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While the Turkish government's approach to minorities in 2012 'remained restrictive', in the words of the European Commission's assessment of Turkey's progress towards EU membership, there were signs of increasing respect and interest in protection for minority rights.

The Constitution Conciliation Commission (CCC), composed of members from the four parties represented in parliament and formed to oversee changes to Turkey's Constitution, failed to reach consensus on key issues affecting marginalized peoples in 2012, although it maintained promising dialogue with group representatives. For the first time, minorities other than those officially recognized by Turkey were invited to parliament, to express their views on a new Constitution. Currently only Armenians, Greeks and Jews are officially recognized as minority groups.

In February parliament heard a submission calling for legislation against hate crimes from a platform of 60 groups representing a wide range of minorities, including Alevi, Christian, Roma, LGBT and disability rights groups. Similarly, Turkey's foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu held an unprecedented meeting with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomew at the patriarchate in Istanbul. The Patriarch also proposed new constitutional protections for religious minorities and religious freedom to the CCC. In May a proposal from the Republican People's Party and the Peace and Democracy Party, which would make the state responsible for eliminating discrimination against women, was rejected by the other two parties. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has suggested that a referendum will be needed in the second half of 2013 even if all parties reach a consensus on a new Constitution.

Nevertheless, prevailing attitudes in government and the media towards minority groups remained a cause for concern in 2012. The European Commission noted that there had been no progress in introducing legislation against hate speech and hate crimes, as recommended by the Council of Europe. Studies of news reports in 2012 by the Hrant Dink Foundation found that the prevalence of direct and explicit hate speech in opinion columns and news articles was double that of 2011. The

Hrant Dink Foundation was set up after the assassination of Turkish-Armenian editor Hrant Dink in 2007. In January 2012, more than 20,000 people marched to mark the five years since his murder, and to protest a court ruling that there had been no state complicity in the assassination; the court's decision was later reviewed by the Supreme Court. In May 2013, the Supreme Court acknowledged that there had been a criminal conspiracy; the new decision paved the way for a retrial.

The situation for Roma in Turkey remained difficult, characterized by discrimination, prejudice and restricted socio-economic opportunities. In June, an administrative court cancelled a redevelopment project in the predominantly Kurdish and Roma Balat neighbourhood in Istanbul after five years of wrangling, and the controversial Sulukule project in Istanbul's Fatih municipality (which had resulted in the eviction of thousands of Roma in 2008) was also cancelled. However, the mayor of the municipality was confident that the state court would overturn the Sulukule ruling.

There was an increase in the number of Turkish applications to the European Court of Human Rights for the sixth year in a row, with most cases concerning the right to a fair trial and protection of property rights.

In August, a number of minority foundations reported that the process for returning property held by the government was dogged by bureaucratic problems and a timeframe that was too short to allow the foundations to make their claims. Between August 2011 and January 31, 2013, approximately 300 properties were returned to minority foundations (which often comprise religious communities).

Although the conflict between government forces and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) continued in 2012 with bombings and counter-insurgency operations causing deaths and displacement on both sides, talks began in October to negotiate a ceasefire. In early 2013, the implementation of a ceasefire between the government and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) held the promise of bringing an end to decades of violent conflict.

While the government promised to recognize Kurdish ethnicity through constitutional reform, there remain political obstacles to achieving this and ensuring the stability of the peace agreement. While some cases of financial and legal settlement for crimes committed by the state against Kurds in the 1990s were settled in 2012, it was noted by Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International that the 20-year limit on judicial settlement is imminent for many cases, and they face being 'timed out' of receiving compensation through the courts. Ensuring that cases are settled and judgments enforced represents an important step towards ensuring sustainable peace in Turkey.

In November, Amnesty International reported that prison doctors routinely refuse to conduct medical examinations of Kurdish prisoners on hunger strike. Kurds in Turkey suffer from discrimination in accessing health care; for example, Kurds may be unable to access medical services in their own language. Although there are concerns about the effects of the privatization of Turkey's health care system on the poorest citizens, south-east Turkey's reputation for treatment in hospitals staffed by Kurdish speakers has attracted Iraqi Kurds to cross the border for medical services. Although provision of services in Kurdish is still far from comprehensive, the Turkish health system still offers better services for Kurds than neighbouring Iraq.

The conflict in Syria had an increasing impact on Turkey during 2012, as the numbers of registered refugees rose from 9,500 in January to 144,755 by the year's end, in spite of restrictions put in place in August.

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