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Discontent directed against the policies of the Turkish government triggered widespread protests during 2013, centring around demonstrations in Istanbul's Gezi Park. The protests, while triggered initially by plans to redevelop the park, soon broadened into a larger movement against the perceived rise of authoritarianism in the country. In September, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan presented a democratization package containing a variety of proposed reforms which nevertheless received mixed reviews, including from Kurds, who claimed not to have been consulted during its preparation.

Nevertheless, the democratization package contains a number of positive provisions, including a lower election threshold which, if implemented, would enable better representation of minority groups in parliament. It also allows small political parties to secure state funding without requiring local chapters and permits political campaigning in other languages and dialects besides Turkish. However, critics have pointed to a range of gaps and shortcomings, such as its failure to recognize Alevi *cemevis* as places of worship. The package also did not propose any amendments to Turkey's existing anti-terrorism laws. This legislation has increasingly been used against minority groups such as the Kurds, long marginalized within Turkey, to penalize activities such as demonstrations and meetings.

After some of the heaviest fighting in recent years between the government and the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), in March 2013 the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan called for a ceasefire. This was seen as an important step towards negotiating an end to the conflict, which has spanned three decades and resulted in thousands of deaths and widespread torture, injury and displacement. Following the ceasefire, PKK troops began withdrawing in May. As peace talks continue, however, Turkish security forces have installed new checkpoints and military fortifications to block smuggling routes and enhance security. As part of this process, in November Turkish authorities reportedly began erecting a wall between Nusaybin in Turkey and Qamishli in north-eastern Syria. The predominantly Kurdish local population, who were not consulted, viewed this as an attempt to divide the Kurdish communities on either side of the border, with many

fearing that other walls may follow. This has led to protests and hunger strikes.

Language is one of the areas where Kurds have faced acute discrimination in Turkey. Until recently, the use of minority languages in people's names was forbidden by law and even though some of these restrictions were lifted in 2003, names containing a *q*, *w* or *h* – all common letters in Kurdish – have been prohibited. The democratization package proposed lifting this ban and other discriminatory practices, such as the student oath in which children – regardless of their ethnicity – have to pledge each day in schools to be 'a Turk, honest, hard-working'. It was also proposed that the original place names for Kurdish villages in the south-east of the country could be used again, rather than the Turkish names put in place in the 1980s, but larger cities were not included (although the government stated that these could be considered).

Other positive measures included the announcement, in February, that sermons in Turkish, Kurdish or Arabic would be permitted in mosques depending on the language spoken by the majority of attendees. On a number of official occasions during the year public representatives also spoke in Kurdish, and the Religious Affairs Office (*Diyanet*) began preparing a Kurdish version of the *Qur'an*. Early in the year, Article 202 of Turkey's Criminal Procedure Code was amended to allow individuals to carry out their defence in their chosen language during certain judicial proceedings. In February, a Constitutional Court ruling entered into force, whereby the use of Kurdish in political party signs, posters and statements is no longer a prosecutable offence. However, discrimination against minority languages remains an ongoing challenge in the country's legislation, including the Constitution.

The year 2013 also saw a number of improvements in education, another area where Turkey's minorities have long suffered marginalization and exclusion. In September, after nearly 50 years of being closed, a Greek school on the Gökçeada (Imvros) Island was permitted to reopen and classes for a handful of children began. The same month, the Syriac community formally applied to open an elementary school following a court ruling in their favour the month before. This overturned the Ministry of Education refusal in 2012 to authorize a Syriac kindergarten on the grounds that the community were not specified as a minority in the Constitution. History textbooks were also amended in response to complaints that they contained discriminatory rhetoric against the Syriac community. However, Alevi groups remain critical of their representation in other school textbooks. The democratization package has proposed further measures, including the establishment of a Roma language and culture institute, although it has also attracted criticism for a number of inconsistencies. In particular, it extends minority language education only to private institutions, meaning that Kurds and other groups will continue to be sidelined in public schools.

Minority individuals and institutions, including Syriacs, Greek nationals and the Roman Catholic Church, continued to face obstacles to land access and property rights during the year. Nevertheless, there were some positive signs of progress. These included, in September, the first baptism in nearly a century at the 1,100-year-old Church of the Holy Cross on Aghtamar Island in eastern Turkey, which, after years of vandalism and disuse, was restored by the Turkish government. Malatya's Armenian cemetery, having been accidentally demolished in 2012, was rebuilt by authorities and opened again in June 2013. The democratization package also proposed that new housing would be built for Roma and in October Mor Gabriel Monastery's land was returned to the Syriac community. However, there were no plans announced to restore the Greek Orthodox monastery at Halki, near Istanbul, to its church owners.

Minorities remain vulnerable to targeted violence. In September, a Roma man and his son were arrested in Iznik, in the west of the country, accused of shooting a 26-year-old man. Following

this, 2,000 people reportedly raided Roma shops and vandalized property before police were able to restore calm, but small-scale hate incidents continued in the weeks that followed. Twenty-two men were later arrested in connection with these attacks, but no criminal charges were brought and they were all released. After the violence, the region's governor visited Iznik but not the affected Roma communities. His office subsequently published a highly discriminatory and sweeping statement about Roma.

In December, 13 Alevi homes were defaced with red marks in Adiyaman province. Other cases had been recorded in different locations across the country since the previous year. These events have raised concern within the country's Alevi population, as similar incidents in the past have escalated to violent attacks, including the killing of more than a hundred Alevis in Kahramanmaraş province in 1978.

In spite of events such as these, Turkey lacks comprehensive legislation on hate speech and hate crime, meaning that racist motives are not considered as an aggravating circumstance when people are sentenced for severe offences, such as killing or injuring people, and destroying property. Thus, hate crimes not only are not prosecuted as such and commonly remain unpunished, but are also directed at individuals belonging to a plethora of minority groups, ranging from Christian clergymen to Kurdish students.

Article 216 of the 2004 Turkish Penal Code criminalizes inciting people to hatred and enmity on the grounds of 'different social class, religion, race, sect' but excludes a number of other areas, including ethnicity. Professor Yasemin İnceoğlu, a member of a coalition of Turkish civil society organizations campaigning for hate crime legislation, said this Article 'covers hate speech rather than hate crime and could even be described as falling short of criminalizing hate speech, as it is not usually used by prosecutors in support of minority groups'. The Hrant Dink Foundation's Media Watch on Hate Speech reports in 2013 highlight that hate speech towards ethnic and religious minorities is still prevalent in Turkey's print media. Their May-August 2013 report noted that, while there appeared to have been a slight drop in frequency compared to the previous period, the number of groups denigrated had expanded. In addition to Armenians, Jews, Christians and Greeks, who were regularly vilified, new categories also gained prominence, such as Syrian refugees.

Still, the 2013 democratization package proposed some amendments to the Penal Code that could provide the country with specific hate crime legislation for the first time. However, even though Turkey's Justice Minister had stated that the laws would be modelled on the principles of the OSCE, the draft defined hate and prejudice crimes as those 'committed based on someone's or some group's language, race, nationality, skin colour, gender, disability, political views, philosophical beliefs or religion', excluding those based on ethnicity and sexual orientation – both areas covered by the OSCE. This means that, despite their vulnerability to bias-motivated violence, Kurdish victims of violence could not qualify within this definition. Furthermore the code, as agreed in March 2014 by parliament, punishes hate speech or hate crime with a penalty of up to three years. This means that more serious crimes, such as bias-motivated murder, fall outside its remit.

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