign as a result of the police and military intimidation, the threats, arrests and detention of many individuals, especially organizers and leaders. There were over 1900 people including 20 mayors arrested, 190 attacks on HDP office, and 258 people killed in terror attacks, including 13 children.

Despite all this harassment, attacks and intimidation we noticed that HDP was still confident of increasing its vote and that it will obtain at least as many votes as in the June election. But they could not hide their fear that Erdogan and the AKP would try every trick in the book to obtain the majority they want.

That sums up the political and security climate in the weeks prior to the election. On Election Day, we were sent to the Sur area, which is a poor neighborhood in the city of Diyarbakir. Our group consisted of myself, Margaret Owen, an international human rights lawyer and Lord Hylton, a member of the House of Lords, and an interpreter.

During the day, we managed to visit six polling stations in the area. Here are my observations:

- A heavy presence of armored vehicles inside the courtyards of the schools or outside the gate of the buildings where polling was taking place.
- Armed plain-clothes officers inside the buildings and outside the voting rooms.
- The presence of these heavily armed individuals created unease among the voters and it could be seen as intimidation and as an attempt to deter people from voting.
- We were able to approach some of these armed individuals and asked them for their reasons for being there; several responded with aggression and in a clearly unfriendly manner.

- Inside the schools, we noticed that some of the armed plain-clothes men were unhappy to see us there and we were followed around the voting rooms.

The results were declared within two hours of the close of voting, much faster than in the June election. Many were shocked at the results, which made the AKP the strongest party and now able to govern on its own.

The result of the election and the climate created by the oppressive situation will place Turkey at a cross roads:

- either it will return to rebuilding a climate of trust and stability, as well as restart the peace process with the Kurdish people;
- or it will continue its current policy of an escalation of confrontation, military attacks, as well as attacks on the independency of the judiciary and media, thus undermining even further the fragile democracy, taking the country further down the road of becoming a country ruled by a strong-man presidency, taking Turkey into a more uncertain future of instability and bloodshed.

I believe Europe and the USA need to play a more important role than they have done up to now. They cannot continue to turn a blind eye to what is going on in this important part of Middle East. They cannot just see Turkey as a vital global partner and member of NATO without exercising their influence on the country to encourage the continuation of the peace process and prevent the emergence of yet another dictatorship in the Middle East.

The EU has an important responsibility and role to play and needs to do this urgently before we see more bloodshed and tears.