



## Statement on the Rise of the Grey Wolves Terrorist Organization in Belgium

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On Sunday evening, Limburg, Belgium, witnessed distressing altercations between individuals of Syrian-Kurdish origin and members of the Turkish community in Heusden-Zolder and Houthalen-Helchteren. These clashes inflicted severe injuries on at least one person, while five others sustained minor wounds. The gravity of the situation intensified when hundreds of Turks targeted a house of Kurdish families in Heusden-Zolder, launching attacks that included attempts to set the dwelling ablaze, shattering windows, and shouting religious slogans. Such egregious acts resulted in several casualties. Two people were left critically injured. Shockingly, the attackers even used the 'wolf salute,' a symbol and gesture synonymous with the Turkish Grey Wolves far-right paramilitary organization.

The Lemkin Institute emphatically denounces the Grey Wolves and the hateful ideology they espouse. The Grey Wolves have been called a terrorist organization by the European Parliament. On 20 May 2021 the Parliament advocated that the 27 member states of the European Union designate it as a terrorist group. Currently, the Grey Wolves are banned only in France. Austria has banned their symbols and three-finger salute. Belgium has no such ban; instead, the Grey Wolves are closely monitored by security forces due to their far-right, extremist ideology that aggressively promotes extremist Turkish nationalism. Originating as the youth wing of the Turkish Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) in the late 1960s, the group has a history of perpetrating violence against dissidents, Kurds, and other minorities, embodying a pan-Turkic and Turkish supremacist ideology. They express views that are anti-Christian, anti-Greek, anti-Armenian, anti-Kurdish, anti-Arab, anti-Iranian, anti-Semitic, and so on.

Sunday's violence against the Kurdish minority in Belgium must be understood within the context of the longstanding history of conflict between Kurdish communities and the Turkish state. For decades, tensions have simmered between Kurds and the Turkish authorities, rooted in complex historical, cultural, and political factors. The Kurdish struggle for autonomy in eastern Türkiye and the recognition of their distinct cultural identity has often been met with suppression

and violence by Turkish authorities, exacerbating deep-seated grievances and fueling interethnic animosities.

The conflict traces back to the early 20th century in Türkiye and has been marked by periods of armed insurgency, state repression, and failed attempts at reconciliation. In Türkiye, the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) has waged a protracted guerrilla war against the Turkish state since the 1980s, seeking greater rights and autonomy for Kurds within Türkiye. This conflict has resulted in significant casualties and displacement, further entrenching divisions between the two communities.

These historical tensions are not confined to Türkiye but have spilled over into diaspora communities, as seen in the recent violence in Belgium. It is crucial to recognize the complex historical dynamics at play and address the root causes of the conflict through dialogue, reconciliation efforts, and respect for the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background.

Following these reprehensible incidents and organized manhunts by Turkish mobs, a pro-Kurdish demonstration convened at Place du Luxembourg in Brussels on Monday, attracting nearly 200 participants. Arife Soysuren, a key organizer affiliated with the 'Mouvement des femmes kurdes' and the 'Progressive International' movement, emphasized that the Brussels demonstration was not solely a reaction to the riots but a vehement response to the premeditated assault orchestrated by the Grey Wolves on Limburg Kurds. Soysuren vividly recounted how peaceful families returning home from festive celebrations were viciously attacked by Turks merely for displaying Kurdish flags, alleging meticulous planning behind the assault.

Soysuren further lamented Erdogan's relentless persecution and intimidation of Kurds abroad, asserting that "even in the heart of Europe, we are not safe." Urging the European Union to leverage its political influence to ensure Türkiye upholds human rights, Soysuren emphasized the imperative of providing resources for Kurdish communities' safe migration to Kurdish regions. The demonstration initially proceeded without official permission. Tensions escalated around 13:30 as police intervened with water cannons to disperse demonstrators.

Following the demonstration, disturbing images surfaced on social media depicting a person being held hostage by far-right Turks in Brussels amidst clashes between PKK sympathizers and members of the ultranationalist Turkish community. The individuals in the photos appeared armed with M1911-pattern, Walther PP-pattern, and Beretta 92 compact pistols, standing before a Turkish flag and displaying the Grey Wolves sign (wolf salute), while another man was seen kneeling.

Previously, videos emerged on Twitter depicting the organized manhunt by Turkish mobs in Limburg on Sunday. They revealed brutal assaults with machetes and knives targeting individuals of Kurdish origin. One particularly alarming video showcased the severe beating of

an elderly man who, in desperation, identified himself as Arab, to which attackers responded: "Liar."

Yasin Gül, the deputy mayor of Heusden Zolder, publicly endorsed these attacks on a television program, justifying the violence by accusing the Kurdish community of provoking Turkish nationals during Ramadan with displays of Kurdish flags and images associated with Abdullah Öcalan, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

As of Wednesday, tensions remain high between Turkish and Kurdish communities in Belgium. Reportedly, a group of 10 masked assailants attacked a Kurdish café located on the Bevrijdingslaan, Ghent, on Tuesday night. The disturbing scene, captured on video, depicts the attackers vandalizing the establishment. Officially, no casualties were reported. The footage also captures attackers using the provocative Grey Wolf salute, raising further concerns amid heightened unrest.

European intelligence services and policymakers have identified the Grey Wolves as a significant security threat, particularly in Germany, where they are one of the largest right-wing extremist groups. Despite efforts to counter their influence, the persistence of their ideology raises concerns about the extent of extremist sentiment and underscores the urgent need for robust measures to address it effectively.

The Lemkin Institute vehemently condemns the alarming cycle of violence unleashed against the ethnically Kurdish minority in Belgium. We emphasize the severity of this issue, understanding that it has the potential to ignite dangerous interethnic tensions within the country. Such acts of aggression not only pose immediate threats to the safety and well-being of Kurdish individuals but also undermine the fundamental principles of equality, diversity, and peaceful coexistence that are essential for a harmonious society.

Given the Grey Wolves' extremist ideology, failure to address this violence against Kurds may lead to its expansion targeting other minorities—the organization harbors bigoted sentiments towards Iranians, Armenians (especially during the current rise in Armenophobia), Assyrians, Jews, and Greeks. The organization's hateful and discriminatory ideology poses a significant threat to the safety and rights of various minority communities, with the potential for violence to escalate and spread across different ethnic and cultural groups.

The Lemkin Institute for Genocide Prevention calls on all European Union members, as well as the USA, to ban the Grey Wolves as a terrorist group. It is imperative that all forms of organizing, promoting hatred and discrimination against minority groups, including the Kurdish community, are swiftly and decisively addressed by state authorities. The promotion of xenophobic ideologies and the incitement of violence against marginalized communities have no place in any democratic society. As such, the Lemkin Institute calls upon law enforcement agencies and policymakers to prioritize investigating and prosecuting individuals and groups responsible for perpetuating such heinous acts, including the Grey Wolves.