

# Turkey's war against peace: why the EU should rethink its support for Erdoğan

*On 10 October a bomb attack on a rally in Ankara killed almost 100 people. [Esra Ozyurek](#) and [Bilgin Ayata](#) write that against the backdrop of renewed hostilities between Kurdish groups and Turkish security forces, the bombing may prove to be a lasting blow for hope of a permanent reconciliation in the country. They argue that the EU should hold the Turkish state accountable for the increasing violence and provide greater support to those campaigning for greater democracy in the country.*



Even though mass killings, state sponsored massacres, executions, and torture have occurred continuously throughout Turkey's history, the 10 October bombing of the Peace Rally in Ankara was an unprecedented act of violence for the country. Never has an attack of this magnitude occurred in Turkey's capital, and in such close proximity to the offices of the intelligence agency and other state institutions. How was this possible, and what does it mean for renewed EU-Turkey relations around the refugee crisis?



For over a decade now, Turkey has been governed by the single party rule of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's [Justice and Development Party](#) (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, AKP). After an initial honeymoon of democratic reforms, it has turned into an oppressive regime, violating many of the basic rights it sought or, at least, promised to implement. To consolidate his power, Erdoğan aims to change Turkey's parliamentary system into a presidential system, moving towards unrestricted rule to complete the transformation into what he calls the 'new Turkey'. Traditionally the opposition in parliament was weak, fragmented and unable to challenge the AKP in any sustained manner.

With the formation of the [Peoples' Democratic Party](#) (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) in 2012, however, a new pro-Kurdish left movement emerged which opposed Erdoğan's push for a presidential system. In a historic victory, the HDP passed the 10 per cent threshold required to enter parliament in the national elections of 7 June this year and became the third largest opposition party in parliament. This was a serious blow for the AKP, which lost its majority.

The June victory for the HDP, with its pluralistic vision, had reignited hopes for true democracy in Turkey. Yet the hope lasted but one month after a suicide bomber detonated himself in Suruç amongst a group of young socialists on their way to bring much-needed aid to Kobanê just across the border in Syria. As with the Ankara bombing at the weekend, the suicide bomber in Suruç was identified as an IS member by Turkish security officials, although IS, who are not known to be shy about their crimes, never claimed responsibility.



Credit: Merton Wilton (CC-BY-SA-2.0)

Pointing to IS as the main culprit ensured Ankara international support and sympathy. After the Suruç killings Turkey evoked Article 4 of the NATO Treaty and agreed to take a more active role in the war against Islamic State. This was

especially noteworthy as Turkey had previously turned a blind eye and even openly supported IS in their fight against the Assad regime in Syria.

It soon became clear, however, that Turkey was busy hitting Kurdish forces fighting Islamic State, rather than IS itself. After two years of a peace process with the [Kurdistan Workers' Party](#) (PKK), the government chose the old and unsuccessful recipe of seeking a military solution to a political conflict. This solution came with sieges of Kurdish cities, attacks against civilians, and arrests of journalists and opposition organisations. The torture and abuse in the Kurdish regions is documented in video footage, which state security personnel proudly upload to social media.

The attacks in Ankara represent the low point of this increasing escalation, which the EU has decided to simply ignore in exchange for cooperation for refugee containment. Despite the fact that Erdoğan's family and his cabinet members are accused of corruption, the EU even plans to send Turkey €1bn (£0.74bn) of assistance.

It is time the EU draws its own lessons from the Arab uprisings: preaching democratisation while supporting non-democratic leaders is not just hypocritical but has lasting consequences, as the arrival of refugees in Europe reminds us on a daily basis.

The bombing of the Peace Rally in Ankara may prove to be a fatal blow to the dwindling possibility of a lasting reconciliation in Turkey. But if the international community does not stand on the side of the people who demand peace, justice, and democracy and does not hold the Turkish state accountable for the increasing violence, instability in the region will only worsen.

In a country where half of the population increasingly feels their life is no longer under protection, Turkish citizens may follow the footsteps of Syrians who risk their lives for safety in Europe.

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*Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics.*

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