

Turkey to strip Kurdish MPs abroad of citizenship if they do not return

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By Editorial Staff

June 5,
2017



Turkey's Kurdish HDP deputies Tugba Hezer Ozturk (L) and Faysal Sariyildiz, (C) along with former deputy Ozdal Ucer. Photo DHA/AA

ANKARA,— Turkey's Interior Ministry has released the list of 130 people who are currently abroad including Turkish-Islamic scholar Fethullah Gülen and two deputies from the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) who will be stripped of citizenship if they do not return to the country within three months.

The individuals on the list are being accused of having links to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the faith-based Gülen movement, which is described as a terrorist organization by the Turkish government although there is no court ruling to this effect.

The list of what it called fugitives from justice include Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) lawmakers Faysal Sariyildiz and Tugba Hezer Ozturk, and former HDP lawmaker Ozdal Ucer.

Sariyildiz, 42, has tweeted many things critical of Turkish security forces including a May 22 incident with photos of an older woman being dragged which he described as "barbarization, banditry and the peak point of lowness."

Ozturk, 27, is from Van. She has retweeted several articles critical of last month's incident at the Turkish embassy during President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Washington, D.C.

More than a dozen Kurdish HDP lawmakers have been jailed, mostly due to alleged links with the PKK which has waged an insurgency against Turkey for more than three decades.

The HDP denies direct ties to the PKK, which is considered a terrorist organization by the United States, Turkey and the European Union.

The party's co-leaders, [Selahattin Demirtas](#) and Figen Yuksekdag, have also been jailed, which handicapped

its campaign against the April referendum to change the constitution and grant President Tayyip Erdogan sweeping new powers. Turks narrowly backed the constitutional change on April 16.

The HDP says as many as 5,000 of its members have been detained as part of a crackdown that followed last year's failed coup, and which rights groups say targets dissent.

Since July 2015, Turkey initiated a controversial military **campaign** against the PKK in the country's southeastern Kurdish region after Ankara ended a two-year ceasefire agreement. Since the beginning of the campaign, Ankara has imposed several round-the-clock curfews, preventing civilians from fleeing regions where the military operations are being conducted.

Observers say the crackdown has taken a heavy toll on the Kurdish civilian population and accuse Turkey of using collective punishment against the minority. In March 2017, the Turkish security forces **accused by UN** of committing serious abuses during operations against Kurdish militants in the nation's southeast.

The PKK took up arms in 1984 against the Turkish state, which still denies the constitutional existence of Kurds, to push for greater autonomy for the Kurdish minority who make up around **22.5 million** of the country's 79-million population.

A large Kurdish community in Turkey and worldwide openly sympathise with PKK rebels and Abdullah Ocalan, who founded the PKK group in 1974, and has a high symbolic value for most Kurds in Turkey and worldwide according to observers.

According to government decree No. 680, individuals who are facing administrative or judicial investigation or prosecution over charges of "crimes against the government," "armed rebellion against the government," "armed attack and assassination of the president" or "membership in an armed terror organization" will be summoned by prosecutors to testify. If they cannot be reached and are understood to be abroad, the public prosecutor will refer the case to the Justice Ministry within a month.

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