

# Crackdown on the Kurdistan Workers' Party

EU nations work with Turkey to disrupt terror group

**Turkey's long-simmering conflict with Kurdish separatists has flared up again with the resumption of bombings and reprisals, but the European Union recommitted itself to reducing outside support for the Kurdish radicals.**

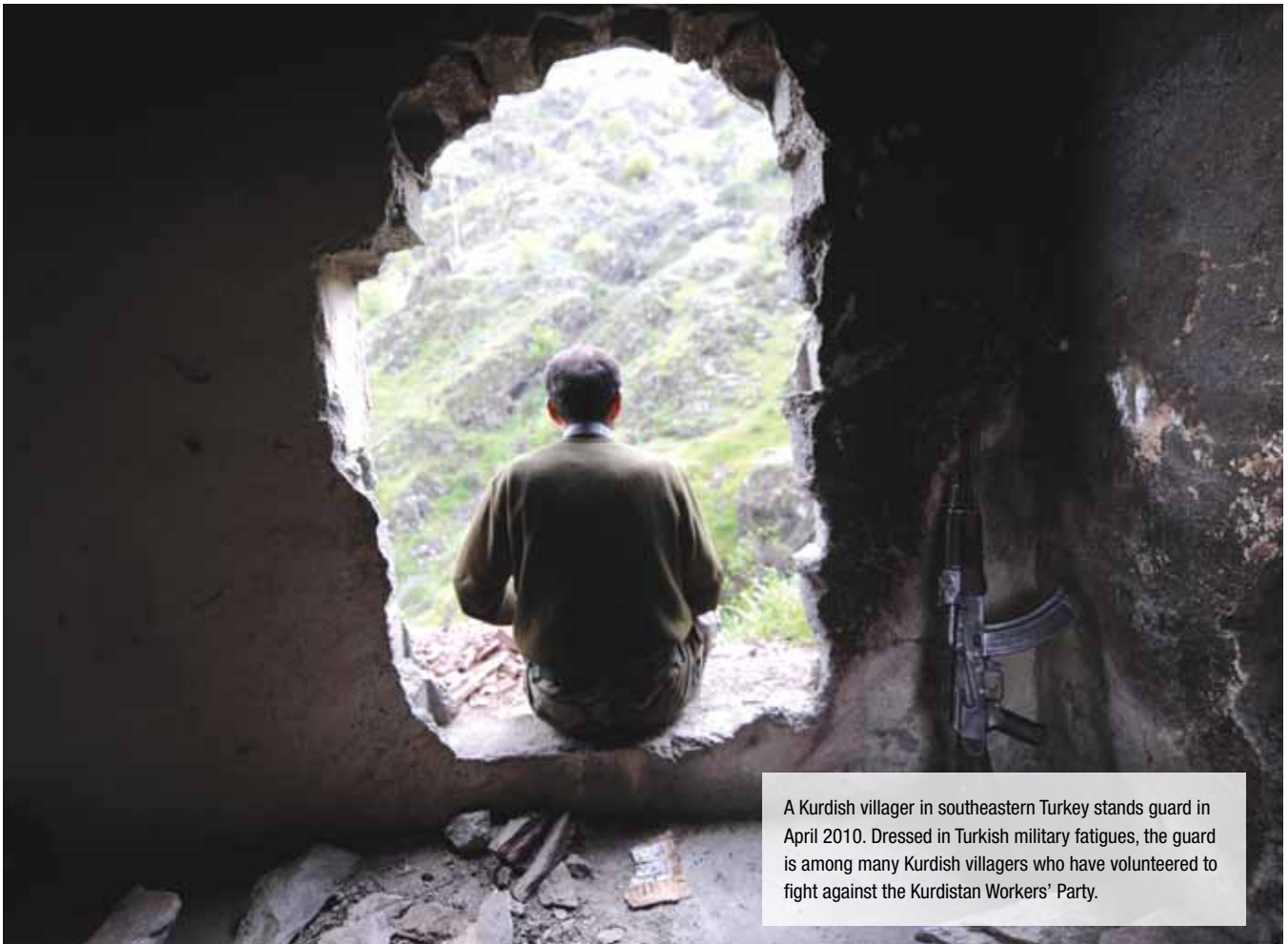
The EU, like the United States, has long labeled the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, a terrorist organization. Separatists espousing Marxist-Leninist principles founded the PKK in the 1970s. They have demanded autonomy for Turkey's estimated 12 million Kurds, an Iranian-speaking people who also live across the Turkish border in Iraq, Syria and Iran. The group also operates under the aliases Kurdish Freedom and Democracy Congress (KADEK) and Kongra-Gel (KGK).

The year 2010 marked a watershed in which the PKK, the topic of years of Turkish-EU diplomacy, lost a large piece of its European support network.

With a Kurdish population 500,000 strong — Europe's largest — Germany made headlines with a June

2010 crackdown on social clubs and media outlets accused of affiliations with the PKK. Germany revoked licenses for Kurdish television station Roj TV and a related company called Viko Fernseh Produktion, complementing those efforts with raids on Kurdish organizations in Bremen, Hannover, Berlin and other cities. As reported in *Der Spiegel*, German intelligence was acting on evidence of an "illegal body of officials actively engaging in conspiracy."

Similar raids occurred in Denmark and Belgium, with Roj TV as the focus of investigations aimed at confirming links to the PKK and its political wing, Kongra-Gel. According to the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*, Kurdish Swede Ibrahim Ayaz, a



A Kurdish villager in southeastern Turkey stands guard in April 2010. Dressed in Turkish military fatigues, the guard is among many Kurdish villagers who have volunteered to fight against the Kurdistan Workers' Party.

AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE



Bulgarian police in Sofia arrest a Kurdish demonstrator protesting in favor of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, a group the EU accuses of sponsoring terrorism.

former bodyguard of imprisoned PKK founder Abdullah Öcalan, owns the Copenhagen branch of Roj TV.

The May 2010 raids in Belgium involved 300 police officers and tax inspectors fanning out across 25 locations to detain Kurds suspected of involvement in terrorism, counterfeiting and racketeering, Deutsche Presse-Agentur news agency reported. Just a day earlier, France had charged nine Kurds with recruiting militants for the PKK. Italy and Romania conducted raids of their own. "This action by Belgium, following ... Italy and France, carries a very strong message to groups and organizations providing financial resources for terrorist activities," Turkish foreign minister Ahmet Davutoğlu announced after the EU crackdown.

By most accounts, the PKK's three-decade-long conflict with the Turkish military has cost more than 40,000 lives, most of them Kurdish. The group gets financing through remittances from sympathetic Kurds living abroad, particularly in Europe, as well as through human trafficking and trafficking in drugs and weapons. Evidence abounds that much of Anatolia's heroin and hashish trade flows through PKK hands. "The drug trade is one of the Kongra-Gel's most lucrative criminal activities. Nearly 300 individuals connected to the Kongra-Gel were arrested on drug trafficking charges from the mid-1980s through the early

1990s, more than half of them in Germany," the U.S. Treasury Department reported in 2009.

With an aim of getting the PKK to lay down its arms, the Turkish government launched its "Kurdish Opening" campaign in 2009 promising limited cultural autonomy to Kurds living mostly in the nation's southeastern corner. Kurds could broadcast in their language and establish a Kurdish language university faculty. But in December 2009, Turkey's constitutional court banned the country's biggest Kurdish political group, the Democratic Society Party. Trouble ensued. "The Kurdish regions of southeast Turkey erupted in protests in December in the wake of the ban, and the Turkish government rounded up scores of Kurdish politicians as tensions escalated," Turkey's *Hürriyet* newspaper reported.

By mid-2010, Kurdish militants responded by calling off a cease-fire that had maintained a crude peace for more than a year. In apparent retaliation for the detentions in Germany, PKK guerrillas kidnapped three German mountain climbers on Mount Ararat in June 2010. The hostages were released unharmed two weeks later. Turkey continues to press the EU to extradite Kurds it accuses of abetting terrorism. It is part of Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's pledge to end the 26-year ethnic conflict. □