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INSTITUT KURDE, 106, rue La Fayette - 75010 PARIS  
Tel. : 01-48 24 64 64 - Fax : 01-48 24 64 66

[www.fikp.org](http://www.fikp.org)  
E-mail: [bulletin@fikp.org](mailto:bulletin@fikp.org)

- **IRAQ: OPERATIONS AGAINST ISIS IN MOSUL ARE LAUNCHED**
- **TURKEY: THE ARBITRARY ARREST OF THE TWO DIYARBEKIR CO-MAYORS AROUSES WIDESPREAD INDIGNATION**
- **TURKEY: THE REPRESSION AND THE WAR AGAINST THE KURDS GO HAND IN HAND**
- **ROJAVA: DESPITE TURKISH ATTACKS, THE KURDS WILL BE TAKING PART IN THE ATTACK ON RAQQA**
- **TWO YEZIDI KURDISH WOMEN ARE HONOURED BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**
- **AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL LAUNCHES AN INTERNATIONAL APPEAL TO SAVE THE LIFE OF ZEINAB SEKAANVAND LOKRAN**

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### IRAQ: OPERATIONS AGAINST ISIS IN MOSUL ARE LAUNCHED

**S**ystematic preparations for the offensive to retake Mosul continued early in the month. Mosul, Iraq's second largest city with 1.5 million inhabitants, has been occupied by ISIS since June 2014. The troops mobilised for the offensive have continued to encircle the city and that are gradually closing in on it are mainly based in the Qayyarah air force base on the Tigris, about 60 Km South and down stream of Mosul, control of which was ensured in August; a French contingent equipped with heavy artillery has been deployed there. To the West Shiite militia are continuing to try and cut all means of communications and supply

between Syria and Mosul — so far with only partial success. Some 20 km to the Northeast an Iraqi battalion of Sunni Arabs, together with an American contingent that arrived on the 3<sup>rd</sup> is deployed on the army base built by the Iraqi Army and overlooking Bashiqa, a town still held by the Jihadists.

This is not far from the controversial Turkish base, which symbolises the political difficulties that complicate the operation with the great number of "partners" involved. Indeed, overcoming the differences between the various participants — difference of objectives and about the future management of these areas after they will be recovered from ISIS! Indeed,

these differences have sometimes led to clashes between the various forces and consequently slowed the process. In this period, the US, under pressure from the Iraqi government, has gradually increased the number of its troops on Iraqi soil — 200 soldiers sent in mid-April, 560 in July, then 615 this month, which brings the total to nearly 7,000 (6,763 to be precise) — 1,500 of which are "*posted for short-term missions*". The agreement finally reached was that neither the Shiite militia or the Kurdish Peshmergas would enter Mosul itself. The Turks themselves were excluded from the operation — they threatened to intervene if the Shiite militia failed to observe the agreement — while trying to the end to

“impose a way for their participation”, while the PKK, for its side, announced their own. Finally the *Hashd al-Watani* Sunni Arab militia would be, throughout the operation operating under the orders of the Kurdish Peshmergas. This was confirmed by its spokesman, Zuhair Hazin Jabouri – this option probably avoided its being under Shiite command. During this lengthy preparation period, fighting continued with the Jihadists: an attack Southward to Kirkuk in which two Peshmergas were injured was repelled on the 6<sup>th</sup>, and then an explosion in the Tuz Khurmatu district on the 8<sup>th</sup> injured two more.

Finally, it was early morning of the 17<sup>th</sup> that the Iraqi Prime Minister, Haider al-Abadi, appeared on the national TV surrounded by the main army commanders to announce officially that the offensive had been launched. To reassure those living in the region, whom he asked to cooperate, he made the point that only the Iraqi Army and police forces would be authorised to enter the city. This announcement was preceded by three days of American air raids on the city, then by the distribution by the Iraqi planes of millions of leaflets announcing the start of the offensive and trying to reassure the inhabitants by specifying that civilians would not be targeted... and warning them to distance themselves from ISIS positions. A source close to the Peshmergas estimated that over 50,000 troops took part (a figure increased later to 94,000) including tens of thousands of Peshmergas. The latter announced, at the end of the day, that they were now only 7 km East of Mosul, having taken 9 villages, while the Iraqi Army to the Southeast, penetrated into the Gwer District. The day after the Prime Minister’s announcement, the Kurdish President Masud Barzani stated that 200 km<sup>2</sup> had been taken back from ISIS and on the 19<sup>th</sup>, a

Peshmerga Major announced that they had taken back control of all the Kurdish areas surrounding the besieged city.

This is only the beginning of what seems likely to be a long drawn out struggle, since the attackers will have to go through the city’s suburbs before starting to surround the inner quarters. The attackers fear that ISIS, which according to the Iraqi Army has 5 to 6 thousand fighters in Mosul, will use the defence techniques already used in earlier towns — Tikrit, Sinjar or Falluja — tunnels, snipers, the use of civilians as human hostages and shields, suicide attacks and booby-trapped vehicles. In order to slow down the attackers, the Jihadists have already used fire — filling trenches with oil dug round the town. Americans, Kurds and UN observers have all expressed their concern ISIS might use chemical weapons. The UN announced on the 27<sup>th</sup> that they had prepared suitable medical help. On the 19<sup>th</sup>, the Peshmerga General Sirwan Barzani declared that taking the city would take two months — a period that Masud Barzani extended to three months in his statement of the 29<sup>th</sup>. Finally, after the military operations, the issue will arise of the city’s political stabilisation—the Americans raise the possibility of raising a Sunni Arab force of 25,000 men, — though without clarifying what its composition might be.

Another worrying element is the fate of the civilians. The inhabitants of the densely populated urban environments are in danger of being trapped in the fighting — or might go fleeing in large numbers that would exceed the capacities of their neighbours to offer shelter. The Kurdish authorities are continuing to prepare for such an eventuality. On the 13<sup>th</sup> Farhad Atrushi, the Governor of Dohuk Province, stated to *BasNews* that he

expected some 10,000 displaced people to arrive — a figure that far exceeds the Province’s capacity — and called for help from international organisations. On 17<sup>th</sup> the UN High Commissioner for Refugees also expressed his concern and issued an appeal for another 61 million dollars to provide winter supplies for the displaced persons flooding into Iraq and for those refugees who were fleeing from Syria or Turkey. Lise Grande, the UN Humanitarian coordinator for Iraq, stated that the organisation had set up some reserves of tents and mattresses, but that she thought the camps’ capacities insufficient. Finally, on the 28<sup>th</sup>, eleven days after the launching of the offensive, the UN spokesperson for Human Rights, Ravina Shamdasani, declared that ISIS had kidnapped nearly 8,000 families, i.e. up to 50,000 people, to use them as human shields by forcing them to move into specific quarters thus protecting them from attack. 232 people, including 190 former Iraqi soldiers, were executed on the spot for refusing to obey orders. One of the few positive notes regarding the displaced civilians is that 8.600 families that had fled from ISIS to Kirkuk were able to return to their original home provinces, Anbar, Diyala and Salahadin, already liberated by the Iraqi Army. The question of population displacement is also a political issue since it could affect the fate of the regions concerned. Thus, even before the start of the offensive, the Peshmergas, who had retaken some areas with a mixed population, were accused of ethnic cleaning since many Arab residents had not returned to their homes. Some had collaborated with the Jihadists, but others may have been afraid of returning without necessarily being guilty. Faced with these accusations the KRG’s International Relations head, Falah Mustafa Baker, declared to Reuters on the 10<sup>th</sup>: “*The Kurdish government cannot allow the Peshmergas*

sacrifices, their deaths in battle against ISIS, be made in vain by letting the Arabisation of these lands be perpetuated. This policy of forcible Arabisation was the work of the old Saddam Hussein regime and must absolutely be reversed". The Peshmerga General, Bahram, in counterpoint, said (see *Libération* 17 October) that the Kurdish participation in this operation had been conditional on the existence of an agreement on the balanced manner of managing these liberated areas. "This city is inhabited by minorities. If one of them is marginalised, in one way or another, a new ISIS will appear".

Already, on the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Peshmergas announced a pause in their advance, with the Iraqi Army continuing theirs. On the 19<sup>th</sup> the Iraqi Army liberated Qaraqosh, 15 Km Southeast of Mosul, which prior to the Jihadist arrival had been the biggest Christian city in the country, with 50,000 inhabitants. Today they have fled, while the Kurdish forces were repelling an attack on Sinjar. There is also the question of the flight of the Jihadist to Raqqa, which provoked a controversy: Syria accused the anti-ISIS coalition of intentionally letting ISIS fighters pass freely into its territory. While the Russian ally of the Syrian government also expressed its concern, the Iraqi Prime Minister declared that it was "the Coalition's responsibility to cut ISIS's road to Syria". On the 20<sup>th</sup>, a meeting organised in Paris about the future of Mosul gave rise to fresh tensions between Baghdad and Erbil, the KRG having accused the Iraqi Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Ibrahim Al-Jaffari, of having excluded them from these discussions: "The KRG firmly condemns the inappropriate attitude of the Iraqi Foreign Minister and his unilateral actions. (...) It is surprising that the Federal Government and its Foreign Minister are persisting at excluding the KRG from international conferences regarding ISIS, the issue of the dis-

placed persons and refugees while the Kurdistan Region has provided shelter to over 1.8 million displaced people and refugees, which imposes a heavy load on it". During this conference, which the Iraqi Prime Minister attended on line, the latter declared however that the operation was going faster than expected and that the co-ordination between the Shiite and Kurdish militia proved the unity of Iraq in its opposition to ISIS.

While Iraqi and Kurdish troops are continuing their advance on Mosul, particularly near the Bashiqa region, where 30,000 Peshmergas regained 7 villages on the single day of the 20<sup>th</sup>, ISIS launched a major diversionary attack on Kirkuk in the night of the 20-21<sup>st</sup>. According to the statement to the Kurdish TV channel *Rudaw* of one of that town's security officers, suicide-commandoes, probably about 100-strong, succeeded in entering the city unseen by using the sewers and then attacked official buildings: the central Police station was attacked at 3 am by four jihadists wearing explosive belts and an electric power station being built near Dibis, 40 Km Northwest of the city was targeted at 6 am resulting in the deaths of 12 Iraqi administrative staff members and 4 Iranian engineers. In the town centre fighting took place and lasted several hours round buildings in which some jihadists snipers were dug in. Although the town's police force had been reinforced with Peshmergas sent from Suleimaniyah as well as PKK fighters, the fighting continued into the next day. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Chairman of the Kirkuk Provincial Council, Rebwar Talabani, declared to the Kurdish NRT channel that the police had taken 90% of the town back from the jihadists. The Provincial Governor, Najmaddin Karim, stated that the aim of the attackers had been to "take control of the Governorate, the Central Police HQ and the offices of the political parties

but that they had not succeeded in taking any of their objectives". The fighting caused 46 deaths and 133 wounded, mainly members of the towns security services and at least 25 jihadists were killed. On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Kirkuk security forces announced they had taken total control of the city and that 48 jihadists had been killed. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, however, while 5 more jihadists had been arrested it was announced that there might be at least another 30 ISIS members in the city. The Kurdish authorities suspect that the commando could have received help from a group of "sleeping" ISIS members and made some 250 Sunni Arab families leave the town, which made Lisa Grande, UN humanitarian co-ordinator react and talk about collective punishment. On the 30<sup>th</sup>, the figure of 47 jihadists killed in the operation against a commando of 200 was announced. Finally the Suleimaniyah security forces announced, on the 31<sup>st</sup>, that they had arrested 50-odd jihadists, thus causing the failure of a similar attack to the one on Kirkuk, planned to take place at the same time.

However murderous they were, these diversionary attacks, described by Masud Barzani as "desperate", did not hinder the continuance of the offensive process against Mosul. At dawn on the 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Peshmergas and Iraqi Special forces renewed their attack in the town of Bashiqa, most of which the Peshmergas took back in the course of the day. Attempts by the Jihadists to reconquer the town was repelled on the evening of the 28<sup>th</sup> though they still held some quarters on the 30<sup>th</sup>, for which the Kurds were preparing to challenge them. On the 31<sup>st</sup>, the overall commander of the Peshmergas announced that the Kurdish fighters had, since the start of the offensive, taken back 500 km<sup>2</sup> and 28 villages and that some of their

units were barely 5 km from Mosul. However, in accordance to the agreement, they would not penetrate into the city, remaining in the positions they had now stabilised. According to a Kurdish Member of Parliament, Bestun Fayaq, an official of the Commission for disputed territories, to date the Peshmergas had retaken control of 90% of the areas originally disputed between Baghdad and Erbil.

These important military operations have taken place while the Kurdistan Region's financial crisis was continuing: as the KRG Planning Minister announced on the 1<sup>st</sup> a drastic plan for reduction

of the public sector, teachers in Suleimaniyah, Halabja, Raparin and Dohuk boycotted the first day of the academic year (the return to class had already been twice postponed!), in protest at the delays in paying their salaries. They were joined in the streets by the staff of the Office for the Trade and Distribution of Food in Suleimaniyah, while the staff of other offices such as housing, taxation and agriculture announced, in turn, their intention to strike in. On the 9<sup>th</sup>, the teachers of Suleimaniyah, Kirkuk and Koya (in the last named town the staff of the Technical Institute in particular) continued their protest movement, joined, on the 10<sup>th</sup>, by those

of the Engineering Institute in Erbil, and on the 19<sup>th</sup> by the Suleimaniyah traffic police. In view of the winter temperatures and the reduction or even the announced abolition of the government-afforded kerosene tickets, the inhabitants of Kurdistan renewed a practice they had thought belonged to the long past years of the political embargo in the 90s, namely cutting down trees for heating. As with the political blockade, which also led to the Erbil Parliament ceasing to work, it seems that the announced meetings between the KDP, PUK, Gorran, *Yekgirtû* and *Komal* (Islamic) did not lead to much progress in the situation.

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#### TURKEY:

### THE ARBITRARY ARREST OF THE TWO DIYARBEKIR CO-MAYORS AROUSES WIDESPREAD INDIGNATION

**D**iyarbakir, with its 1.8 million inhabitants, is the largest town in Turkish Kurdistan and is considered to be its politico-cultural capital. After several months of destructive conflict that put the lives of its residents in danger and led to probably irreversible damage to its heritage, the city is again the victim of a fresh abuse by the State. Its two co-mayors, Gültan Kışanak and Fırat Anlı, have been detained by the police at 9 am the 25<sup>th</sup> of October.

Like all the local councils run by elected members of the pro-Kurdish HDP party, Diyarbakir is run by two co-mayors, a man and a woman — an example that could well be followed by other parties of the country. Gültan Kışanak, the woman co-mayor, is, indeed, the first woman in Turkish history to be at the head of such a big city. As a Kurd, an Alevi (a minority Shiite sect), a secularist and a feminist, Ms Kışanak represents everything that the President Erdoğan detests, conservative and

Islamist as he is, he who constantly preaches that Turkish women should return home and to bear and look after children... She was arrested at the city's airport on her return from Ankara, where she had been questioned as a witness by a parliamentary Commission enquiring into the "attempted *coup d'état*" of last 15 July. After five days in police custody, she was placed in preventative detention in a cell of the high security section of the Kocaeli Prison, 1,240 km West of Diyarbakir, together with her male fellow co-mayor, Fırat Anlı, who was arrested in his home. Just after their incarceration, all Internet access was cut throughout Diyarbakir to prevent the organisation of protest demonstrations by the population — a cut that was extended at least for two the days following their arrest.

In parallel, the police cordoned and searched the municipality building in a look for documents allowing to justify the arrests, barring everyone to access. The reason is that the Turkish Auditing

Court had just finished a municipal Audit (after a whole year) which would have to be completed by an inspection of all the sums of money in all the municipal premises to try and find some irregularity that might justify charging them — in vain, since inspectors of the Audit Court had already been obliged to admit they had found nothing wrong. Then there was no other means for the prosecution to use the usual means put forward to justify dismissing or arresting HDP elected representatives — and they have been used here again to give a legal appearance to these arrests — "*incitement to violence*", "*links with the PKK*". Failing to find proof, the charges are made on the basis of statements made by the elected representatives at election meetings. The choice of methods to be used often reveals that the arrests are merely based on their opinions — and so, totally arbitrary.

An Ankara district governor has been nominated by the State as trustee to manage the city — thus flouting once again the electors

rights to chose their own representatives — as they had done in Diyarbakir in 2014.

**The following is the English text of an international appeal put on line by the remaining Diyarbakir Councillors (unaltered):**

**REPORT ON DETAINMENT OF GULTAN KISANAK & FIRAT ANLI, CO-MAYORS OF DIYARBAKIR**

Posted date: **October 28, 2016**

The Metropolitan Municipality of DIYARBAKIR (Amed) issued the following report on the arrest of their co-Mayors GULTAN KISANAK & FIRAT ANLI last Tuesday, October 25, 2016

Co-Mayors of Diyarbakir, Gultan Kisanak and Firat Anli

**REPORT ON DETAINMENT OF GULTAN KISANAK & FIRAT ANLI, CO-MAYORS OF DIYARBAKIR**

Diyarbakir, with a population of 1.8 million, politically and culturally the most significant city in the Kurdish region of Turkey, is now facing another major challenge after months of armed conflict in the city center that

ended in March 2016. Co-Mayors of Diyarbakir, Gultan Kisanak and Firat Anli were detained by Turkish police on 25 October 2016 around 9 PM.

Ms. Gultan Kisanak also serves as the co-chair of the Union of Southeast Anatolia Region Municipalities (GABB), which is an official umbrella organization bringing together 117 municipalities.

Just after the detention, the Internet connection across the Kurdish region was cut. As of 27 October 2016, millions of people still have no Internet access. This blackout attempt aims at silencing voice of people in the region as well as to prevent them from exercising their right to be informed about developments.

Detention of co-mayors took place hours after the last official inspection process by the Court of Audit ended, that was continuing for the last 3 weeks within Diyarbakir Metropolitan Municipality. Although inspectors could not find any grounds for detaining co-mayors with allegations of misuse of municipal power and infraction of rules, the government detained co-mayors. As press release by

Diyarbakir Chief Public Prosecutor's Office indicates, they were detained due to statements they had made, mainly because the government believes that their detention would be beneficial for its political interests. Those statements made by the co-mayors falls into cases of exercising right for freedom of speech.

Following detention of co-mayors, a number of high-ranking municipal officers were also detained such as Secretary General Zülküf Karatekin (on 26/10/2016), Deputy Secretary General Rojda Balkaş (27/10/2016), Deputy Secretary General Necati Pirinçcioğlu and Head of Supportive Services Department U. Şiyar Nezan (27/10/2016) in addition to tens of others from various departments.

Detention of Co-Mayors of Diyarbakir shall be considered as final phase of a year-long process of carried out by the government to abolish local democracy in Turkey step-by-step. Thus this is also an opportunity to save local democracy by enabling release of the co-mayors and to halt appointment of trustees by the government to replace the elected mayors.

## TURKEY:

### THE REPRESSION AND THE WAR AGAINST THE KURDS GO HAND IN HAND

**O**n 2 October the police arrested in Izmir Province, Kutbettin Gülen, the brother of the preacher Fethullah Gülen, accused of "membership of an armed terrorist group". Soon after. Turkey extended for another 90 days, as from 19 October to 19 January, the State of Emergency imposed on 15 July following the attempted *coup d'état*.

The government's attacks on the media have also been continued.

Following a written request by the RTÜK, the Superior Turkish Council of Radio and Television, the French company *Eutelsat* stopped the satellite broadcasting of the "pro-Kurdish" channel *MED Nûçe TV* on 3 October at 11 am. *Eutelstat* had already in 2012 stopped broadcasting the channel *RojTV*. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, the police carried out a raid in Istanbul on the television station *IMC-TV*, immediately stopping its broadcasts. This violent action, which was broadcast live until the technicians accompanying

the raid had physically disconnected the cables from the control room, followed the decree issued on the last 30 September to close this channel at the same time as 12 other stations all accused of "terrorist propaganda". *IMC-TV* was cut on the 29<sup>th</sup> from the *TurkSat* satellite but remained accessible via *HotBird* and on Internet. The station staff resisted to the closure to the end, assembling in the studios and chanting "Free media will not be silenced". In Istanbul on Tuesday evening, hundreds of people gathered at Taksim

to condemn the closures despite a strong police presence with banners repeating the slogan shouted by the staff during the raid and also “*All together against fascism*”. *Eutelstat*'s decision was condemned by the European Federation of Journalists and the two co-presidents of the HDP wrote to the company to express their total failure to understand this unilateral decision at a time when attacks without any legal basis were being made against the media. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, *Eutelstat*, again at the demand of RTÜK, stopped the broadcasting of *Newroz TV*, a channel that broadcasts in Sorani, Kurmanci and Guranî programmes about Iranian Kurdistan, making the channel inaccessible in Europe, though still broadcast by *NileSat*. Latest attack in this month on the Kurdish media, on the 31<sup>st</sup>, the police raided the *Ozgur Radio* station after the staff had refused to stop broadcasting, and arrested 15 of them. At dawn on the same day a dozen staff of the opposition daily *Cumhuriyet* were arrested in the course of a raid as well as the Chief editor, Murat Sabuncu, who is accused by the Istanbul Public Prosecutor of having “*legitimised the attempted coup d'état by the content of his articles*”.

Police and magistrates were also targeted. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, 12,801 policemen were suspended on the grounds of their alleged links with the Gülen movement. On the 13<sup>th</sup>, on the orders of the Ankara chief Prosecutor, police raided Turkey's Court of Appeals and some other courts with warrants to arrest 189 judges and prosecutors, including judges of the Court of Appeals and the State Council, Turkey's highest administrative court. On the 24<sup>th</sup>, Germany announced that since the failed *coup d'état* of last July, 35 Turkish diplomatic passports holders had filed an application for political asylum... On the 27<sup>th</sup>, 45 pilots of fighter aircraft were arrested at Konya — and 29 others already in jail were formally

charged. All belong to a group of 73 officers targeted by the arrest warrants issued by the office of the Konya Prosecutors office, on suspicion of being Gülenists. Thus, since July, some 100,000 members of the police, the judiciary system, the armed forces (including high-ranking officers) have been suspended or fired and over 32,000 arrested.

Finally, the State has pursued its line of repression against the victims of the suicide-bomb attack of 10 October 2015 near Ankara Station — the worst in the recent history of the capital. This attack had caused 130 deaths and 500 injured, mostly Kurds. On the 10<sup>th</sup> the police has physically obstructed the commemoration of this event by the victims' families (although the authorisation had been duly requested and granted). A road block of police lorries, water canons and about twenty police equipped with anti-riot shields were deployed. Faced with hundreds of demonstrators carrying the banners of a variety of associations and shouting: “*The murderer is the State*” the police used tear gas and plastic bullets. Some of the demonstrators retaliated by throwing bottles or stones, others were beaten with truncheons as they were dispersing. The commemoration was also a protest by the families at an enquiry that is at a standstill — a year after the event there is still no suspect! This is far from the speed with which Turkish justice treats suspicions of “*terrorism*” of Kurdish politicians.

Indeed, the day after the repression of this commemoration the police carried out a series of raids in Diyarbakir against the homes of Kurdish political politicians, arresting 55 people including the co-president of the Party of Democratic Regions (BDP) of Diyarbakir Province, Hafize İpek, the co-Presidents of Diyarbakir Province HDP, Cebbar Leygara et Gülşen Özer, the co-president of the Peyas

(Kayapınar) district HDP, Abbas Ercan, and other DBP and HDP activists. Then, a few days later, on the 13<sup>th</sup>, at least 49 people were arrested, including several activists of local branches of HDP on the grounds of “*terrorist propaganda*” or “*membership of a terrorist group*” as part of an operation against the PKK in Hakkari and Van Provinces. Then on the 25<sup>th</sup>, the police surrounded and searched the Diyarbakir Town Hall while the city's two co-mayors being arrested (see previous article), one at the airport, the other at home, on the grounds of “*links with the PKK*” and “*incitement to violence*”. The HDP described these arrests as “*illegal and arbitrary*” and has called on the international community to react to these “*fabricated charges*”. Violent clashes broke out round the Town Hall after the arrests, the police using truncheons, tear gas and water canons to disperse 200 demonstrators, arresting 25 of them. According to AFP internet access was also cut in the city throughout the morning to prevent the co-ordination of demonstrations. On the 31<sup>st</sup>, a court ordered the incarceration of the two co-mayors on the grounds of “*membership of an armed terrorist organisation*” and “*providing logistic support to an armed terrorist organisation*”. Parallel to this the HDP Mayor of Siirt, Tuncer Bakırhan, was sentenced to a year's imprisonment for “*terrorist propaganda*”. On the 30<sup>th</sup> the HDP co-president, Figen Yuksegdağ, was forbidden to leave the country, the court justifying this measure by the fear that this elected representative, accused of “*membership of an armed terrorist organisation*” and “*terrorist propaganda*” might flee abroad: a prelude to a programmed arrest?

The only news that might be considered positive is that on 8 October the BDP leader for Şırnak, Hurşit Kutler, who had disappeared from this town on 27 May at the time of the security forces assault, reappeared in Kirkuk, stating that he



had been arrested and guarded for two weeks in a cellar where he was physically and psychologically tortured by his captors who wanted him to spy for them. He had succeeded in escaping and getting to Iraq after being hidden in Şırnak for a month. This put an end to the concern for his life that had been widely expressed following his arrest.

Regarding the constitutional amendments so much desired by President Erdoğan to increase his powers, one could ask whether they are still needed — since the failed “*coup d'état*” of last July, the Turkish president has all the powers he could have dreamed of, since the State of Emergency allows the government to rule by decree, especially as Binali Yıldırım’s AKP government is so loyal to the President that Erdoğan’s wishes are virtually orders. Nevertheless, Erdoğan returned to this issue in a speech to his supporters on 12 October, specifically stating: “*Turkey must give the present de facto situation a legal status*”. The head of the ultranationalist (traditionally neo-fascist) MHP party, Devlet Bahçeli, confirmed the extent to which his party had become a satellite of the AKP by his saying on the 18<sup>th</sup> that the MHP, although favourable to maintaining the existing parliamentary system, would not oppose holding a referendum on the issue. With 40 seats in Parliament, added to the AKP’s 317 the MHP is thus providing Erdoğan with the 330 voices needed to call a referendum

In parallel to this, the clashes between the Governments armed forces and the PKK guerrillas have continued all through the month. On the 6<sup>th</sup>, a booby-trapped motorbike caused 10 injured near the Yenibosna police station, not far from Istanbul’s Ataturk Airport. It was claimed two days later by the TAK (*Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan* — Hawks for Kurdistan’s Freedom), a group

that broke away from the PKK in opposition to Öcalan’s “Peace process”. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, a man and woman in a booby-trapped car detonated the charge when stopped by the police. According to the Governor of Ankara, the type of bombs used indicated links with the PKK — however the TAK also claimed this action on the 17<sup>th</sup>. Also on the 8<sup>th</sup>, a suicide attack using a light truck loaded with 5 tons of explosives hit the gendarmerie in the village of Dural, 20 km from Şemdinli (Hakkari Province). According to the authorities, at least 18 soldiers were killed and 11 wounded, plus 16 civilians. This attack was claimed the HPG (the armed wing of the PKK) that claimed 32 soldiers were killed. On the 14<sup>th</sup>, four different attacks took place killing 3 soldiers and wounding 12 others by bomb attacks on their convoys. The 3 killed were in the first attack between Diyarbakir and Mardin, while 8 and 4 were wounded respectively in two other attacks in Van and Hakkari. The fourth attack was in the Antalya region, where a rocket hit a roadside fish restaurant and killed 5 policemen. On the 15<sup>th</sup>, after the police had arrested at least 25 people suspected of links with the PKK, the TAK claimed this attack. On the 19<sup>th</sup> another rocket attack hit a minibus carrying “village guards” returning from an operation in Diyarbakir Province causing 2 deaths and 3 wounded. On the 21<sup>st</sup>, the Army announced it had killed 12 Kurdish activists in Cukurca District (Hakkari Province) and 6 others in strikes in the Basyan region of Iraqi Kurdistan. On the 23<sup>rd</sup>, two policemen were killed and five others wounded in Bingöl province, as well as 14 civilians, by the explosion of a bomb close to the district governor’s office, set off as the police vehicle passed by. On the 29<sup>th</sup>, a mortar attack near Cukurca killed 3 soldiers and wounded 5 others. Furthermore,

Turkish Air Force announced to have hit PKK positions in the Qandil Mountains on the 7<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup>. According to AFP one of the F-16 planes that had taken part in the raid was hit and shot down on the 7<sup>th</sup> evening.

Finally the guerrillas also hit some non-military targets. The HPG claimed to have shot down two “trustees” appointed by AKP to replace arrested Kurdish elected representatives: on the 11<sup>th</sup>, Aydın Muştu, at Özalp (a district in Van), then Deryan Aktert, of the Dicle district, in Diyarbakir Province, the last named shot down in his office for collaborating with the State in its struggle against the PKK. On the 20<sup>th</sup>, 3 other “trustees” appointed by the government to replace local Kurdish elected representatives resigned: Ramazan Hekimoğlu who had replaced the co-mayor Aygun Taşkınand at Ergani (Diyarbakir province), Ali İpek, who had replaced Hasip Demirtekin, as member of the municipal council. Following these resignations, the council’s 3<sup>rd</sup> trustee, Mustafa Yalçın, who had replaced Sabiha Alçiçek, also declined the post...

Turkish Security Forces seem unable to curb these actions from growing, and, according to the 22 October issue of the daily paper *Habertürk*, the Minister of the interior, Süleyman Soylu, announced the recruiting of 5,000 more “village guards” — on the 4<sup>th</sup> of last September, the gendarmerie had already decided to recruit 1,000... On the 25<sup>th</sup>, the Foreign Minister, Mevlut Çavuşoğlu, announced he envisaged ground operations against the PKK in Iraqi Kurdistan. The last Turkish incursion into Iraqi Kurdistan, back in February 2008, had had to be quickly called off because of the negative US reaction... So whatever military “response” is used to alter the situation it seems nothing can replace a political one.

## ROJAVA: DESPITE TURKISH ATTACKS, THE KURDS WILL BE TAKING PART IN THE ATTACK ON RAQQA

**O**n the 2<sup>nd</sup>, the Syrian Army and the Kurdish self-defence forces, in a joint operation, took the industrial zone of Shkeif, located in Aleppo's suburbs, back from the Syrian rebels. While the Syrian war is, more than ever, a multi-lateral one with alliances based mainly on local circumstances, there are some constant factors. Thus the Syrian Kurds are always under fire, almost simultaneously, from both the Turks, to the North and ISIS to the South. On Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> October, a bomb attack targeted a Kurdish wedding celebration at Hassakeh and, according to the Syrian Observatory on Human Rights (SOHR), caused 34 deaths and 90 injured, some of them seriously. This town, the site last August of fighting between pro-regime militia and the YPG fighters, in which the latter had the advantage, is now mainly controlled by the Kurds. On the 4<sup>th</sup>, the Turkish Prime Minister, Binali Yıldırım, in a speech in Parliament, threatened to destroy the YPG "as had been done to ISIS" — referring to the Turkish incursion to Jerablus, although most observers noted that the Jihadists had simply retired from the town without fighting... The next day there were several nocturnal air raids on Thultana village, at about midnight, most probably by the Turkish Air Force, which killed 19 mostly Kurdish civilians, according to the SOHR. Thultana is in Aleppo Province, in a zone controlled by ISIS. This is not the first Turkish strikes in that region. After the Turkish incursion of 24 August and following the bombing of their villages North of Al-Bab, 2.000 residents sought refuge in Afrin Canton. On the 8<sup>th</sup> October, while ISIS took several villages away from Turkish-

backed rebels near Dabiq, some factions belonging to the Syrian National Coalition (backed by Turkey) again bombed the Kurdish Cheikh Maqsoud quarter of Aleppo (controlled by the YPG) killing 3 civilians. On the 11<sup>th</sup>, an ISIS suicide attack was made on the village of Mashi, near Manbij, recently freed from the jihadists, which caused 11 deaths and 6 wounded, and another affected the village of Dandanah.

On the 13<sup>th</sup> a brigade of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) joined the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). Hussam Al-Awak, the Free Officers' chief Deputy, declared at a press conference held at Hassakeh: *"We are now seeing the gradual collapse of the rebel groups linked to the Moslem Brotherhood following their cooperation with Turkey. I accuse these groups of fighting against the Syrian people to Turkey's sole benefit"*.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> the Turkish Air Force announced it had carried out 26 air strikes on Wednesday 19<sup>th</sup> against 18 YPG targets, had killed between 150 and 200 activists and destroyed 9 buildings, one armoured vehicle and 4 other YPG vehicles. The Kurdish authorities and other sources confirm that Turkish fighter planes had carried out over 20 raids against the SDF in Shahba canton, which has joined the self-declared Federation of North Syria. According to the SOHR, the areas bombed, in particular the villages of al-Hassiya, Oum al-Qoura and Oum Hosh had been taken from ISIS by the YPG a few days earlier. Mahmoud Barkhadan, a YPG Major, later confirmed these attacks while disputing the number of losses announced by the Turkish Armed forces. He

declared to Associated Press that the casualties were 10 fighters killed and accused Turkey of seeking to help ISIS by hitting the Kurds while they were busy fighting the jihadists. On the same day the YPG commander in Afrin called for help from the YPG "to defend the region against ISIS, Turkey, that supports them, and all the other threats during this "historic" resistance. He reaffirmed his support for *Jaysh al-Thuwar* (The Revolutionary Army) a group of Arab members of the SDF and all the revolutionary forces fighting ISIS. Also on the same day the Rojava administration declared that Turkey had carried out these attacks to protect its own mercenaries and that these attacks were also a reaction against its having been kept out of the attack on Mosul. Finally a member of the Movement for a Democratic Society declared: *"The international silence about the Turkish air strikes (brings) the danger of disastrous consequences"*. The Syrian Democratic Council (SDC — the political expression of the SDF) condemned the Turkish strikes, described as *"outrageous acts"* and demanded that the international community intervene. The Syrian Army reacted against the Turkish attacks on its national soil and announced on Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> that from now on it would shoot down any Turkish plane that might enter Syrian air space. The next day the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergueï Lavrov, expressed Russia's concern at the air strikes against the Kurds in Syria. For his part, the PYD President, Salih Muslim, declared in an interview with the Russian news agency *Sputnik* that the Turks had struck civilian residential zones, describing as lies the figures published by the Turkish

army (160 to 200 killed), saying they were more like 11 members of the Kurdish local forces. Muslim also refuted the accusations of firing rockets from Afrin towards Hatay, pointing out that the YPG did not have any differences with Turkey. On the 22<sup>nd</sup>, Turkey again struck the Kurdish YPG for the second time in 3 days, this time using artillery. At Jerablus two fighters of the Turkish-backed Syrian opposition were wounded when the YPG opened fire. Furthermore, a force of Syrian rebels backed by Turkish armoured units had crossed the border near Marea, beginning to advance towards the town of Tell Rifaat. According to SOHR 13 rebel fighters and 3 YPG were killed. On the 25<sup>th</sup>, the Turkish Foreign Minister declared during an interview on the *Kanal 24* channel that if the YPG did not withdraw from Manbij, which is West of the Euphrates, and which they had contributed to freeing from ISIS, the Turkey would "have to take strong measures against them". On the 24<sup>th</sup>, while the Turkish Army was announcing it had launched fresh strikes against the YPG and ISIS in the previous 24 hours, a bomb attack using a motorbike and aimed at a YPG convoy killed 1 civilian and seriously wounded two others in the industrial quarter of Sharqi, East of Qamishlo.

On the 26<sup>th</sup>, according to the Turkish troops, a helicopter suspected of belonging to the Syrian Army dropped barrels of explosives on Turkish backed rebels

surrounding the Turkish positions in a village about 5 km Southwest of Dabiq that the rebels had taken from ISIS earlier in the month. This attack killed two and injured five, the first occurrence of a direct confrontation between regime forces and Turkey-backed rebels since Turkey military incursion in Syria last August. On the same day Rojava's (YPG) representative in France, Khaled Issa, held a press conference in which he accused Turkey of taking advantage of the media's concentration on operations against ISIS round Mosul to attack Rojava on a mass scale. *"If the Turkish artillery and aircraft are bombing and shelling the SDF in this area and in the Afrin district, it is on the one hand to prevent ISIS's supply lines to Raqqa from being cut, and on the other to enable Turkey to maintain its control of 70 km of its borders with Syria"*, he said, adding: *"We cannot go and fight ISIS at Raqqa while the Turkish Army is shelling us. The conditions are not ripe for capturing Raqqa"*. Issa asked France and the other permanent members of the Security Council to *"put an end to Erdogan's irresponsible actions"*, which he accused of *"flying to the rescue"* of the jihadists. The last named President had just declared that Turkey could envisage the possibility of military intervention to force the Kurdish fighters out of Manbij as well as an area of North Syria extending *"between the Turkish towns of Kilis and Kirikhan"*. Kilis is located immediately opposite the border town of Azaz, North of it, but Kirikhan is right in the middle of

Turkish Hatay province, less than 20 km East of Iskanderun (Alexandretta) and 30 km West of the capital of Afrin Canton! Any Turkish operations in the area of Syria "between those two towns" would mean launching an attack due East from Hatay to capture Afrin Canton from the rear, an area already threatened on the East by the Turkish incursion against Jerablus and the strikes in the canton of Shahla. The day after this declaration Salih Muslim again expressed the same concerns as had Issa in Paris, stating that the PYD feared a *"stab in the back"* from Turkey if the SDF took part in the offensive against Raqqa. This could be, for example, an attack on Kobané or Tell Abyad. He called on the United States to ensure Turkey's non-intervention in the event of their participation in the Raqqa offensive. On the same day, Lieutenant-general Stephen Townsend brought him an indirect reply by declaring during a press briefing that the anti-ISIS Coalition, led by the US, wished to isolate the city of Raqqa as quickly as possible since it was used as a base for the preparation of many attacks abroad. According to Reuters, Townsend stated that *"Turkey does not want us to work with the SDF, especially at Raqqa. We are having discussions with Turkey and we are going to tackle the question step by step. The only force capable of action in the short term is the SDF, of which the YPG is an important part. We are going to use the force that we have and we will go to Raqqa with it as fast as possible"*.

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## EUROPE:

### TWO YEZIDI KURDISH WOMEN ARE HONOURED BY THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE



On the 10<sup>th</sup> October, the Yezidi activist Nadia Murad received the fourth Vaclav Havel Prize for Human Rights

at the *Palais de l'Europe* in Strasbourg. This prize pays tribute to exceptional contributions in this field. The ceremony took place on the same day as the opening of the

Autumn Plenary Session of the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly. Last September Nadia Murad had been appointed Good Will Ambassador for the Dignity

of survivors of trafficking in human beings. Two weeks later, on 27<sup>th</sup> The European Parliament honoured her together with another Yezidi woman, Lamiya Aji Bashar, by awarding them the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought and Expression. These two Kurdish women of the Iraqi community of Yezidis had been kidnapped, in the Summer of 2014 following the capture of their village, Kocho, near Sinjar in Northwest Iraq. Like thousands of other women and young girls, they had been kept as sex slaves by the fighters of the so-called Islamic State or ISIS. However, having managed to escape, Nadia Murad began her militant activity by bearing witness to the sufferings she and the others had undergone and calling for the recognition of the massacre of the Yezidis as a form of genocide.

On the same day when Nadia Murad received the Victor Havel Prize, the Assistant Manageress of the research committee of Amnesty International at Beirut, Lynn Maalouf, was criticising the international community for failing to provide enough aid to the Yezidi women who had survived the horrors of genocide and sex slavery from ISIS. The testimony of

several survivors shows many cases of serious depression and attempts at suicide and Ms Maaluf declared: *"These appalling testimonies bring to light the urgent need for greater international support to help the survivors face up to the long term physical and psychological traumas from the abuses they have suffered or witnessed. (...) The international community must convey its horror of ISIS's crimes by concrete action"*.

Last August Amnesty's researchers visited Iraq's Kurdistan Region to meet at Dohuk some survivors of ISIS's Yezidi genocide and brought back terrifying evidence from the victims' families. One woman told how her 13-year-old daughter set herself on fire when she was released and died of her burns three days later. All the mother's requests for obtaining post-traumatic treatment abroad for the young girl had not been answered.

The victims have to overcome at the same time the traumatism at what they have personally suffered, the lack of care structures adapted to their conditions and an often humiliating life in displaced persons camps. Moreover numerous families have indebted themselves to an enormous extent to pay for the escape or ransom of

their relatives, while others are still without any news of family members still in the jihadists' hands and others are mourning for people murdered sometimes under their very eyes.

Amnesty has declared that an organisation should be set up rapidly to evaluate the needs of the displaced Yezidis and funds allocated to start actions of therapy and support.

Finally it must be recalled that, while women are already the most threatened groups in war-like situations like the military operations against ISIS at Mosul, most of the Yezidi women and young girls still prisoners of the jihadist organisation are likely in the besieged city. The head of the Office for Yezidi Affairs of the Kurdistan Regional Government, Khayri Bozani, estimated that 3,735 Yezidi women have not been able to escape or been liberated — which means that there are probably some thousands in the city. They are kept cloistered to prevent anyone trying to help them, and some may have died from the air raids that have been hitting the city since the acceleration of the operation over the last month.

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### APPEAL BY AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL: SAVE THE LIFE OF ZEINAB SEKAANVAD LOKRAN!

**T**he question of violence to women goes far beyond the crimes against humanity committed by Jihadists like ISIS, which unfortunately is only the visible part of the iceberg. As evidence we would quote the fate of Zeinab Sekaanvand Lokran, an Iranian Kurdish woman of 22 for whom the Human Rights organisation *Amnesty International* has issued an appeal on twitter to try and save her life. According to that organisation, this young woman

was sentenced to death during an undoubtedly inequitable trial in October 2014 on the basis of *qesas*, an Iranian equivalent of "an eye for an eye". Married at the age of 15, the young woman was arrested in February 2012 for the murder of her husband who used to ill treat her regularly. She at first confessed to having stabbed him but retracted once in Court saying that the confession was extracted by torture. She also declared that the her husband had been ill-treating her for months, physically and

morally while refusing her request for a divorce. Zeinab Lokran finally said that her brother-in-law, who had several times abused her, was the one who killed her husband, adding that he had tried to persuade to take responsibly for the crime telling her that he could probably save her life by using the possibility given by Iranian law to close relations of murdered people to pardon the murderer and accept financial compensation instead of demanding the penalty. The court did not, how-

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ever, take her statements into account nor asked for further enquiries, basing her sentence of hanging solely on her previous confessions. Moreover, although the accused was a minor at the time of the crime the court did not apply the penal code of 2013

regarding minors. Since the accused had then married another prisoner in Urmiyah prison and was pregnant, the execution was delayed until she had given birth, which occurred in 30 September 2016. The resulting child was a still born.

The doctor attributed this to the shock of the execution of her second husband ten days before she went into labour, stating that the child had died in the womb. Zeinab Sekaanvand Lokran never received any post-natal care or psychological support.

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