

THE İMRALI POST

YOU HEARD HIS NAME. LEARN HIS STORY. DEMAND HIS FREEDOM

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Let Freedom Ring. Let Them Hear Your Voice

Today is the 23rd anniversary of Abdullah Öcalan’s abduction and incarceration. Öcalan’s abduction was an “international plot” involving many countries, including the USA, the UK, Israel, Germany and Greece. However, there has still not been a thorough investigation shedding light on the details of this plot and its ramifications.

After Öcalan’s abduction, Kurds from all parts of Kurdistan and around the world united to prevent some of its intended consequences: Öcalan’s execution; the emergence of a genocidal civil war; the collapse of the freedom movement. Even in prison, Öcalan himself made a major contribution, consistently focusing on peace and a political solution to the ongoing conflict.

Although the Turkish state’s track record of genocides and oppression of the Kurds is well known, Western states handed over Öcalan but called on Turkey to ensure that Öcalan received a fair trial. The show trial in Turkey ended with the expected death sentence. The European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg deemed the trial “not fair and not impartial”, based, however, on a technicality rather than substance. Thus, the facts of the odyssey that culminated in Öcalan’s abduction have been further obscured and given legal cover rather than being clarified.

When the death penalty was lifted, a whole new level of isolation was introduced into Turkey’s penal system: complete isolation, no contact with lawyers or family and an aggravated life sentence—with no chance for parole—in effect, a slow-motion death sentence. These changes were supported by European institutions and the US.

In spite of the abduction, total isolation in atrocious prison conditions and the aggravated life sentence, international human rights institutions have shown no interest. The bodies that could not avoid involvement either provided legitimacy for the isolation (ECtHR) or failed to obtain any improvements (CPT).

For 11 years, Abdullah Öcalan was the sole prisoner on an island declared a military zone and guarded by more than 1,000 soldiers. Since 2011, there have been 3 others in the island prison. They are all held totally incommunicado, including no contact with family or lawyers. For more than a year, nothing has been heard from Abdullah Öcalan or the other three inmates in the island prison. The complete silence of European institutions makes them accomplices.

We Are “Hope”

This much is clear: war and terror against the Kurds have always been both covert and systematic, based on joint interests of past and present forces in Europe and the Middle East. The US continues this policy. With its critical role in the international plot, the US entered into open-ended and irresponsible experiments in the region, as can be seen in the terror unleashed by Turkey and ISIS against the Kurdish people in Kurdistan as a whole and in Turkey, Iraq and Syria, in prison or not.

To expect restitution from these states is a cat and mouse game. The institution of an aggravated life sentence is a path towards a US-style prison system like the one Blacks in the US have been struggling against for decades. Ill prisoners are dying by the score, often after more than 20 years in prison. Prison complexes larger than anything previously seen are being built in Turkey, as is the case the world over. The struggle of Kurdish society proves that only democratic circles and organizations can reverse this tide. There is no other possible force.

Abdullah Öcalan’s resistance and his approach to addressing issues of democracy, peace and war have shown us how fragile the Turkish war machine and the world-system are, despite their show of power.

Öcalan’s Freedom Is the Only Path to Peace

With their treatment of Öcalan, his jailers want the Kurds and their friends to get the message: “he is never getting out; accept that, and accept that you will never be free”. Thus, it is imperative that we demand “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan” with words and actions. It is the power of peoples and of women that can call these states to account and demand responsible actions. This power can create free life and can force these states to act in accordance with principles that were attained through struggles of long ago: Let Freedom Ring. Let them hear your voice.

The İmralı prison complex must be disbanded. Those involved in maintaining complete isolation at the İmralı Island prison are acting illegally and engaging in an ongoing war against the Kurdish people.

We once again call on everybody to:

- put pressure on the international institutions that Turkey is party to, namely the Council of Europe and the United Nations, as well as all other political and human rights bodies.
- put pressure on your local representatives to demand an end to isolation.
- help us achieve our goals: “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan—Peace in Kurdistan” now.

International Initiative “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan — Peace in Kurdistan”

Cologne, 12 February 2022

Institutionalizing the State of Exception: The İmralı Isolation Regime

FAIK ÖZGÜR EROL | FRIDAY, MARCH 15, 2019

The Political Thought of the İmralı Prison Complex and the Öcalan Laws

The attempt to understand the prison isolation of İmralı as a negative expression of a prohibition order does not do justice to the issue at hand. The weakness of this attempt lies in the desire to explain power and politics in the framework of juristic thought. It seems more promising to explain the concept of isolation through its positive attributes, as a technique of control and administration. The following shall present a critique, or rather a self-criticism, of the level at which we have led the discourse up to now.

What notion of law, what kind of politics underlies the isolation in İmralı? Despite all the failures of the isolation, we must ask ourselves: Where does isolation lead to? What does it bring about? What purpose does it serve?

Turkish prisons are part of the extensive legal-political structures of the country. While the prison system may first seem to be an issue that is primarily concerned with punishment (deprivation of freedom) and re-socialization (and respective mechanisms) its implementation measures rather remind one of the practical implementation of judicial agreements, which include extensive penal measures. These arrangements include a.o. gratification, incentives and sanctions to prevent inmates from engaging in certain behaviors or actions. Thus, the prisoner is granted for instance more visiting time or other opportunities as long as he or she is “well-behaved”. Different measures can be taken for behavior deemed inappropriate, from the denial of existing rights to continuous cell confinement.

Is İmralı part of any such prison system? In a way, it has never been part of a system that is based on any of the above-mentioned legal arrangements. From the beginning, the asymmetrical features that are part of its structure rendered İmralı to be something that stands outside of law, or rather, in contradiction to existing law. At a technical, physical or legal level, it is neither part of the prison system, nor completely independent of it.

İmralı has always been an expression of a remarkably effective, new, and exceptional technique of power, which is neither based on a rule of law, nor completely excludes it as a principle. Giorgio Agamben’s claim that “the question about whether or not the events at the camp are lawful is meaningless,” applies also to the situation on İmralı Island. İmralı’s relationship to principles of law is tightly connected to the circumstance that the island constitutes a sphere in which law is being suspended.

İmralı island is not merely a space where a prison is located. The island stands for a system by means of which a completely new punishment regime is being implemented. Everything on the island is organized according to this system. The island was turned into a place without humans. Its surrounding was declared as a military zone. Metaphorically, the island presents the most favorable geographical conditions for the institutionalization of such exceptional measures. An island is neither outside nor inside; its particularity lies in its secluded-ness. The twenty-year old physical isolation constitutes part of a larger aspect. It means

the disruption of any relation to the outside world, a policy of isolation, death, and a life that is restricted in the tightest manner. In this situation, connection to society is cut off, while connection to the power system remains. Due to the intensity of the applied exceptional legislation, this connection remains particularly strong in fact. On one hand, a prevalence of details that enable power to be felt absolutely, on the other hand, lives that are forced to hang in a limbo at the brink of total lawlessness. All persons who set foot on the island, including those employed by the state, must submit to its system. The state of exception regime does not tolerate any exceptions.

On İmralı, the system's primary aim was not to deport Mr. Öcalan to a place that is considered to be a "secure location." The actual intention was to seclude him, to turn him into an "other", to isolate and atomize him, to constantly observe and in a way to dissolve him. Therefore, the İmralı system should not be reduced to notions like severe punishment, revenge and forced obedience (although these elements of course constitute part of the whole). The actual aim of the system is comprised of separating, breaking and turning the prisoner into an obedient tool.

Precisely for this reason, we understand the isolation system of İmralı not as a method of punishment, but rather as a method of control and administration. Part of this method is the surveillance and recording of all meetings with family members, lawyers or delegations, the overt or secret documentation of discussions between the prisoners on the island, and the continuous video and audio surveillance of the individual cells and daily medical examinations. These measures are not mere safety precautions or means of intimidation. Rather, these are techniques through which information is gathered and analyzed to be used for purposes of governance and influence in phases of political confrontation and conflict. There is a dual function by means of which information is extracted from the prisoner, while information is collected about him. The right to obtain and analyze all this information lies in the hands of those in charge, and who do not seem to be willing to share this information with others.

Another aspect of the administration methods is the control over the opportunities of the inmate to access information. For fifteen years, there was no access to television on İmralı, a restriction that does not apply to any other prison in the country. For a long time, Mr. Öcalan was not allowed to keep more than three books at a time in his cell. Newspapers were only provided after they were carefully selected, censored and sometimes kept long enough beforehand to be outdated. It was thus decided what the prisoner was and was not allowed to know. Investigations and lawsuits were launched upon meetings with lawyers. With reference to individual sentences he said during meetings with his lawyers, Mr. Öcalan was punished to 200 days in his cell. When lawyers arrived on İmralı to meet Öcalan, no political or other delegations were allowed access to the island. In turn, whenever such delegations were able to go to İmralı, lawyers were not allowed to visit the island. One measure that was implemented for the first fifteen years of the İmralı imprisonment is the perfect symbol for all of these aspects: a radio that was provided to Mr. Öcalan in his cell was set on the official state radio channel, with the button to switch channels removed. This limitation policy was always maintained on İmralı with the utmost care.

İmralı is an institution of law that serves as a prototype for actual methods of power and control

It is impossible to understand İmralı as a system that was ordered only from above and completely planned beforehand. Without a doubt, many details were arranged at the beginning of Mr. Öcalan's imprisonment in such a way as to achieve certain aims. With time, İmralı turned into an administrative technique, which derived its legitimacy from itself, expanded and was applied to other spheres of societal life.

Even if we understand İmralı as part of a system of law, we cannot avoid coming to the following conclusion: İmralı is an institution of law that serves as a prototype for the actual methods of power and control in Turkey. The continuous existence of İmralı as a state of exception regime over a period of twenty years made it possible for the state of exception or exceptional measures to spread to entirely different spheres. İmralı presents the core or the basis of this development.

For once, the democratic farce of the existing rule of law on İmralı became visible: Formal equality and judicial objectivity no longer play any role here.

1. Formal equality: Formal equality before law is normally guaranteed through the blindness of jurisdiction, meaning that everybody is equal before law. What we have witnessed in Turkey over the past 25 years however is the tailoring of law to a single person. Regulations for exceptions were added to existing laws, which will be remembered as the “Öcalan laws”. These exceptional regulations were incessantly and exclusively applied on İmralı Prison Island. An example for this regulation is the right of the client to hold private meetings with his or her lawyers. The exception on İmralı however requires that a state official is present at all times during such meetings and that the meetings are recorded. This regulation was issued in Turkey in reaction to a decision of the European Court of Human Rights, which had criticized an unjust treatment of the inmate Öcalan. With the tightening of the legislation concerning life sentences in 2005, the status of hundreds of prisoners on death row in Turkey changed overnight. They were removed from their old cells and put into one-person cells. The intention behind this measure was to legitimize the praxis on İmralı and to spread it to the other prisons in the country. The apparatus that was constantly concerned with the creation of new measures was refined in such a way that any law amendment or new legislation in the country was examined for whether it would have any potential effect on the İmralı system. At times, the system was re-examined to check whether it continues to do justice to its exclusionary function. This exclusion developed into a culture that was deemed necessary for the maintenance of the entire system. A particularly striking example is the amnesty for students in 2011. The state was keenly concerned to ensure that Öcalan could not benefit from the amnesty, so that politically-motivated cases were from the onset excluded from qualifying for amnesty. While this praxis was first sold as an exceptional measure, over time, it developed into an amnesty legislation for students that excluded political offenses. All the special regulations that have been applied to one person in İmralı over the course of ten to fifteen years developed into general law with the declaration of the state of exception in 2016: specific legal measures for singled-out individuals or societal groups.

2. Legality/Objectivity: Since 2005, all meetings on İmralı were supervised by a state representative and recorded. The content of the meetings was documented without any legal base. Instead, it was justified with a broad interpretation of the following legal regulation: “The files of suspicious lawyers may be confiscated.” Normally, it is not possible to extend legal exceptions through the re-interpretation of existing law. At best, freedom-related rights could be extended in this way. Yet again, nobody attributed great meaning to this development. Since July 2011, no lawyers were allowed on İmralı Island any longer. The island became completely inaccessible to them. This measure, too, did not have any legal or judicial base. It was simply the decision of a person in charge at the institution. Thus, based on an institutional decision, lawyers’ visits to a prison were undermined. The praxis of referring to institutional decisions rather than laws soon became a broadly applied administrative praxis. It is enough to recall the military curfews in 2015 and 2016 in dozens of Kurdish districts in Turkey. But how exactly did these declarations of the state of emergency, which had not yet been named as such, come about at the time? What legal basis existed to legitimize those measures at the time? Through the far-reaching interpretation of paragraph 11/C2 [1] of the provincial administration law, the provincial governor, by an administrative decision (governorship de-

cision) issued curfews on several towns, isolated them from the outside world, and thus suspended nearly all constitutional rights through executive decree. Practically the constitutionally-enshrined rights of millions of people were suspended with a single executive institutional decision.

This is precisely the administration technique that we are talking about. This is precisely what we mean when we say that the tactics and techniques introduced in İmralı are being expanded to society as a whole. Without a doubt, the legal discourse presents a safe and legitimate framework for analysis. But if we limit ourselves to this kind of discourse, we become victims of a superficial and negative discourse to an extent. We are faced with a power system that has decided to either abandon or undo any desire to be lawful. I support the view that the centre of this turn developed at least over the past 25 on İmralı. At hand is a form of hegemony that suspends the sovereignty of law during periods it considers urgent; a power apparatus that operates with an extraordinary authority. This authority does not recognize the principle of the separation of powers; rather, it is under the control of bureaucracy and has in fact taken over the power of law.

Spheres outside of the discourse around universally valid human rights

We can understand the structures in İmralı as a paradigm shift in criminal law. What does this change consist of? The aim is to create spaces that are not bound to the discourse around universally valid human rights. Since World War II, this discourse had served to put limits to states' use of violence. Another example for such kinds of purposefully created spheres is Guantanamo. Within the framework of the "War on Terror", proclaimed by the United States in January 2002, people were arrested worldwide upon accusations of membership in violent extremist organizations such as al Qaeda or the Taliban. They were taken to the US military Camp Delta, a small piece of land in Cuba, which has been rented – or rather occupied – for a century. The media obtained footage of blindfolded and handcuffed prisoners in the camp with orange inmate clothing and chained feet, curled up on the floor. The US refused to accept these people as prisoners of war. At the same time, it was argued that the prisoners were not on US territory and thus could not benefit from fundamental human rights, which would have been the case for US citizens. Their imprisonments had not been preceded by a judicial decision but were a result of the US president to declare them "terrorists". They had no right to due process, they had no contact to lawyers or family members, and they were subject to all sorts of torture methods. All these measures constituted a clear turn away from the fundamental rights that had been viewed as inviolable only in the 20th century.

In March 2002, John Yoo, former Deputy Assistant Attorney General at the Office of Legal Counsel in the U.S. Department of Justice, hit the nail on the head, when describing the purpose of Guantanamo: "What the administration is trying to do is to create a new rule of law." [2] [Translator's note: The original phrasing may slightly vary from the translation]. In the case of the British citizen Feroz Abbasi a British court of appeal ruled that the accused was being arbitrarily held captive based on "legal black holes." [3]

Ever since, Guantanamo has been regularly referred to as a "legal black hole." In reference to the statement we made at the beginning, we can note that that which we describe as a paradigm shift or new rule of law concerns the creation of such legal black holes. Presidents and politicians change, days and seasons go by, lives and generations end; but the legal black holes remain intact. In fact, black holes tend to ever expand. At times, it is a prison, at times a concentration camp, sometimes it is a region or a town, other times it is an entire country that can be transformed into a big legal black hole.

Precisely because of this, the modern judicial discourse or justice apparatus do not find efficient answers to the questions raised by Guantanamo and İmralı. Human rights are supposed to protect the human body from suffering and pain. When it comes to the constant surveillance and documentation of the inmates, the withdrawal of entitled information, the extensive techniques of control and administration, the legal discourse fails to provide answers and can in fact be turned into a complicit or supporting addition to the system.

The Professionalization of the İmralı System

Let us consider the CPT, the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture, and the report that this institution published in March 2018. [4] Even though this report appears academic, diplomatic and juridical, it fundamentally suffers from a lack of spirit and moral-ethical values. Instead of challenging the matter at hand, with this report, the CPT contributes to the attempt to professionalize the system at İmralı. Let us look at the efficient and legal suggestions in the report. The report notes to the Turkish government that the CPT cannot be expected to believe excuses to refuse to allow visits to İmralı, which include "bad weather conditions" or "issues with the ferry". It is further added: "There is no legal base in Turkish law for the restrictions implemented in the year of 2013." Thus, the violation of law is clearly mentioned. There are suggestions in the report: "To the extent to which the lawyer functions as a messenger for instructions, in special cases, an independent lawyer can be arranged to gain access." Thus, instead of criticizing the fact that the authorities are violating a fundamental right, the report proposes to act rationally, to maintain an appearance and to employ an "independent lawyer". An "independent" lawyer!

Likewise, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), another institution of the Council of Europe, follows a similar approach. After lawyers were banned from visiting İmralı in July 2011, Öcalan's legal advisors turned to the ECtHR in October of the same year. Their most important demand was access to their client. However, the isolation and the refusal to allow lawyers continue ever since. Not only has the ECHR failed to take a decision on this matter, in the past 7 years, it did not even proceed to deliver the application submitted by the lawyers to the Turkish government and to demand a statement from the government as normally required per procedure. One could write a separate article about the ECtHR's stance since 2010 (or lack thereof), considering the trials on Roboski*, the military curfews, and İmralı, which is why I will refrain from elaborating on this issue further at this point.

The Institutionalization of the State of Exception

»The exception in jurisprudence is analogous to the miracle in theology« (Carl Schmitt, Political Theology). [5] It would have been impossible to find more suitable words! Even if all that is said falls into oblivion, it is miracles that continue to live in society's memory. Miracles are based on a force that transcends nature and society. A new state of governance is being created in which a state of exception is being institutionalized, and which perpetually repeats itself. It is these legal-political methods and administrative techniques that turn İmralı into a centre of power.

İmralı is being turned into a sphere of resistance through analyzing and subverting this regime of power. Over the past 20 years, by rendering itself ungovernable, İmralı has been constituting the history of a resistance praxis against a technique of power! This praxis is based on rendering its behavior and ability to speak unforeseeable; this is what it means to make oneself ungovernable, uncontrollable. This aspect would be subject to further analysis.

For this reason, it is not sufficient to only criticize the institution at İmralı and its legal status. Even if we should be successful with this, we would have to accept watching İmralı being replaced by another institution with the same purpose and effect. The way out of the İmralı isolation can therefore only be achieved with a legal-political re-configuration of the İmralı status and technique.

Notes:

1 - (Article 11/C) It is among the tasks and duties of the provincial governor to take the decisions and measures necessary to ensure peace and security within the borders of the province, to protect the immunity of the person, to guard the safety of the person, to provide public welfare, and engage in preventive law enforcement. To this end, the governor takes the necessary decisions and measures. The regulations of Article 66 apply to those, who do not abide by such decisions and measures.

2 - Philippe Sands: Hukuksuz Dünya, Verlag Alfa, Übers. B. F. Çallı, İstanbul April 2016, S. 242–243.

3 - ibid. S. 261

4 - <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-/council-of-europe-anti-torture-committee-publishes-report-on-imral-prison-turkey->

5 - Carl Schmitt: Siyasal İlahiyat (Politische Theologie), Verlag Emre Zeybekoğlu – Dost Kitabevi, 2016, S. 42.



Timeline of the International Conspiracy

The founder and leader of the PKK and leader of the Kurdish people, Abdullah Öcalan, was expelled from Syria on 9 October, 1998, kidnapped from the garden of the Greek Embassy residence in Nairobi, Kenya, and, delivered to a Turkish operation team waiting in an airplane at Nairobi airport, on 15 February, 1999. This international conspiracy was planned and implemented by international forces working with regional and local collaborators. The Kurdish people see this international conspiracy as the culmination of the attacks that have been carried out since the two world wars and also as an attack against their struggle for freedom, democracy and equality.

The colonial division of Kurdistan among Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria, brushing aside the existence of the Kurdish people in the process, took place after World War I. In 1978, with the establishment of the PKK, the struggle of the Kurdish people gained a new dimension, especially following the military coup of 12 September, 1980. The PKK responded to the military coup with resistance, which propelled the organization into the leadership of the anti-colonial Kurdish movement. Turkey developed a counter-attack by engaging with the KDP and various Kurdish collaborators during these years, the period when the PKK began to engage in guerrilla warfare, nonetheless Turkey and its collaborators were unable to prevent the PKK's further development.

In 1993, the promising dialogue process that developed with the then Turkish president Turgut Özal was sabotaged by Özal's suspicious death, after which, in 1993 and 1994, with the permission and support of Britain, Turkey began to carry out intense military operations against both the PKK guerrillas and the Kurdish people as a whole. In these operations, Turkey also established and used counter-guerrilla organizations such as JITEM (Jandarma İstihbarat ve Terörle Mücadele or Jandarma İstihbarat Teşkilatı; Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Organisation), Village-Guards and Hezbollah. As a result of these attacks, 4,000 Kurdish villages were destroyed. The inhabitants of these villages were killed, tortured,

and/or forcibly displaced. Their belongings and fields were plundered. Close to 19,000 Kurdish civilians from all walks of life were killed by the so-called “unknown assailants”.

Yet, Turkey and its collaborators scored no real success with these cruel attacks against the freedom struggle of the Kurdish people under the leadership of the PKK. On 6 May, 1996, one of the assassination attempts against the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, then residing in Syria, took place. A car loaded with a tonne of C4 was placed outside of Abdullah Öcalan’s residence in Damascus, Syria, and, the bomb detonated while he was on the phone in his house. It was only by chance that Öcalan survived. Interestingly, less than half an hour after the assassination attempt, London-based newspapers announced to the world that “Abdullah Öcalan was killed by a bomb”.

Despite all of the attacks that he faced, Abdullah Öcalan always kept the channels open for a possible dialogue with Turkey. On 29 August 1998, he declared the third ceasefire to begin on 1 September, 1998. During this period, then US President Bill Clinton was in talks with the Syrian Administration. The topic of the Clinton-Assad meetings was the removal of Öcalan from Syria. In fact, the CIA went to Damascus and presented a package to the Syrian authorities in this regard, as was later discussed in the media.

In the first week of September 1998, Turkish prime minister Mesut Yılmaz went on a tour of the Middle East, which included Jordan, Israel and Palestine. The leader of the Kurdish People, Abdullah Öcalan, was on his agenda, and, as was later revealed, during this trip, there was a secret cooperation agreement signed involving Jordan, Israel and Turkey. Jordanian and Israeli intelligence, which dominates the Middle East, would transmit information to Ankara regarding Abdullah Öcalan in Syria and the PKK in Southern Kurdistan, and, in return, the Turkish state would open its airspace to both countries for training flights.

With support of NATO, the Turkish state, using various means, has carried out a war against the Kurdish People’s freedom struggle led by the PKK, which has not scored any definitive victories over the years. Thus, the process leading up to the 15 February 1998 international conspiracy, meant to deprive both the PKK and the Kurdish people of their leader and weaken the struggle was set in motion.

14 September 1998 - A note sent from the Turkish General Staff to the PKK reads: “We have terminated the negotiations until further notice”.

16 September 1998 - Atilla Ateş, then commander of the Turkish Land Forces, goes to Reyhanli/Hatay, which is at point zero of the Turkey-Syria border, and openly threatens the Syrian Administration led by Hafez Assad, saying: “Our patience is about to run out. Don’t let us lose our patience”.

17 September 1998 - A critical development takes place in Washington. KDP leader Mesut Barzani and PUK leader Celal Talabani sign a protocol prepared by the US administration and declare that they have made peace. One of the main articles of the agreement addresses the expulsion of PKK forces from Southern Kurdistan.

30 September 1998 - Under the chairmanship of Turkish President Süleyman Demirel, the MGK (National Security Council) convenes in a meeting lasting 6 hours and 10 minutes, with only one agenda item: how to fight against the PKK and the situation of Abdullah Öcalan. At the meeting, it is clearly stated that diplomatic pressure on Syria had not yielded results and military options are discussed.

1 October 1998 - President of Turkey, Süleyman Demirel, openly threatens Damascus during his opening speech to the Turkish Grand National Assembly, saying: “We once again declare to the whole world that we reserve our right to act against Syria, which has not given up its hostile attitude despite all of our warnings and peaceful initiatives, and our patience is running out”.

3 October 1998 - While these developments were happening on the Ankara-Damascus axis, 11 NATO countries launched the Turkish part of the military exercise named Dynamic Mix98 near Mediterranean coastline of İskenderun, close to the Syrian border, although this manoeuvre was not part of the original plan.

3-4 October 1998 - Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak went to Saudi Arabia to discuss Turkish-Syrian tensions. Mubarak, who met with King Fahd, said: “We must stop the tension; we must control it. I am ready to make all efforts in Ankara and Damascus in this direction”.

5 October 1998 - Mubarak, acting as a mediator, travels to Ankara and meets with Turkish president Süleyman Demirel. At this meeting, Demirel gives Mubarak a file outlining “what Syria should do”, adding, “If our expectations are not met, we will do what is necessary. And you know better than us what is necessary”.

6 October 1998 - Former Greek transport minister and PASOK MP Costas Baduvas travels to Damascus to meet with Öcalan. At this meeting, he reminds Öcalan that 109 Greek parliamentarians invited Öcalan to Greece in 1997, making clear the Greek State would be very happy to welcome him to Greece, promising to personally meet and welcome him at the airport.

8 October 1998 - It was Iran’s turn to take the mediation role in the crisis between Ankara and Damascus. Iranian foreign minister Kemal Harrazi, goes first to Damascus, leaving for Ankara the same evening. On the same day, the Syrian authorities ask Öcalan to leave Syria.

9 October 1998 - Abdullah Öcalan departs Damascus for Athens on a scheduled flight at 10:00 a.m., with a passport issued under the name of “Abdullah Sarikurt”. Meanwhile, a red notice from Interpol was issued with the code “Urgent” for the detention of the Kurdish people’s leader Abdullah Öcalan. When Öcalan reached the Athens Airport, instead of Baduvas, who promised to be there in person, Savvas Kalenteridis and senior intelligence official Haralambos Stavrakakis met Öcalan at the airport. They harshly state that they will not admit Öcalan into Greece, refuse to accept his asylum application and ask him to leave immediately. Öcalan is held at the airport for 8 hours before receiving an invitation from Russia, through the PKK representative to Russia Numan Ucar, and flying to Russia the same day on a plane belonging to the Greek Foreign Ministry.

15 October 1998 - Abdullah Öcalan, who has not been heard for a week since leaving Damascus, makes a statement by telephone on MED TV, saying: “First of all, I wish speedy recovery for our people, all Muslim countries and progressive humanity from the comprehensive conspiracy imposed on the people of the Middle East, with me as its vehicle, which has not yet succeeded but remains unfinished at this point”.

19 October 1998 - Abdullah Öcalan again participates on a MED TV programme via telephone, assessing the latest developments and providing the following information: “Missiles in the Mediterranean Sea are positioned to target all Syrian borders. Ten thousand troops have been deployed in Zaxo, and, the KDP traitors have launched an attack in Garê. That’s the nature of the steps they took, all of which are documented. They’ve issued an international red notice, meaning that no matter what country we go to, we are to be arrested. So where in the world are we going to go? To shake them off, only outer space or the moon seem like options. It’s such a far-reaching conspiracy that it seems that there’s no way to evade it”.

20 October 1998 - The Adana Agreement between Turkey and Syria is signed in exchange for the expulsion of Abdullah Öcalan from Syria.

4 October 1998 - Öcalan’s request for political asylum in Russia is accepted by the Duma, the lower house of the Russian Parliament. However, despite this, no final decision is ever made.

11 October 1998 - While Öcalan was staying in a house in the hills of Moscow, then Turkish prime minister Mesut Yılmaz released a statement: “Today, according to the intelligence information shared with us by an allied country, we have received the news that Öcalan is in Russia”. Following this statement, Abdullah Öcalan left his accommodations for security reasons and moved to another house belonging to Russian parliamentarian Alexey Mitrafon.

12 November 1998 - After 33 days in Russia, Öcalan sees that the situation has become dangerous and, with the help of his Italian friends, travels to Rome. When he lands at Leonardo Da Vinci airport, he requests asylum in Italy but is immediately arrested. Italian authorities base the arrest on a decision by the Federal Court of Karlsruhe, Germany, on 12 January 1990, 1 BSJ 195/ 88-3 BGS 9/90. This court decision was meant to oblige both Italy and Germany to guarantee Öcalan's safety, so that he could be a "defendant" in a fair trial, with all of his ECHR rights ensured.

16 November 1998 - German chancellor Gerhard Schröder meets with Italian prime minister Massimo D'Alema in Bonn. After the meeting, it is stated that Europe will take action to peacefully resolve the Kurdish issue, and both countries appoint their foreign ministers to develop a plan to address the issue. Italian prime minister Massimo D'Alema holds a press conference on the same day and announces that Öcalan will not be extradited to Turkey. In the following days, Turkey launches boycott campaigns against Italy.

21 November 1998 - The US secretary of state Madeline Albright meets with NATO's secretary general. US President Bill Clinton, steps in and speaks with the Italian prime minister, advising him to "avoid a historical mistake". Thereafter, Italian Prime Minister D'Alema appears before the cameras for the second time and, in diplomatic language, says that Öcalan should leave Italy.

25 November 1998 - The coalition government of Mesut Yılmaz in Turkey is ousted by a no-confidence vote in Turkish Parliament.

28 November 1998 - The president of the US National Security Council Sandy Berger seeks Öcalan's extradition to Turkey for trial under domestic law and launches felony charges against Italy.

29 November 1998 - Italian foreign minister and minister of religious affairs Lamberto Dini and German foreign affairs minister Joschka Fischer meet in Rome. The two ministers announce that they have begun work on the European Initiative for a Solution to the Kurdish Problem. Both ministers say they have agreed on the establishment of an international tribunal for Öcalan.

3 December 1998 - After participating in the OSCE Council of Ministers meeting, German foreign minister Joschka Fischer, contradicting statements, says, "Italy and Germany cannot establish an international tribunal for Öcalan".

7 December 1998 - After the statement of the German foreign minister, Italian prime minister Massimo D'Alema seeks British support. To that end, he sends his adviser Philip Robins to London for talks with Prime Minister Tony Blair. Blair and other British officials bluntly inform Robins that "Europe will not accept Öcalan and will not take initiative in the peaceful resolution of the Kurdish problem".

11 January 1999 - In Turkey, the DSP forms a minority government with the support of parties other than the CHP, and Bülent Ecevit, who was deputy prime minister in the previous ANAP coalition government, becomes Turkey's new prime minister.

16 January 1999 - After 66 days in Rome, Abdullah Öcalan goes to Moscow for the second time.

20 January 1999 - After reaching Moscow, Öcalan describes his situation as like "being in an iron cage". Meanwhile, Öcalan's asylum request, previously accepted by the Duma, the lower house of the Russian Parliament, has still not been finalized. Öcalan asks the Russian authorities to help him get to Kurdistan. At first, Russian authorities accept the idea of helping him get to the border via Armenia, but shortly thereafter they refuse to proceed with the plan, saying only "the situation has changed". They subsequently force Öcalan onto a cargo plane and send him to Dushanbe, the capitol of Tajikistan, where he is kept in isolation for 8 days.

28 January 1999 - Öcalan is returned to Moscow from Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

29 January 1999 - Öcalan receives an offer to go to Greece again from the Greek Admiral Andonis Naksakis, to whom he had sent a message indicating that his life was in danger. Öcalan secretly returns

to Greece on a private plane and stays in the home of the writer Vula Damyanaku in the village of Nea Makri, 40 kilometres from Athens.

31 January 1999 - Öcalan, whose political asylum request was never processed in Greece, proposes to the Greek authorities that he go to the Netherlands, departing the same day for the Netherlands via Minsk, Belarus. According to the plan, a transit flight will be made available from Minsk to The Hague, Netherlands. The plane to the Netherlands never arrives. Meanwhile, a 24-hour alarm is issued so that the plane carrying Abdullah Öcalan will be unable to land at any European airport.

1 February 1999 - Öcalan's plane leaves Minsk, Belarus, and lands in Athens at around 4:00 a.m. There, an official from the Greek Intelligence Service, Savvas Kalenteridis, meets Öcalan and offers to send him to Africa to stay in a Greek Embassy. Kalenteridis tells Öcalan: "The Greek Embassies are treated as Greek territory and have immunity. No power besides ours can interfere there, and you will be safe. Your safety will be ensured". Kalenteridis also adds that this destination is an intermediate stop on the way to South Africa, something that has already been discussed with South African authorities. He added that they will speak to the South African authorities again once he is at the embassy.

2 February 1999 - The plane lands in Nairobi, Kenya's capital. Abdullah Öcalan and his companions stay in the house of Greek ambassador Georgios Kastoulas for 14 days.

4 February 1999 - A CIA and US intelligence delegation meets with the Turkish intelligence MIT, and a protocol is signed between them, after which the detainees in İmralı prison are transferred to other prisons and preparations begin for Öcalan's eventual imprisonment there.

5 February 1999 - Turkish businessman Cavit Çağlar's private plane is leased by the Turkish state, for \$200,000, and a special team of seven people are prepared for an operation to seize Öcalan.

10 February 1999 - Greek authorities in Athens give orders to their embassy in Kenya to remove Öcalan. Öcalan resists, telling them that he will only leave the embassy once travel arrangements to Europe have been made for him. The Greek authorities send a second order for Öcalan to be forcibly removed from the Embassy and thrown out into the street. However, neither the officials of the Greek Embassy nor the intelligence officers who later arrive from Athens for this purpose carry out this order. Later, these officials are prosecuted by Greek authorities for failing to obey the order. Meanwhile, the plane and the team assembled in Turkey to seize Öcalan are instructed to go to Uganda and wait there.

14 February 1998 - During the evening, the Turkish plane flying a fake Malaysian flag that is waiting in Uganda with Turkey's special team is instructed to go to Nairobi. The operation begins at around 7:20 p.m.

15 February 1999 - Kenya's administration and police step in and threaten to forcibly remove Öcalan from the embassy if the Greeks do not hand him over. Meanwhile, the Greek minister of foreign affairs Theodoros Pangalos steps in and assures Öcalan by fax message that he will be taken to the Netherlands. After receiving this assurance, Öcalan leaves the embassy to go to airport. Öcalan is placed alone into a one of the 5 cars with Kenyan official licence plates that are waiting outside the embassy building. On the way to airport, the car carrying Öcalan suddenly leaves the convoy as they approach the airport, and Öcalan is handed over to the team waiting on the Turkish plane with the fake Malaysian flag. The end result is that Öcalan is kidnapped in violation of the applicable international laws and norms.

16 February 1999 - The plane carrying Öcalan takes off from Nairobi, Kenya, for Bandırma, Turkey, but heavy morning fog obliges the plane to divert to İstanbul, Turkey, from where Öcalan is taken directly to İmralı Island prison on a military boat. A delegation of people, including a US official and a female official of the Council of Europe, are present when he arrives. That morning, the then prime

minister of Turkey Bülent Ecevit publicly announces that Öcalan has been brought to Turkey. At the İmralı Island prison, Öcalan is questioned for 10 days by a delegation composed of four Turkish security units (General Staff, Gendarmerie, Security and National Intelligence). Öcalan is denied his legal rights and is not allowed to meet with his lawyers.

25 February 1999 - Abdullah Öcalan meets with his lawyers for the first time.

24 March 1999 - An entirely illegal show trial begins at the İmralı Island prison.

29 June 1999 - Ankara DGM 2 (State Security Court) sentences Abdullah Öcalan to death.

International Initiative “Freedom for Abdullah Öcalan — Peace in Kurdistan”



Who Are We?

The International Initiative “Freedom of Abdullah Öcalan — Peace in Kurdistan” was founded in March 1999, a month after Öcalan’s abduction from Kenya and his imprisonment by Turkey. Since its initial foundation, the International Initiative struggled for Abdullah Öcalan’s release from prison so that he can play his rightful role in the establishment of a just peace between the Turkish state and Kurdistan’s Workers Party (PKK). The International Initiative also aimed at contributing to the repairing of the ties between the Kurdish and Turkish peoples, as well as all other peoples of the Middle Eastern regions.

In order to achieve its aims, the International Initiative followed several related paths. Influencing international and national audiences through international campaigns to interfere with Turkish state’s policies towards Abdullah Öcalan has been one of these paths. A second area of work the International Initiative committed itself is the dissemination of Öcalan’s views through art, publications and conferences. Finally, the International Initiative has also been active in raising awareness for Öcalan’s conditions and the human rights violations he faces through reports, fact-finding delegations and lobbying.

Campaigns

The International Initiative organizes signature campaigns to influence the policies towards Öcalan. One such campaign which was launched in 2012 by one thousand preliminary signatories including Gerry Adams, Prof. Antonio Negri, Prof. Immanuel Wallerstein, Prof. Achin Vanaik, and other intellectuals, politicians, MPs, and NGOs from South America, Europe, Asia, Russia, and the Middle East. The campaign reached 10,328,623 signatures and may be the biggest signature campaign for the freedom of a political prisoner that the world has ever seen. It significantly challenged the isolation that was enforced on Öcalan and possibly paved the ways for the peace talks that the Turkish state and Öcalan led between 2013 and 2015.

The International Initiative also organizes video campaigns that educate the public on Öcalan’s life-story, his prison conditions and the demands for his freedom.

Publications

The International Initiative translates, edits and publishes books written by Öcalan in different languages including in English, German, French, Spanish and Arabic.

It compiles brochures from his works on specific topics, such as democratic confederalism or women’s freedom.

It edits books on Öcalan that discuss his main ideas.

The International Initiative also publishes regular reports on Öcalan's prison conditions and his isolation.

Conferences

The International Initiative organizes biannual conferences and invites scholars, activists, students and politicians to discuss Öcalan's ideas in order to initiate a conversation between different Movements around the world.

Delegations

Every year on February 15th, which is the date of the abduction of Abdullah Öcalan, the International Initiative organizes a group of internationally acclaimed people to take a trip to Turkey for a fact finding mission and publicizes their findings.

Lobbying

The International Initiative lobbies in the European Council, CPT and other international organizations against the human rights violations against Abdullah Öcalan and his total isolation in İmralı prison.

Art for Öcalan

This campaign aims to express the relationship between Abdullah Öcalan, Kurdish people, freedom and women's freedom and to educate the wider public on the past and present of the Kurdish people. The International Initiative has already collected art from Brazil, South Africa, USA, South America, Italy, Germany as well as Kurds from different parts of Kurdistan. These works have been printed in postcards, t-shirts and canvas and made available for solidarity sale.



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