

German police clash with Kurdish protesters in Düsseldorf

Clashes between police and Kurdish protesters occurred over banned PKK symbols. Germany has taken a harder line against PKK symbols in response to criticism from Turkey.



German police clashed with Kurdish demonstrators protesting against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in the western city of Düsseldorf on Saturday.

The violence erupted when police warned protesters to take down banners of Abdullah Ocalan, the imprisoned leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).

When the warnings were ignored, police moved in to remove illegal banners and stop the march.

Twelve police officers were injured in clashes. Police responded with pepper spray and detained nine people. Two protesters were injured.

Around 6,000 people attended the march through the center of the city, with some chanting "Down with fascism," "Freedom for Ocalan" and "Long live leader Apo," the nickname used by PKK supporters for Ocalan.



Kurdish protesters march with Ocalan flags in Dusseldorf.

The PKK, which has waged a more than three decade-long insurgency against the Turkish state, is considered a terrorist organization by Turkey and the EU.

Germany had long been lenient towards Ocalan flags and PKK symbols, but earlier this year authorities moved to expand the list of banned symbols.

Protesters at Kurdish rallies carry a plethora of flags and symbols of dozens of Kurdish umbrella organizations, making implementation of the law confusing and uneven.

As restrictions on PKK symbols grow, Kurds have often resorted to using symbols of the Syrian Kurdish parties that following Ocalan's ideology and the People's Protection Units (YPG), a Syrian Kurdish militia that is backed by the United States to fight the "Islamic State" and not considered a terrorist organization.

Turkey considers the YPG and its political wing, the PYD, a terrorist organization with ties to the PKK.

The tougher line against PKK symbols came in response to repeated Turkish criticism that German authorities were too soft on allowing "terrorist propaganda." The issue has been a major sore spot in already sour Turkish-German relations.

It has also increased worries that the conflict in Turkey could lead to violence and

social divisions between some three million Turks and Kurds living in Germany.

Source: <http://www.dw.com/en/german-police-clash-with-kurdish-protesters-in-d%C3%BCsseldorf/a-41241660>

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