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Kurdistan/Turkey

Kurdish spring defies Erdogan

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On Sunday 21 March in Diyarbakir, the capital of Kurdistan in Turkey, hundreds of thousands of Kurds of all ages, but mainly young people, came to celebrate Newroz, the celebration of the first day of spring. This is a very important festival for the Kurds, celebrating the revolt of the blacksmith Kawa against the tyrant Dehak, a slightly different version of the Iranian version, but in both cases the end of oppression.

This year's Newroz had a special character because Turkey, like almost every country in the world, is undergoing the wave of Covid-19, but also because another virus is eating away at democracy in Turkey: its Islamo-conservative government in alliance with the MHP (Nationalist Action Party), the far-right party whose supporters, the "Grey Wolves" nebula, have just been banned in France.

Towards the banning of the HDP?

In recent months, ten HDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) MPs have had their parliamentary immunity lifted. They were convicted on various pretexts, such as participation in a demonstration in support of Kobane besieged by jihadists, or alleged links with Ankara's *bête noire*, the PKK. On 17 March, Omer Faruk Gergerlioglu's parliamentary immunity was lifted so that he could serve two and a half years in prison, following a tweet more than two years ago. The MP was well known for his tireless defence of human rights and freedoms in Turkey. The next day, the arrest of the co-chairman of the Human Rights Association, Öztürk Türkdogan, was announced. Sixty HDP mayors have been removed from office and replaced by administrators since their election in 2018, and the arrests of HDP activists and cadres have accelerated, with more than 800 currently in prison, awaiting heavy sentences.

But the worst is probably yet to come, as the Turkish government has just officially asked the Constitutional Court to ban the HDP as a political party. The Constitutional Court, the highest court in Turkey, inherited from the 1982 Constitution and the 1980 military coup, can ban a political party and cut off its public funding. Moreover, the request is accompanied by a ban on hundreds of HDP cadres and middle-ranking officials from reforming another party under a different name and simply from being politically active.

Erdogan wants to gag the Kurds

The Kurdish movement is used to repeated bans: HEP, DEP, HADEP... have been banned, often running for elections in alliances. The HDP is different, it is a broad party, supported by a significant part of the population and the Turkish left, well beyond its roots in the Kurdish movement. In June 2015, this very young party obtained almost 14% of the votes in Parliament, 80 deputies, and caused the AKP to lose its absolute majority, something that Turkish President Erdogan has never forgiven it. Even after the dissolution of parliament and months of simmering civil war fomented by the far-right and AKP supporters, the new elections in November 2015 saw the HDP win 68 MPs in parliament. This confirmed it as the third largest political force in the country,

The AKP government and its far-right allies therefore want to finish off the HDP, but they had so far taken small steps, removing a co-mayor like the one in Diyarbakir, Gultan Kisanak, and sentencing her to 11 years in prison, then a deputy, then another co-mayor, another deputy... This has allowed them to test the reaction of the "international community" and Europe. In the total absence of any reaction, apart from a few disapproving grumbles not followed by

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any sanctions, he has resorted to the big means. Turkish President Erdogan wants to gag the Kurds of Turkey for good and crush the Kurds of Rojava with his F16 bombs.

But the young and joyful crowd from Newroz to Diyarbakir and in all the cities of the region, waving thousands of HDP flags, was there yesterday to remind him that the game is far from being won.

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Translated by **International Viewpoint** from [l'Anticapitaliste](#).

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