

A short report on Anarchism in Turkey in 2000

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Roots of Turkish anarchism depends on both punk-rock culture which is somehow 'imported' from the West and ideological transformation of former Marxists from authoritarian socialism to libertarian communist ideas. At the current time anarchists are increasing in number but yet they are not so successful in catching a stable social ground to struggle.

GROUPS

In addition to lots of anarchist individuals spread out all around the country, anarchists also appear as groups and organizations in some larger cities of Turkey.

In Istanbul the most effective and massive group is 'AGF' (Anarist Gençlik Federasyonu-Anarchist Youth Federation). It was founded in April 1998; its basic principles were declared as anti-capitalism, ecologism, anti-sexism, anti-hierarchism/anti-gerontocracism, and anarchism. AGF defends the idea of direct action; organized their own demos and protest actions in Istanbul and Ankara universities, and attended some other demonstrations with their own banners. Lastly appeared in anti-nuclear demos against the construction of Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant. Being consistent with its name, it includes young(er) anarchist autonyms and individuals from Istanbul; it has some members in other cities like Izmir and Ankara but yet they are not so organized in elsewhere.

In August 1999 Ankara anarchists organized as a 'culture-cooperative'. The idea of a culture-cooperative emerged after discussions that lasted for months beginning from the first days of the same year. The group defines itself as a 'discussion platform of anarchists' and consists of not only young anarchists, students etc. but also workers, clerks, and unemployed people. It has 35-40 active members (40 % women) some of whom define themselves as anarcho-communist, anarcho-syndicalist, anarcho-feminist, pan-anarchist etc. They have worked on a project of self-production, for now discussing on being more effective in so-called 'political' arena-especially aiming to study on anarcho-syndicalism.

'öSKD' (özmir Savaş Karşıtları Dernei-Izmir War Resisters Association) is still actively working on anti-militarist and pacifist projects. The association includes anti-militarists most of whom declared their objection against doing military service. The group had organized an international campaign to support their member conscientious objector 'Ossi' (Osman Murat Ülke) who was released in March 1999. In the following days the association will have much work to do with parallel to possible objection declarations and new initiatives on the anti-militarist ground.

In Istanbul there are relatively smaller anarchist and libertarian groups some of which are publishing their own periodicals, and also lots of groups are located in Izmir, Ankara, Antalya, öskenderun, Adana, Mersin, Çanakkale, Konya and Diyarbakır (mostly in universities and among younger people). A group of anarchists living in the Mediterranean region recently have a project to work in coordination on eco-anarchist ground.

ANTI-MILITARISM

In Turkey, it's obligatory to do military service for men older than 20. Turkish army is 'historically' proud of itself as being one of the most authoritarian and most disciplined armies. In recent years a few dozen of anarchists and anti-militarists had declared their conscientious objection

against doing military service. In October 1996 one of them-Ossi (Osman Murat Ülke) had been arrested and after an international campaign he was released in March 1999.

For the current time, the war in Kurdistan seems to be ended and the military gave a chance to deserters to do their military service for short-term if they can afford to pay a big amount of money. Despite this unsuitable atmosphere for anti-militarist propaganda, an anarchist/anti-militarist will dare to declare his conscientious objection. For May, an anti-militarist festival is planned if a legal permission can be taken from the local authorities, but in any case there will be an objection declaration. 'đAMđ' (đstanbul Anti-Militarist Inisiyatif-Istanbul Anti-Militarist Initiative), đSKD and some other anarchist/anti-militarist groups and individuals are studying on this project. After the declaration the objector may be arrested, so thinking such a possibility it may be inevitable to organize an anti-militarist campaign which will need international support of anarchists, anti-militarists and pacifists.

In addition to đSKD (from Izmir) and đAMđ (from Istanbul) anti-militarists from Ankara decided to organize under the name of 'ASKD' (Ankara Savaş Karşıtları Dernei-Ankara War Resisters Association) as a new initiative.

ECOLOGISM

Turkey's first nuclear power plant is planned to be constructed in Akkuyu-near to the Büyükeceli village on the Mediterranean Coast. Anarchists are actively fighting against the construction of the plant; working in anti-nuclear platforms and local initiatives, attending demonstrations etc. Anarchists (AGF) were the largest group after KESK (the clerk-union) in the demo which was organized in Mersin, they have also appeared in other demonstrations in Istanbul and elsewhere. Few anarchists prefer to work with Greenpeace which organizes non-violence direct actions.

'Kara Toprak' (Black Land) project which aimed coordination among places like Akkuyu-Büyükeceli, Bergama, Çamlıhemşin-Fırtına Vadisi, and Çamköy facing ecological problems had failed but the activists are still working locally.

ANTI-SEXISM

The first homosexual/anti-heterosexist periodical in Turkey 'Kaos GL' was initiated by anarchist gay and lesbians in September 1994 in Ankara and since then it was published monthly. In time, the group expanded, 'popularized' but didn't lose its libertarian character and it's yet the 'only' periodical of Turkish gay and lesbians. A few years ago lesbians formed their own group named 'Sappho'nun Kızları' (Sappho's Girls), but they continue to work together with gays for the periodical.

Anarcha-feminists sometimes gather and organize their own meetings but usually fail to organize as long-timed 'stable' groups. One of the first anarcha-feminist groups which published 'Dokunduran Çüksüzler' zine in Ankara had disappeared a few years ago, but for a time some new initiatives emerged.

ANARCHIST PRISONERS

At the current time, there exists no “anarchist prisoner” in Turkish prisons-meaning none is in jail because of his/her anarchist actions or because of being a member of an anarchist organization. In Turkey there are more than ten thousand “political” prisoners; most from PKK (Partiya Karkaren Kurdistan-Kurdistan Labor Party), less than that from illegal-armed leftist groups and less from Islamists. But some prisoners who were arrested because of being members of either PKK or illegal leftist organizations by the time changed their ideological views from socialism to anarchism and began to define themselves as “anarchists”. They used to write letters to anarchist/libertarian periodicals-that’s the way ‘free’ anarchists could become aware of their “existence”.

An “anarchist prisoner” has much more problems than a political or an ordinary prisoner. The pressure not only comes from the jail administration but also from his/her former group. In 1998 an anti-militarist/pacifist (a former member of TÖKKO-an armed maoist group) was killed by TÖKKO itself in Bursa prison with the claim of being in cooperation with the government forces, but the real reason was political/ideological disagreement. Anarchist prisoners can even be ‘punished’ and beaten with nonsense claims like having long-hair or listening rock music etc. by leftists. The exact number of anarchists in jail is not known but there would be about 20; and yet there is no organization like ABC (Anarchist Black Cross) instead there are some smaller initiatives dealing with prisoners’ problems.

PERIODICALS-PRESS

The only active anarchist publishers in Turkey is ‘Kaos Yayınları’ (Chaos Publishers). Until now, they’ve published books on various anarchist ideas and movements; books of and on Bakunin, Malatesta, Rocker, Tolstoy, Makhno (Makhnovist Movement), Durruti (Spanish Revolution), Bookchin, Woodcock, Unabomber etc. In recent years some leftist publishers began to publish anarchist books, too; ‘Ayrıntı Yayınları’ (Ayrıntı Publishers) is a significant example-publishing books on anarchism, and libertarian ideas.

For now several number of anarchist periodicals are still active. First issue of anarchist newspaper ‘Efendisizler’ (Masterless) had been quite successful; more than 5,000 was sold out and since the first issue 13 issues were published. Another periodical is ‘Anarşi’ (Anarchy) first issue of which was seen in November 1999-tends to be nearer with ideas defended by AGF. ‘Ateş Hırsızı’ (Fire Thief) is not so much active as it used to be before-it can be published only once a year. ‘Apolitika’ which was one of the important Turkish anarchist theoretical periodicals seems to be vanished. ‘Nisyan’ stuff had determined the ‘file subject’ for the forth issue but it does not seem to be published in a short period of time. The group who published ‘Karaşın’ are studying on a new periodical which will include articles about anarchist culture-it’s expected to be ready in a few months.

All of the periodicals mentioned above are located in Istanbul, there are also lots of anarchist and anarcho-punk zines which are published irregularly in Istanbul and other places. Anarchists (or better to say anarchist ‘intellectuals’) do also write in well-known Turkish periodicals like Varlık, Birikim etc. on politics, literature, art and philosophy.

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