

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	580
Land:	Tyrkiet
Kilde:	Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB)
Titel:	Turkey: The ability of the Turkish authorities to monitor suspected Hizmet supporters abroad; treatment of family members of suspected Hizmet supporters in Turkey; treatment of returnees, including whether particular profiles face greater risks upon return (2018-November 2020)
Udgivet:	2. december 2020
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	20. maj 2021

Document #2042343

IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Turkey: The ability of the Turkish authorities to monitor suspected Hizmet supporters abroad; treatment of family members of suspected Hizmet supporters in Turkey; treatment of returnees, including whether particular profiles face greater risks upon return (2018–November 2020) [TUR200363.E]

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

For information on the Hizmet movement, including the treatment of followers or perceived followers, and how members of the Hizmet movement are identified, see Response to Information TUR106389 of January 2020.

1. Monitoring of Suspected Hizmet Supporters

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Director of the Centre for Hizmet Studies (CHS), a London-based NGO that “provides information, research, analysis and critique on Hizmet” (CHS n.d.), noted that, “since 2015, monitoring and spying on Hizmet supporters abroad [has] remained the first priority for the Turkish diplomatic posts abroad” (CHS 3 Nov. 2020). Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, the former director of the Intercultural Dialogue Institute (IDI) of the Greater Toronto Area (IDIGTA) [1], who now volunteers with the organization, wrote that “[t]he most important duties for the Turkish Embassy and Turkish Intelligence Service agents have been following and spotting Hizmet followers abroad and bringing them back to Turkey” (IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a representative of the Alliance for Shared Values (AfSV), “a non-profit umbrella organization that serves as a voice for civic and service organizations associated with the Hizmet social initiative in the U.S.” (AfSV n.d.), stated that “[t]he Turkish government has its own network of spies and regime loyalists all over the world” (AfSV 4 Nov. 2020).

The IDIGTA former director indicated that the “Turkish State has been using its foreign missions for surveillance of Turkish expats and, in some cases, abductions of these individuals from their respective countries” (IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020). Similarly, in correspondence with the Research Directorate, Abdullah Bozkurt, a journalist and the President of the Stockholm Center for Freedom (SCF), “an advocacy organization that promotes the rule of law, democracy, fundamental rights and freedoms with a special focus on Turkey” (SCF n.d.), indicated that “Hizmet supporters have been under constant monitoring by the Turkish authorities all around the world. There have been cases of abductions, extralegal deportations and documented cases of spying by Turkish diplomatic missions abroad” (Bozkurt 4 Nov. 2020). A July 2020 article by The World, a daily public radio program covering international news from Boston (The World n.d.), reports that the Turkish government has extradited, kidnapped and “otherwise push[ed] foreign governments to hand over” Hizmet supports from countries including Kazakhstan, Moldova, Kosovo, and Pakistan (The World 23 July 2020). Similarly, a December 2018 report by a team of journalists from nine media organizations across eight countries coordinated by CORRECTIV (CORRECTIV 11 Dec. 2018), a Germany-based non-profit investigative newsroom (CORRECTIV n.d.), writes that Turkish nationals have been “abducted and forcibly returned to Turkey” from countries including Gabon, Sudan, Moldova, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Malaysia, Switzerland, and Mongolia (CORRECTIV 11 Dec. 2018). A July 2018 article by Anadolu Agency (AA), a state-run press agency in Turkey (BBC 8 Oct. 2018), reports that Turkey’s Foreign Minister stated that “more than 100 FETO [Fethullah Terrorist Organization] affiliates have been brought back to Turkey” (AA 16 July 2018). According to sources, the Government of Turkey has designated the followers of Fethullah Gülen as terrorists (*The New York Times* 13 Apr. 2017; *The Guardian* 31 May 2016; Reuters 31 May 2016).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the President of the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF), a New York-based international civil society organization “dedicated to the culture of peace, human rights and sustainable development” (JWF n.d.a) and whose Honorary President is Fethullah Gülen (JWF n.d.b), noted that “in addition to the ‘traditional’ surveillance entities, or state agencies, there are probably hundreds of organizations and other entities funded by the Government of Turkey, whose ‘unofficial duties’ many times also involve monitoring activities” (JWF 4 Nov. 2020). The same source indicated that organizations and entities involved in monitoring activities include Turkey’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, National Intelligence Organization (MIT), and Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) as well as the Maarif Foundation, the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related

Communities (YTB), and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) (JWF 4 Nov. 2020). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

According to sources, in 2017 German authorities opened an investigation into claims that Turkish agents were spying on Hizmet supporters in Germany (AFP 28 Mar. 2017; *The Financial Times* 28 Mar. 2017). A May 2020 article by the *Arab Weekly* [2] reports that a study by the European Centre for Counterterrorism and Intelligence Studies (ECCI) [3] "accused Ankara of using Islamic organisations and public institutions to spy on its opposition in Germany" and that, according to the study, individuals connected to the Hizmet movement "are among the most prominent targets" (*The Arab Weekly* 30 May 2020).

A July 2018 article by *Daily Sabah*, a Turkey-based pro-government newspaper (*The New York Times* 21 Mar. 2018), states that Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs has "located 4,600 suspected members of the [Hizmet] group in 110 countries, and ... more than 80 coup plotters from 18 countries have been brought back" to Turkey (*Daily Sabah* 14 July 2018). A January 2019 report published on the Nordic Monitor news website [4] operated by the Nordic Research and Monitoring Network [5], written by Abdullah Bozkurt, who is also the Executive Director of the Nordic Research and Monitoring Network, cites a document from Turkey's Ministry of Foreign Affairs disclosed in a court case as indicating that Turkish embassies and consular officials engaged in surveillance and monitoring of "institutions affiliated with the Gülen movement" in countries in the Americas, Africa, Europe, Asia, and Oceania (Nordic Monitor 25 Jan. 2019). A July 2020 Nordic Monitor report, also written by Abdullah Bozkurt, cites an MIT secret intelligence report submitted to the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office at the request of the prosecutor as stating that MIT spied on 15 individuals in Canada, who were all "accused of being involved with the Gülen movement" (Nordic Monitor 19 July 2020). According to a July 2020 *Globe and Mail* article, documents filed in a Turkish court containing information collected by MIT at the request of the chief prosecutor's office in Ankara and provided to the *Globe and Mail* by Abdullah Bozkurt, demonstrate that Turkey's national intelligence agency collected personal information about 15 Canadian citizens who "have been named as suspects in a Turkish 'terrorism' investigation" (*The Globe and Mail* 7 July 2020). The same source reports that according to a February 2019 letter, Ankara's chief prosecutor requested that Turkey's national intelligence agency "collect the suspects' fingerprints and banking information" (*The Globe and Mail* 7 July 2020). The *Globe and Mail* notes that Turkey's ambassador to Ottawa stated that he could not confirm the authenticity of the documents provided by Bozkurt (*The Globe and Mail* 7 July 2020).

The July 2019 Nordic Monitor report notes that the MIT intelligence report "shows that Turkish intelligence also profiled the spouses, parents, siblings and in-laws of people who were put under surveillance on Canadian soil" (Nordic Monitor 19 July 2020). According to the *Globe and Mail* article, suspects' family members living in Canada and Turkey were also named in the case files (*The Globe and Mail* 7 July 2020).

2. Treatment of Family Members of Suspected Hizmet Supporters in Turkey

A June 2017 report by the UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion, based on his visit to Turkey in November 2016, states that "[d]ecrees adopted since July 2016 have broadened the scope of the original emergency to include those who 'belong to, connect to, or have contact with the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization' (decree No. 668)" and "public personnel who have 'membership, affiliation or connection to the Fetullahist Terrorist Organization' and even the spouses and children of such persons (decree No. 670)" (UN 21 June 2017, para. 26).

The CHS Director noted that "many family members of alleged Gulenists are also staunch AKP [the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), "the ruling conservative political party" (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, 4)] supporters" and avoid negative attention from the government, adding that, "in fact, in many cases they inform the authorities about their Gulenist relatives" (CHS 3 Nov. 2020). Corroborating information could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

The IDIGTA former director stated that Hizmet supporters' family members have been experiencing "precarious conditions including social exclusion, pressure from peers and intimidation by the Turkish authorities" (IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020). Similarly, the JWF President wrote that "families and children of individuals allegedly linked to the Hizmet movement face direct and indirect discrimination" (JWF 4 Nov. 2020). The IDIGTA former director noted that "Hizmet supporters in Canada cannot fully exercise their rights and freedoms due to fear of repercussions for their family members" (IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020).

The SCF President wrote that "family members of suspected Hizmet supporters have been systematically targeted by the government authorities" (Bozkurt 4 Nov. 2020). The JWF President noted that, following the 15 July 2016 attempted coup, family members of Hizmet supporters came under "unprecedented and wholesale attack" and that family members of Hizmet supporters have been subject to arrest and detention because of their "alleged" ties to the Hizmet movement (JWF 4 Nov. 2020). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor at Stockholm University who studies Turkish culture, society, religion, and politics, noted that if someone is "accused" of being a Hizmet supporter, "a family member may also be accused (without evidence, simply by association), arrested and even imprisoned" (Professor 4 Nov. 2020).

The CHS Director wrote that "on many occasions," the police had arrested the spouse of a wanted Hizmet supporter that they were unable to locate (CHS 3 Nov. 2020). The same source also noted that the spouses of arrested Hizmet supporters are brought to the police station to "threaten and force" the arrestee to confess (CHS 3 Nov. 2020). Similarly, the AfSV representative indicated that "family members are often used as leverage in efforts against

Hizmet supporters abroad” (AfSV 4 Nov. 2020). A June 2020 *Guardian* article reports that the father of a Turkish NBA player who is close to Fethullah Gülen was recently acquitted and released, after being sentenced to 15 years in prison on terrorism charges in 2018 (*The Guardian* 19 June 2020).

The Professor indicated that family members of “accused” Hizmet supporters “are shunned by family and society,” lose their jobs, are unable to get hired, and “often” have their social security, insurance, and pensions cancelled (Professor 4 Nov. 2020). The same source also noted that “in some cases,” the property of family members of “accused” Hizmet supporters has been confiscated (Professor 4 Nov. 2020).

According to the JWF President, the Turkish government has suspended disability and social benefits for the spouses and children of individuals who have been detained or arrested because of ties to the Hizmet movement (JWF 4 Nov. 2020). The same source indicated that children of individuals believed to be connected to the Hizmet movement have been denied health care in hospitals and health centres (JWF 4 Nov. 2020). Similarly, the CHS Director stated that individuals dismissed under emergency decrees and their spouses and children cannot receive General Health Insurance [6] benefits and disabled individuals whose primary caregivers are dismissed under an emergency decree are unable to receive social benefits (CHS 3 Nov. 2020).

According to a June 2017 report by SCF, a 9-year-old girl was separated from her foster family after her foster father was put under investigation for his alleged connections to the Hizmet movement (SCF 2 June 2017). The same source reports that, in November 2016, an official from Turkey’s Ministry of Family and Social Policy stated that “authorities may remove children from homes if their guardians are found to be supporters of the coup attempt” (SCF 2 June 2017).

A September 2020 country information report by Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) notes that, following the 2016 attempted coup, authorities cancelled the passports of the family members of “people alleged to be associated with the Gulen movement” (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para 5.26). The same source indicates that “[i]n some cases the government has cancelled or refused to issue passports to family members of individuals outside the country who are accused of ties to the Gulen movement” (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para. 5.38).

3. Treatment of Returnees

Sources report that Hizmet supporters do not voluntarily return from abroad (Bozkurt 4 Nov. 2020; JWF 4 Nov. 2020). Similarly, the IDIGTA former director noted that, even if there is a family or medical emergency, “members of the Hizmet movement avoid any travel to Turkey due to the ongoing active persecution” (IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020). The AfSV representative wrote that “Hizmet supporters who have left or escaped Turkey simply do not return to Turkey. The danger is too great” (AfSV 4 Nov. 2020).

The AfSV representative wrote that

any Hizmet supporter is in grave danger upon return to Turkey. Their names may be on lists the Turkish government has developed to identify Hizmet supporters. As such, they would be arrested immediately upon entry at an airport or other point of entry. If they manage to make it into the country without notice, they would have to hide their affiliation and be in constant fear of neighbors, friends or family alerting the authorities to their presence. (AfSV 4 Nov. 2020)

The Australian DFAT report notes that “Turkey’s sophisticated information databases mean failed asylum seekers are likely to come to the attention of the government if they have a criminal record or are a member of a group of particular interest, including the Gulen movement” (Australia 10 Sept. 2020, para 5.27).

According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), in their 2020 world report, Hizmet supporters have been extradited to Turkey in a way that “bypassed legal procedures and judicial review” and those “illegally extradited in this way were detained and prosecuted upon return to Turkey” (HRW 14 Jan. 2020, 578). Sources report that Turkey has been forcibly returning Turkish nationals from abroad (JWF 4 Nov. 2020; UN 28 Aug. 2020, para. 8). An August 2020 report by the UN Human Rights Council following up on recommendations made by the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances states that “[t]he working group is gravely concerned at what appears to be a systematic practice of State-sponsored extraterritorial abduction and forced returns of Turkish nationals from numerous States to Turkey” (UN 28 Aug. 2020, para. 8). The same source also notes that “at least” 100 individuals with suspected ties to the Hizmet movement “are reported to have been subjected to arbitrary arrests and detention, enforced disappearance and torture, as part of covert operations reportedly organized or abetted by the Government of Turkey in coordination with authorities of several States” (UN 28 Aug. 2020, para. 8).

The JWF President stated that, “regardless” of whether they returned to Turkey voluntarily or involuntarily, “all victims appear to have been subject to torture and ill-treatment” (JWF 4 Nov. 2020). The IDIGTA former director noted that, in “rare” cases where Hizmet supporters have returned to Turkey voluntarily, these individuals have been “detained and faced court cases” upon return (IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020). Similarly, the CHS Director wrote that in cases where Hizmet supporters have voluntarily returned to Turkey they were “often arrested at passport checkpoints upon an arrest notice registered at the customs and borders database” (CHS 3 Nov. 2020).

The IDIGTA former director indicated that any individual who may have had a connection to the Hizmet movement in the past is at risk of being investigated and subsequently imprisoned for six years as a result of their "membership in the movement" (IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020). Similarly, the CHS Director noted that there are no groups of Hizmet supporters that "face minor risk" and "[a]ny supporter of the Hizmet [m]ovement, whatever their profession," faces "grave risk[s] for their freedoms in Turkey" (CHS 3 Nov. 2020).

The IDIGTA former director wrote that some individuals and their families might face greater risk due to their careers, the way they are perceived by the community or "their seniority level in the movement" (IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020). The SCF President noted that, while all individuals considered to be Hizmet supporters are targeted by the Turkish government, certain individuals "seem to be" more at risk: those who had executive duties within the movement; former government officials; those "accused" of being connected to the "abortive putsch," and those with a "high level of publicity," such as journalists (Bozkurt 4 Nov. 2020). The JWF President noted that

Turkish authorities do not seem to 'discriminate' when requesting the extradition or illegally transferring perceived members of [the] Hizmet movement to Turkey. ... However, it does appear that there is a difference in their sentencing. Individuals who held higher positions, e.g. in Hizmet-inspired schools abroad, receive harsher sentences once they are transferred to Turkey. (JWF 4 Nov. 2020)

According to sources, individuals who worked in Hizmet affiliated schools, institutions, or organizations face greater risks (Professor 4 Nov. 2020; JWF 4 Nov. 2020; IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020). The Professor reported that Hizmet supporters who previously worked in the military face a higher risk (Professor 4 Nov. 2020). Other sources indicated that others who face greater risk include "perceived Hizmet supporters who previously worked in law enforcement, military, bureaucracy [or] government" (JWF 4 Nov. 2020) or individuals who worked in public institutions and were expelled from their positions because of the government decree, particularly those in the police and armed forces (IDIGTA 13 Nov. 2020). The CHS Director wrote that individuals in the following categories are at greater risk because the sentence they would receive "could be heavier":

- former employees of entities that were shut down under emergency decrees
- former shareholders in companies that were shut down or seized under emergency decrees
- former members of associations or unions that were shut down under emergency decrees
- those who have been implicated by other suspects or defendants
- those who have been "snitched" on by pro-government individuals
- those who have been spied on by the Government
- "alleged" Bylock users
- those who were dismissed under an emergency decree
- those who have a deposit account in Bank Asya
- former subscribers to newspapers or magazines that were shut down under emergency decrees (CHS 3 Nov. 2020).

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] The Intercultural Dialogue Institute of the Greater Toronto Area (IDIGTA) is a branch of the Intercultural Dialogue Institute (IDI), a non-profit organization that promotes "interfaith and intercultural cooperation, tolerance and dialogue," as well as "diversity, pluralism and multiculturalism throughout Canada," and was "founded by Turkish Canadians inspired by the teachings and example of Fethullah Gulen" (IDIGTA n.d.).

[2] The *Arab Weekly* is an English-language publication by the Al Arab Publishing House in London that analyzes trends and developments in the Middle East and North Africa (*The Arab Weekly* n.d.).

[3] The European Centre for Counterterrorism and Intelligence Studies (ECCI) is an organization based in Germany and the Netherlands with a focus on "European efforts to combat radical Islamic groups" (ECCI n.d.).

[4] The Nordic Monitor is a news and tracking website covering "religious, ideological and ethnic extremist movements and radical groups, with a special focus on Turkey" (Nordic Monitor n.d.).

[5] The Nordic Research and Monitoring Network is a non-profit organization aiming to "raise awareness on radical and violent extremist trends in Europe and beyond" (Nordic Research and Monitoring Network n.d.).

[6] According to the Asylum Information Database (AIDA), managed by the European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE), “Turkey’s General Health Insurance (*Genel Sağlık Sigortası*, GSS) scheme makes it compulsory for all residents of Turkey to have some form of medical insurance coverage, whether public or private. For persons whose income earnings are below a certain threshold and are therefore unable to make premium payments to cover their own medical insurance, the scheme extends free of charge health care coverage” (ECRE n.d.).

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Oral sources: Human Rights Foundation of Turkey; lecturer in international relations and politics at a London university who studies Turkish politics; lecturer in law at a university in Turkey.

Internet sites, including: Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; Austrian Red Cross – Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation; Balkan Insight; Bertelsmann Stiftung; Council of Europe; ecoinet.net; Factiva; Freedom House; *Hürriyet Daily News*; Netherlands – Ministry of Foreign Affairs; UK – Home Office; UN – Refworld; US – Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress; *The Washington Post*.

ecoinet summary:

Query response on Turkey:

Monitoring of suspected supporters of the Hizmet / Gülen movement, treatment of their family members and of returnees (2018 - November 2020)

Country:

Turkey

Source:

IRB – Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

Original link:

<https://irb-cisr.gc.ca/en/country-information/rit/Pages/index.aspx?doc=458252&pls=1>

Document type:

Response

Language:

English

Published:

2 December 2020

Document ID:

2042343

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ecoi.net is run by the Austrian Red Cross (department ACCORD) in cooperation with Informationsverbund Asyl & Migration. ecoi.net is funded by the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior and Caritas Austria. ecoi.net is supported by ECRE & UNHCR.

