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28 November 2025

TUR202442.E

Türkiye: Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi, DEM), including its origins, structure, leadership, objectives, and activities; treatment of party members and supporters by authorities; requirements and procedures to become a member of the party, including whether membership cards are issued; attestation letters,

including content, appearance, and issuing authority; attestation letter samples (2023–November 2025)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

1. Overview

Sources indicate that DEM is a ["left-wing" (DW 2024-11-20)] "pro-Kurdish" political party in Türkiye (DW 2024-11-20; Reuters 2025-01-29; AP 2024-11-22). A report by the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicates that while DEM is "described as 'pro-Kurdish'," it is not "exclusively Kurdish" (Netherlands 2025-02-24, 56). The same source adds that DEM works for "the political and cultural rights of Kurds" while also focusing on "gender equality, the environment, the working class and other ethnic and religious minorities, including Alevis, Arabs, Armenians, Assyrians and Laz" (Netherlands 2025-02-24, 56, references omitted).

Middle East Eye (MEE), a "digital news organisation" focusing on the Middle East and North Africa (MEE n.d.), states that the Turkish government "generally views" DEM as the "political wing of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê, PKK)," a non-state armed organization that has "waged a violent insurgency against the state since the 1980s, initially for independence and later for greater cultural autonomy for Turkey's Kurdish population" (2024-11-11). Sources indicate that DEM "denies any links to the PKK" (Rudaw 2025-01-29; MEE 2024-11-11).

1.1 Origins

According to an Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) report, "[a]fter the government-initiated closure proceedings" against the Peoples' Democratic Party (Halkların Demokratik Partisi, HDP) in 2021, the party reorganized first as the Green Left Party (Yeşil

Sol Parti, YSP), then later as DEM (Australia 2025-05-16, 3.84, para. 3.85). DEM's website notes that the party changed its name to avoid the "risk of a potential closure" by a court ruling and that in the May 2023 general elections, the HDP ran members under the YSP's name (DEM n.d.a). Sources note that DEM initially used the abbreviation HEDEP following their name change from YSP in October 2023 but changed it to DEM in December 2023 due to a court ruling (Turkish Minute 2023-12-11; Netherlands 2025-02-24, 10). For information on the situation of supporters or perceived supporters of the HDP, see Response to Information Request TUR202089 of November 2024.

1.2 Election Results

Citing Duvar English, the English-language version of the online independent Turkish news site Gazete Duvar (Nieman Reports 2020-02-03), the Dutch report indicates that in the 2024 local elections, DEM became the "largest party" in 10 out of 81 provinces: Ağrı, Batman, Diyarbakır, Hakkâri, Iğdır, Mardin, Muş, Siirt, Tunceli and Van (Netherlands 2025-02-24, 15). The Australian DFAT report states that in the same elections, DEM won 82 mayorships out of 1,400 (Australia 2025-05-16, para. 3.84). MEE notes that nationally, DEM's mayoral candidates won elections in 10 cities, 58 provincial districts and 7 counties (2024-11-11). The Union of Turkish World Municipalities (Türk Dünyası Belediyeler Birliği, TDBB)—an organization based in Istanbul that conducts research on regions with a "geographical, historical and cultural relationship with ... Turkophone areas" (TDBB n.d.)—indicates that DEM won in 85 municipalities in the 2024 local elections (TDBB [2024]).

According to sources, in the May 2023 general election, the YSP garnered 8.8% of the national vote (MEI 2024-07-09; Turkish Minute 2023-12-11). Sources report that DEM is Türkiye's "third-largest political

party" (MEE 2024-11-11), or that DEM holds 57 seats out of 600 in Türkiye's Grand National Assembly (Reuters 2025-01-29; Duvar English 2023-10-15).

1.3 Objectives

According to DEM's website, the party aims to "establish a democratic, libertarian, egalitarian, just, ecological, gender-equal, and solidarity-based society" (DEM n.d.a). The party's website also lists among its objectives "decentralizing authority and resources to empower local governments," advocating for "gender equality in all fields and at all levels," "combating discriminatory policies affecting the youth," and supporting "equal social and political rights for immigrants and refugees" (DEM n.d.a). The same source indicates that DEM "is part of the global struggle against capitalism and industrialism" (DEM n.d.a).

Sources indicate that one of the party's aims is to find a "peaceful" solution to the Kurdish conflict in Türkiye (DEM n.d.a; Research Fellow 2025-10-22; Kurdish Expert 2025-10-30).

Reuters reports that in a 2025 meeting with government representatives, DEM highlighted their party's "priorities," which include "calls for reforms to anti-terror law, penal code, and judicial practices, as well as an end to the practice of appointing trustees to replace elected opposition mayors" [see section 2.2 of this Response] (2025-03-18).

1.4 Structure

Information on DEM's party structure was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a research fellow at a university in the UK with publications on Türkiye's political opposition indicated that DEM has an equal co-chair system featuring a

female and a male co-chair (Research Fellow 2025-10-22). Also in correspondence with the Research Directorate, a Washington, DC-based expert on Kurdish affairs, who was formerly an acting Managing Editor of Voice of America's Kurdish language service, noted that DEM has a co-chair system at the national, provincial and district levels, and maintains "autonomous women's and youth structures" (Kurdish Expert 2025-10-30). The same source added that DEM's national organs include its Party Convention (Parti Kongresi), its Central Executive Committee (Merkez Yürütme Kurulu), its Party Assembly (Parti Meclisi), as well as commissions covering themes such as law, local governments, foreign affairs, women, ecology, language and culture, and refugee and migrant affairs (Kurdish Expert 2025-10-30).

1.5 Activities

According to the Kurdish expert, DEM engages in various activities at the local, national and international levels:

- Local: municipal governance, "especially in Kurdish-majority provinces," that focuses on "women's centers, multilingual services, ecological initiatives, and participatory budgeting";
- National: parliamentary opposition, public policy focusing on "peace, rights, decentralization, gender equality, labour, and the environment," as well as legal support for DEM members who are detained;
- International: conducting "[o]utreach" with European institutions and human rights organizations, Kurdish diasporic communities, and "other global partners" (2025-10-30).

The Research Fellow noted that DEM's "core activities" include "documenting political repression and rights violations" against its members and broader society (2025-10-22). The same source added that DEM "actively engages with European institutions and human rights organizations" to express its concerns regarding the rule of law and "democratic backsliding" in Türkiye (Research Fellow 2025-10-22).

The Research Fellow indicated that DEM also pursues "an active strategy of parliamentary diplomacy" by "engaging with ruling party officials" to advocate for political and legal reforms, such as changes to prison laws to improve the situation of sick prisoners (2025-10-22). Sources indicate that DEM has "taken the lead" (Rudaw 2025-10-03), has an "active involvement" (Research Fellow 2025-10-22), or has "play[ed] a key role," in the peace talks [1] between the PKK and the Turkish government (Rudaw 2025-10-03; Research Fellow 2025-10-22; AFP 2025-10-27).

Sources note that DEM legislators have attended demonstrations (Rudaw 2025-01-14; Duvar English 2025-02-20), including one in Aydin province protesting the dismissal and replacement of DEM members of a municipal council by Turkish authorities (Rudaw 2025-01-14) and one in Ankara protesting the government appointments of trustees (Duvar English 2025-02-20). CHANNEL8, a broadcast and digital news outlet based in the Kurdish region of Iraq (CHANNEL8 n.d.), indicates that in September 2025, DEM Members of Parliament (MPs) "staged a protest" in Türkiye's Grand National Assembly "demanding the release" of a former HDP co-chair (2025-10-09).

1.6 Leadership

DEM's website notes that Tülay Hatimoğulları and Tuncer Bakırhan are the party's co-chairs and were elected in October 2023 (DEM n.d.b).

2024 and 2025 sources name the following individuals among the party's leadership:

- Pervin Buldan, Deputy Speaker in Türkiye's Grand National Assembly (*Hürriyet Daily News* 2025-06-15);
- Ayşegül Doğan, Party Spokesperson (Kurdistan 24 2025-08-15);
- Sezai Temelli, DEM "Parliamentary Group Deputy Chair" (ANF 2025-11-18), or "DEM Party Group Deputy Chair" (Bianet 2025-05-29);
- Gülistan Kılıç Koçyiğit, "DEM Party Group Deputy Chair" (ANF 2025-09-28), or "chair of the parliamentary group of the DEM Party" (BIRN 2025-11-25);
- Ebru Günay and Berdan Öztürk, Co-Speakers of the Foreign Affairs Commission (DEM 2024-05-16);
- Elif Bulut, Co-Spokesperson of the "Central Organization Commission" (Mezopotamya Agency 2024-06-29), or member of the "Central Executive Board" (ANF 2024-11-28).

The HDP's website indicates that prior to the party's 4th Grand Congress in October 2023, during which YSP changed its name to HEDEP, Çiğdem Kılıçgün Uçar and İbrahim Akın were the party's co-spokespersons (HDP 2023-10-15). *Hürriyet Daily News*, an English-language Turkish media owned by a "pro-government conglomerate" (RSF 2018-03-22), states that Mithat Sancar and Pervin Buldan had both been HDP party co-chairs until their resignation in August 2023, after which they joined the YSP (2023-10-22). Another publication by the same source notes that Mithat Sancar was first elected HDP party co-chair, and that Pervin Buldan was re-elected as co-chair, at an HDP congress in February 2020 (*Hürriyet Daily News* 2020-02-23).

2. Treatment by Authorities

According to the Kurdish expert, despite government peace talks with the PKK, "institutional or legal repression" against Kurdish political actors "continues unabated" (2025-10-30). Freedom House's annual report covering the events of 2024 notes that "pro-Kurdish parties" face "regular harassment" by Turkish authorities in the form of "hate speech, politically motivated prosecutions, and disinformation in progovernment media" (2025-02-26, Sec. B4). Human Rights Watch's annual report covering the events of 2024 indicates that "[h]undreds of Kurdish activists and former

parliamentarians, mayors, and party officials" are imprisoned or are serving sentences following convictions for "terrorism offenses" after engaging in "legitimate non-violent political activities, speeches, and social media postings" (2025-01-16). The US Department of State's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2023* notes the "continued" challenges faced by "Kurdish and pro-Kurdish" political parties in "exercising freedoms of assembly and association" (US 2024-04-22, 69).

2.1 DEM Leaders

The Kurdish expert indicated that DEM officials "continue to face intense scrutiny and legal targeting" despite the "softened rhetoric" following the beginning of the peace talks with the PKK (2025-10-30). Sources report that the Turkish government submitted motions to strip several DEM MPs of their parliamentary immunity (*Hürriyet Daily News* 2024-12-31; Kurdish Expert 2025-10-30; SCF 2024-11-15), including the co-chairs Tuncer Bakırhan and Tülay Hatimoğulları (*Hürriyet Daily News* 2024-12-31).

Sources note that in November 2024, the Turkish Ministry of the Interior opened an investigation against Tuncer Bakırhan following his remarks on the removal and replacement of DEM mayors by government-appointed trustees in the municipalities of Mardin, Batman and Halfeti (ANF 2024-11-07; *Hürriyet Daily News* 2024-11-07).

2.2 DEM Mayors and Politicians

According to a publication by the Kurdish Peace Institute (KPI) [2], a Washington-based research and policy institute (KPI n.d.b), as of 4 November 2024, Turkish authorities had removed the elected DEM mayors of 4 municipalities, replacing them with "'trustees' loyal to the ruling Justice and Development Party [Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi] (AKP)"

(KPI 2024-11-19). A report by the Associated Press (AP) later in the same month states that Turkish authorities, citing "terrorism-related charges," removed and replaced 2 more DEM mayors with "state-appointed administrators" (2024-11-22). According to the Dutch report, citing a "confidential source," as of February 2025, 11 mayors were replaced by trustees, including 9 from DEM (Netherlands 2025-02-24, 60).

International Crisis Group (Crisis Group) states that "over the last decade," representatives of DEM [and its predecessors] and Kurdish "sympathisers" have faced "an intense government crackdown on the grounds of alleged links to the PKK," which has translated to the "imprisonment of many parliamentarians" and the removal of "many DEM Party mayors" (2025-03-11). Bianet, an online news website published by the Independent Communication Network (BIA) [3] (Bianet n.d.), explains that in the wake of the 2024 elections, the government used "terrorism-related court verdicts and criminal investigations" to take over "several" municipalities held by DEM, among others, and replace the mayors with government-appointed trustees (2025-02-21). The Balkan Investigative Reporting Network (BIRN), a "network of non-governmental organisations promoting freedom of speech, human rights and democratic values in Southern and Eastern Europe" (BIRN n.d.), notes that the arrests, detentions and replacements of mayors and other local administrators affiliated to DEM "continue" despite the ongoing peace talks between the government, the DEM Party, and the PKK (2025-01-10).

Citing "[i]n-country sources," the Australian DFAT report notes that DEM politicians had been "physically attacked in Parliament without consequence to those who assaulted them" (Australia 2025-05-16, para. 3.87). Citing "several in-country sources," the same report indicates that

DEM MPs who were reaching the end of their terms "were faced with a choice between 'prison or exile' once they no longer had parliamentary immunity" (Australia 2025-05-16, para. 3.88).

Sources describe the following incidents involving DEM politicians:

- In October 2025, a court in Ağrı province sentenced 10 Kurdish political figures, including DEM municipal council members, to a combined 177 years and 7 months in prison for charges such as "membership in a terrorist organization," "propaganda," and "violent resistance" (Kurdish Expert 2025-10-30). Sources report that in October 2025, the same court sentenced DEM MP Berdan Öztürk, who is also the co-speaker of the DEM Foreign Affairs Commission (DEM 2025-05-16), to 6 years and 4 months imprisonment (ANF 2025-10-18; HRFT [2025-10]) for "aiding a terrorist organization" and spreading "terrorist propaganda" (ANF 2025-10-18).
- In February 2025, the co-mayor of Kağızman district in Kars province was sentenced to 6 years and 3 months of prison for "membership in an armed terrorist organization" (Bianet 2025-02-21; Duvar English 2025-02-25).
- In November 2024, a Turkish high criminal court sentenced Elif Bulut, a member of the DEM Central Executive Board, to a prison sentence of 6 years and 3 months for membership in an illegal organization (Mezopotamya Agency 2024-11-28; ANF 2024-11-28).
- In November 2024, the Turkish Ministry of the Interior dismissed mayors of the municipalities of Mardin, Batman and Halfeti, investigated them on "terrorism" charges, and replaced them with appointed trustees (Bianet 2025-02-21; Duvar English 2024-11-04). According to Human Rights Watch, this marked the third time the mayor of Mardin, a "veteran Kurdish politician" with other convictions he is still appealing, had been replaced after being elected to public office (2024-11-07).

2.3 DEM Members and Supporters

The Human Rights Watch annual report states that Turkish police "violently detain" protestors "associated with leftist or Kurdish groups" (2025-01-16). The Australian DFAT report notes instances of DEM politicians and supporters being "assaulted and beaten at public gatherings, including peaceful protests and press conferences" (Australia 2025-05-16, para. 3.87). Citing 2 confidential sources interviewed in late 2024, the Dutch report indicates that DEM members and supporters

might be targeted with "arrests, detentions, criminal investigations, prosecutions and convictions" for reasons including but not limited to:

- posting, sharing and liking pro-DEM messages on social media;
- participating in demonstrations (for example, against the appointment of trustees);
- giving or attending press statements;
- sending money to incarcerated relatives (which could be seen as financially supporting the PKK) (Netherlands 2025-02-24, 62).

Sources note that in response to a February 2025 demonstration protesting the replacement of DEM's mayor of Van with a trustee, Turkish police arrested 127 people (Duvar English 2025-02-16) or 121 people (HRFT [2025-02]). Citing the Association of Lawyers for Freedom (Özgürlükçü Hukukçular Derneği, ÖHD) [4], the Van Bar Association (Van Barosu) [5] and the Van branch of the Human Rights Association (İnsan Hakları Derneği, İHD) [6], Turkish Minute [7] notes that in the February 2025 protests against the removal of Van's mayor, "at least 16 minors and 90 adults were subjected to mistreatment while in custody, with reports of fractures to the head, arms and hands as well as severe bruising" (Turkish Minute 2025-02-18). According to Bianet, in November 2024 Turkish police "used rubber bullets and tear gas" on those protesting the removal of mayors affiliated to DEM and the Republican People's Party (Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, CHP) in Tunceli province and its Ovacık district (2024-11-22). Citing video footage, Human Rights Watch notes that, after protests in November 2024 in response to the Turkish authorities' dismissal and replacement of the DEM Mayor of Batman, police officers engaged in "beating and ill-treating [of] demonstrators they had apprehended" (2024-11-07). An election observation report of the May 2023 Türkiye general election by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) notes that YSP supporters faced

"widespread pressure, intimidation and arrests" during the campaigning period, including an "anti-terror" operation that resulted in the detention of 216 YSP supporters on 25 April 2023 (2023-09-29, 2, 15).

Citing the co-spokespersons of the DEM Legal and Human Rights Commission, Duvar English notes that 2,906 "people affiliated with the party, including 60 provincial and district executives and 72 children" were detained from January 2023 to November 2023, with 319 of those individuals being arrested (2023-12-18).

3. Requirements and Procedures to Become a Party Member

Information on the requirements and procedures to become a DEM member was scarce among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response. In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of DEM's Foreign Relations Commission indicated that "DEM Party's membership procedures and guiding principles remain the same as those of the HDP" (DEM 2025-10-14). For information on the requirements and procedures to become a member of the HDP, see Response to Information Request TUR200823 of November 2021.

3.1 Membership Cards

According to the representative of the DEM Foreign Relations Commission, the party does not issue membership cards (DEM 2025-10-14).

4. Attestation Letters

The information in the following paragraph was provided by the representative of the DEM Foreign Relations Commission in correspondence with the Research Directorate received on 14 October 2025:

DEM "may provide official letters for certain party members who have faced human rights violations or political persecution in Türkiye." The "only" issuing authority for such letters are DEM's Deputy Co-Chairs. DEM is aware of the existence of "some falsified letters" under the names of the provincial co-chairs. Such documents should be "disregard[ed]" and DEM can verify the authenticity of "related letters or documents" once said documents are sent to the party for confirmation (DEM 2025-10-14).

The information in the following paragraph was provided by the representative of the DEM Foreign Relations Commission in follow-up correspondence with the Research Directorate received on 15 October 2025:

The "unique circumstances of each individual case" prevents the party from using a standardized template in its letters. DEM uses 2 types of letterheads for "official letters addressed to public authorities": an English version used by the Foreign Relations Commission and another that features the official letterhead of DEM's "Party Headquarters" (DEM 2025-10-15).

A template of DEM's English letterhead used by the DEM Foreign Relations Commission (attachment 1) and a template letterhead of DEM's "Party Headquarters" (attachment 2), provided by the DEM Foreign Relations Commission representative, are attached to this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

Notes

[1] Following a call by the PKK's imprisoned leader in February 2025 for the organization to "disarm and dissolve" and the PKK leadership announcing a unilateral ceasefire, a peace process began between the government and the armed group to resolve the conflict in Türkiye (Crisis Group 2025-03-11). [\[back\]](#)

[2] The Executive Director of the KPI was a former HDP representative to the US (KPI n.d.a). [\[back\]](#)

[3] BİA is a media project aiming to strengthen "independent media" that is managed by the IPS Communication Foundation and funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) (Bianet n.d.). The IPS Communication Foundation is a non-profit based in Istanbul promoting "rights-based journalism values" for Turkish media (Hrant Dink Foundation n.d.). [\[back\]](#)

[4] The ÖHD is a Turkish lawyers association (Human Rights Watch 2019-04-10). [\[back\]](#)

[5] The Van Bar Association is one of Türkiye's regional bar associations located in the city of Van (Van Barosu n.d.). [\[back\]](#)

[6] The IHD is a Turkish NGO that conducts "activities that protect and promote human rights and freedoms" (OMCT n.d.). [\[back\]](#)

[7] Turkish Minute is a news website operated by International Journalists Association e.V., a "journalism organization established in Germany by media professionals who had to flee Turkey due to government pressure

and are now living in exile" (Turkish Minute n.d.). [\[back\]](#)

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Attachments

1. Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi (DEM). N.d. Foreign Relations Commission. Template of the English letterhead used by the Foreign Relations Commission. Sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of DEM's Foreign Relations Commission, 2025-10-15.
2. Halkların Eşitlik ve Demokrasi Partisi (DEM). N.d. Template of the letterhead of the Party Headquarters. Sent to the Research Directorate by a representative of DEM's Foreign Relations Commission, 2025-10-15.

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