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Covid-19 pandemic in Turkey

Turkey's Newest Tiny Foreign Enemy to Unite the Nation

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“Those who criticize the pandemic precautions, are waging a war against their own country...Other countries wouldn't allow these sorts of publications even for one day. Those terrorist organizations, media, political organizations which are trying to demoralize our nation will be drowned in the hatred of our nation.” says President Erdoğan, after his Government received harsh criticisms from head of the main opposition party regarding their policy towards pandemic. [1]

This quote more or less sums up the Government of Turkey's response to COVID-19 pandemic, first centrally control everything including flow of information and declare that whoever criticizes Government's policy are terrorists or traitors, secondly keep the economy going on as usual even if this would cost the lives of workers. The President of Foreign Economic Relations Board, one of the representatives of big business, declares that “a curfew or lockdown will have devastating results for business and would bring the country in the verge of a chaos” [2] Government has always followed this advice of big capital very carefully, while there are constant reminders to everyone to stay at home, no measures were taken to protect workers who goes to work everyday and works in factories together with thousands of other colleagues, use same workstations, same busses, same canteens, same locker rooms in the factories. These has a deadly consequence for workers. A civil society coalition named Occupational Health and Safety Assembly collected the names of 52 workers died after they were infected by Covid-19 virus at their workplaces, this data was compiled based on the information published in newspapers so the real number should be even much higher. [3] There were some spontaneous work-stoppages against this especially in construction and metal sectors but these were mostly isolated and fragmented. Because of these work-stoppages, Governorship of industrial town of İzmit has published a decree telling that “all demonstrations including work-stoppages are banned during the pandemic”. Later after the reactions they withdrew this Article from the Decree.

On the other hand, there is already many workplace closures because of economical results of the pandemy. Turkey as the biggest auto exporter to EU, now all the automotive factories were closed due to lack of supply. In order to postpone the economical affects of the crisis, Government also prepared an economical stimulus package full of incentives to capital which they claim to overall has value of 100 billion Turkish Lira (15,4 billion US Dollars). [4] Like almost all other countries in Europe Turkey as well introduced a short-term work benefit which will cover the at most the 60 percent of the workers wage with maximum limit of 4380 TLs, around 580 Euros per month, when the workers are not working. But this only covers workers who has certain amount of days in social security system. On 16th of April, Parliament made a new legislation which will allow employers to send unpaid leave without workers consent and in case of that Government would pay 1168 TLs, income support per month, around 155 Euros. This amount is even less that the rent for most of the workers. Unfortunately there was not even a real opposition to these measures as a result of very weak and disoriented left in the country for many years.

Another measure applied by the Government against the pandemy was an amnesty for the prisoners but this was not a general amnesty, this law released rapists, murderers, mafia leaders but not the arrested journalists or opposition politicians like Selahattin Demirtaş who became symbol for those who are criticizing this amnesty law. On the other side, the symbolic name for those who are released by this amnesty was Alaattin Çıkkak, notorious mafia leader and one of the prominent figures of ultra nationalist grey wolf who was arrested in France in 1998 and held responsible for 41 murders. Actually, Çıkkak's release was not a new issue, it was also discussed after the elections in 2018 when head of ultra nationalist MHP party, de-facto partner of AKP now, visited him in prison and made a call for amnesty to him. Over the years since his arrest himself and many officials of Turkey's national intelligence agency openly declared that Çıkkak has “served to country” in “operations” (murders they mean) abroad mainly towards Armenians. During Çıkkak's release from prison social media was full of shows of joy/excitement where people were saying that “now the wolf is out, traitors needs to hide.”

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[1] *Sabah*, 13 April 2020 <https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2020/04/13/baskan-erdogandan-kilicdarogluna-sert-tepki-bu-mitomani-hastaligidir>

(Strong reaction from President Erdoğan to Kılıçdaroğlu: This is mythomania disease).

[2] *Dunya*, 11 April 2020 <https://www.dunya.com/is-dunyasi/sokaga-cikma-yasagi-bizi-kaosa-goturur-haberi-467471> ('Curfew takes us to chaos').

[3] *No Borders News* 24 April 2020 "[The political instrumentalization of the Covid-19 crisis in Egypt](#)".

[4] *Daily Sabah* 18 March 2020 "[Turkey rolls out TL 100B stimulus package to protect economy, businesses from coronavirus fallout](#)".