



COUNCIL OF EUROPE: ADVOCATE FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE 'RIGHT TO HOPE' IN TURKEY FOR ABDULLAH ÖCALAN

SUMMARY REPORT

MARCH 2026

PEACE AND JUSTICE ASSOCIATION
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Dear distinguished friends, Members of Parliament, human rights advocates, and representatives of political parties, city council members, and NGO representatives,

In the following report, we address several key issues related to the establishment of a democratic legal framework in Turkey and the achievement of a lasting peace in Kurdistan. Progress on these issues would have a profoundly positive impact not only within Turkey but across the Middle East region as a whole.

*Among the most pressing matters today is the implementation of what has been termed the “right to hope,” namely the abolition of aggravated life sentences in Turkey, as required by the 2014 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in *Öcalan v. Turkey* (No. 2). In September of last year, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted an interim resolution urging Turkey to make the necessary legal changes to recognize the “right to hope.” Turkey has been given until June 2026 to submit an action plan outlining how it intends to implement this decision in practice.*

While several important steps have been taken over the past year toward peace and democratisation in Turkey, particularly in relation to resolving the Kurdish question, we remain concerned that the Turkish authorities may once again find reasons to delay implementation. Each delay postpones the possibility of lasting peace, regional stability, and democratic progress in Turkey.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask that you contact your representatives in the Committee of Ministers and encourage them to ensure that this issue is actively discussed and that clear and decisive conclusions are reached during the Committee’s meeting in June 2026 so that Öcalan legally be allowed to freely play his role as the legitimate representative of the Kurdish people and main interlocutor with the Turkish state in the ongoing negotiation process.

Kurdish diaspora communities—now numbering more than two million people—have lived in Europe for decades and share the European Union’s core values of equality, justice, democracy, and peace. At the same time, we remain deeply concerned for our relatives and communities in the Middle East who continue to be affected by ongoing conflicts, as well as by what we perceive as Europe’s relative silence regarding recent developments. It is therefore our sincere hope that you will take action on this crucial matter and advocate on our behalf.

While concrete recommendations are outlined at the end of the report, our most urgent request is for you to take action on this issue. Every voice, statement of support, and vote within the Committee of Ministers is important in advancing these goals. Democratisation, respect for the rule of law, and peace in Turkey are important not only for Kurds in Turkey, but also for broader discussions on human rights, solidarity, and the future of multilateral diplomacy through institutions such as the Council of Europe.

By upholding these shared values, we also protect the principles upon which our shared democratic systems are built—and help build the future we aspire to. We therefore ask you to engage actively: to write to the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers, to raise the issue with your Minister of Foreign Affairs, and to bring it into public debate.

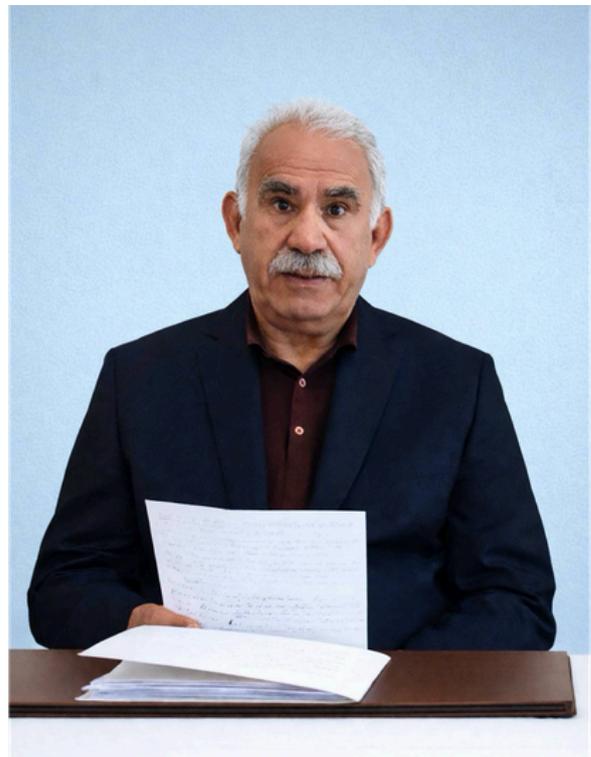
INTRODUCTION

Abdullah Öcalan, internationally recognised Kurdish leader and revolutionary theorist, has been imprisoned on the island of İmralı for the past 27 years under conditions of severe isolation and deprivation of rights. In 1999, he was sentenced to death following a special military trial ruled to be unfair in a later decision of the European Court of Human Rights (*Öcalan v. Turkey*).¹ In 2002, his sentence was commuted to “aggravated life imprisonment”—a form of life imprisonment without the possibility of review or parole. Over much of the past decade, he has been held in conditions of near-total isolation for prolonged periods. This is despite a 2014 ruling by the European Court of Human Rights in *Öcalan v. Turkey (No. 2)*,² which found that aggravated life imprisonment without the possibility of review violated Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights. The Court called on Turkey to amend its legislation to guarantee what has since become known as the “right to hope”—the principle that even those serving life sentences must have a realistic prospect of release and a review of their sentence.

Recent developments, both in Turkey and within international institutions, have brought this topic again into the spotlight with a renewed urgency. In October 2024, Mr. Devlet Bacheli, leader of the Nationalist MHP party in Turkey called for the “right to hope” of Mr. Öcalan to be recognised, and for him to address the Turkish Parliament. This statement, together with Mr. Öcalan’s call for “Peace and Democratic Society” in February 2025, initiated a new process aimed at peace and democratisation in Turkey through the resolution of the Kurdish question.

Over the past year, significant steps have been taken toward peace, though substantial challenges remain. Mr. Öcalan has continuously played a central role as a key interlocutor within the process, interacting directly with a DEM Party delegation, representatives of the Turkish State, and a commission established in the Turkish parliament specifically to create a framework for the peace process. Yet despite this substantive role, he continues to be held under restrictive conditions, with limited access to fundamental rights and an unresolved legal status.

At the same time, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers has pressed Turkey to take concrete steps to implement the Court’s ruling in Öcalan’s case. At its September 2025 meeting, the Committee set a deadline of June 2026 for Turkey to submit an action plan detailing the legislative changes required.³ With that deadline approaching and no visible progress in implementation, the issue is likely to return to the Committee’s agenda, where further measures may be considered.



1. *Öcalan v Turkey* (2005) <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-69022>

2. *ÖCALAN v. TURKEY* (No. 2) (2014) <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-142087>

3. Interim Resolution CM/ResDH(2025)264 <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=09125948802873a4>

After nearly three decades of imprisonment under harsh conditions of isolation, Öcalan continues to be recognised by many as a key interlocutor and representative of Kurdish aspirations for peace and democracy. In this context, we advocate for full the implementation of the 2014 judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in *Öcalan v. Turkey (No. 2)*—in particular, the recognition of Abdullah Öcalan’s “right to hope.”

THE RIGHT TO HOPE: THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE’S RESPONSIBILITY

The abolition of the death penalty in Turkey brought to the forefront the issue of aggravated life imprisonment and, consequently, the debate on the “right to hope.” With the enactment of Law No. 4771 in 2002, death sentences were commuted to aggravated life imprisonment. For those convicted of terrorism-related offenses, the possibility of conditional release, sentence suspension, or pardon was categorically excluded. Subsequent amendments to the Turkish Penal Code and the Law on the Execution of Sentences made these exclusions permanent.⁴ As a result, although the death penalty was no longer applied in practice, it was effectively replaced by a harsher regime: lifelong imprisonment without any prospect of release.

Since the 2000s, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has developed a consistent body of case law safeguarding the “right to hope” under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights, which prohibits torture and inhuman or degrading treatment. In *Vinter and Others v. the United Kingdom*, the Court held that life sentences must be both legally and practically reducible, and that a review mechanism must be available no later than 25 years after sentencing. Longer periods, in practice, extinguish the right to hope.⁵

A critical turning point for Turkey arose when Abdullah Öcalan’s death sentence was commuted to aggravated life imprisonment. In *Öcalan v. Turkey (No. 2)*, the Court ruled that Turkey’s system of aggravated life imprisonment without the possibility of parole violated Article 3 because it provided no realistic prospect of release or review. Such sentences are commonly imposed under Article 302 of the Turkish Penal Code and Article 17 of the Anti-Terror Law (Law No. 3713), both of which exclude parole for individuals convicted of designated terrorism-related offenses. The Court called on Turkey to amend its legislation accordingly, effectively recognizing the applicability of the “right to hope.”

This position was reaffirmed in subsequent judgments, including *Kaytan v. Turkey* and *Gurban v. Turkey*, where the Court again found that the categorical exclusions under Turkish law were incompatible with Article 3. The Court made clear that the structural nature of the problem required legislative reform.

4. Accessible in English at: <https://www.anayasa.gov.tr/media/2628/2002-201.pdf>

5. *VINTER AND OTHERS v. THE UNITED KINGDOM* <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng?i=001-122664>

According to ECtHR jurisprudence, the minimum requirements of the right to hope are:

- The sentence must be legally and de facto reviewable.
- A genuine possibility of release must exist after a certain period (generally no later than 25 years).
- The review process must include adequate procedural safeguards.
- Conditions of detention must allow for the prisoner's rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

At present, for individuals sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment in Turkey, the right to hope exists neither in law nor in practice. Both the European Court of Human Rights and UN monitoring bodies have identified this situation as a clear and ongoing violation of international human rights standards.

Since 2015, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has been supervising the execution of the Öcalan (No. 2) and Gurban group judgments. It has repeatedly called on Turkey to amend its legislation, provide transparent statistical data on prisoners serving aggravated life sentences, and establish a review mechanism consistent with the Court's case law.

At its 1419th meeting (30 November–2 December 2021), the Committee expressed serious concern about the lack of progress and stressed that excluding prisoners convicted of crimes against “the security of the State,” the “constitutional order,” or “national defence” from conditional release was incompatible with the Convention. It urged Turkey to bring its legal framework into line with the Court's jurisprudence and requested statistical data on affected prisoners.⁶

At its 1507th meeting (17–19 September 2024), the Committee reiterated its concerns and strongly urged Turkey to adopt the necessary legislative reforms without delay, drawing attention to comparative examples from other member States.⁷ It warned that, absent meaningful progress, a draft interim resolution would be prepared for the September 2025 meeting.

At its 1537th meeting (15–17 September 2025), the Committee noted that no legislative amendments had been adopted in the eleven years since the Öcalan (No. 2) judgment and accordingly prepared an interim resolution. The Committee emphasized that legislative proposals—such as opposition bills providing for a 25-year review for all life sentences—should be taken into consideration. It also noted that the National Solidarity, Fraternity and Democracy Commission was expected to submit proposals in October and requested that Turkey achieve concrete progress by June 2026.⁸

6. 1419th meeting (DH) (30 November - 2 December 2021) - H46-37 Gurban group v. Turkey (Application No. 4947/04) <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=0900001680a48b1a>

7. 1507th meeting (17-19 September 2024) (DH) - H46-35 Gurban group v. Turkey (Application No. 4947/04) <https://hudoc.exec.coe.int/?i=CM/Notes/1507/H46-35E>

8. Interim Resolution CM/ResDH(2025)264 <https://search.coe.int/cm?i=09125948802873a4>

The United Nations Committee against Torture, in its 2018 and 2023 concluding observations, issued similar recommendations, including the repeal of Article 25 of the Law on the Execution of Sentences and Security Measures. Nevertheless, no structural reform has been undertaken.⁹



In this context, it is essential that the Committee of Ministers urgently:

- Require transparent and comprehensive statistical data from Turkey concerning aggravated life sentences;
- Abolish, without distinction, legislative provisions imposing categorical bans on conditional release;
- Intensify and regularize supervision of the execution of the Öcalan (No. 2), Kaytan, Gurban, and Boltan judgments;
- Consider adopting effective interim resolutions should tangible progress remain absent.

Only comprehensive legislative reform can bring Turkey’s legal framework into compliance with Article 3 of the Convention and restore the right to hope. It must be further underlined that the “right to hope” is not merely an individual matter. It is also a shared obligation to protect human dignity, which lies at the very heart of the European Convention on Human Rights system. Turkey’s compliance with its obligations is an urgent necessity both for its domestic legal order and for the international human rights regime.

SPRING 2026: THE SECOND PHASE OF THE PROCESS FOR PEACE AND DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Since Mr. Bahçeli’s October 2024 statement supporting the “right to hope,” and Abdullah Öcalan’s call of 27 February for “Peace and a Democratic Society,” important steps have been taken toward a political resolution of the Kurdish question through democratisation. Following Öcalan’s appeal, the PKK declared a unilateral ceasefire that remains in place, convened its congress, decided to dissolve the organisation, held a symbolic weapons-burning ceremony in South Kurdistan, and withdrew its guerrilla forces from North Kurdistan (Turkey), committing to pursue Kurdish rights through legal and political means. However, critics argue that the Turkish state has yet to take corresponding, concrete steps.

9. Available at: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1662629?ln=en&v=pdf>, and <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4059743?ln=en&v=pdf>



In August 2025, the National Solidarity, Brotherhood, and Democracy Commission was established in the Turkish Parliament as the principal legislative body tasked with designing a framework for the peace process. The Commission heard testimonies from a broad range of affected groups, including the Saturday Mothers, academics, trade unions, lawyers, and business representatives. In November, a delegation visited Öcalan on İmralı Island to receive his proposals.

In February 2026, the Commission published its final report, proposing measures on democratisation and the implementation of ECtHR judgments. The report was criticised, however, for maintaining the framing of a “terror-free Turkey” and for omitting key issues repeatedly raised by civil society actors, including Kurdish linguistic and cultural rights, the “right to hope,” and accountability for enforced disappearances.¹⁰

Throughout this period, Öcalan has played a central role as a key interlocutor. His proposals have extended beyond Kurdish rights to broader democratisation for all peoples of Turkey. His constructive role was acknowledged in a letter signed by 88 Nobel laureates to the Committee of Ministers, expressing concern about his detention conditions and urging that he be enabled to contribute freely to the process, with a view toward eventual release.¹¹ Similar calls have been made by prominent intellectuals and political figures internationally.

Following the Commission’s report, key figures from all sides have described the process as entering a second phase, highlighting the need for concrete legislative and administrative reforms to implement the proposed measures. Central to this is clarifying Öcalan’s legal status. Despite his pivotal role, he remains detained under conditions that violate his fundamental rights. For negotiations to proceed on equal footing, the conditions must allow him to participate freely.

Recognising the “right to hope” in his case would be a first step toward ending the regime of extreme isolation imposed for over 27 years and toward establishing the legal basis for release. Aligning Turkey’s execution-of-sentences regime with its human rights obligations would not only affect Öcalan’s case but also represent a broader step toward democratisation and the rule of law, with implications for thousands of prisoners held under the same framework.

10. Overview of report available here: <https://english.anf-news.com/news/final-report-of-the-parliamentary-commission-adopted-by-majority-vote-83980>

11. Available here: <https://ocalanvigil.net/open-letter-by-69-nobel-prize-laureates/>

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Today, we stand at a critical turning point, where the future of Kurdish society—and of all peoples of Turkey—hangs in the balance. Given Turkey’s role within the broader region, and Kurdish regions spanning Iran, Iraq, and Syria, this will also have implications for the broader Middle East. On one path lies regional stability, democratic self-governance, and peaceful coexistence: on the other, the expansion of regional conflict and violent extremism, with consequences extending far beyond the Middle East. To quote the report of the Commission: “the Kurdish, Turkish, Arab, Alevi, Sunni, and all other segments of this geography do not consent to a repetition of the decades long suffering and conflicts.”

In this context, the conditions must be created for Abdullah Öcalan, a key actor in this process and legitimate representative of the Kurdish society, to play his role within the ongoing peace process, and be released from prison. For these reasons, we make the following recommendations:

- 1. The ‘Right to Hope’ must be implemented in Turkey, the Council of Europe must provide the necessary political pressure—and support—in making sure Turkey implements the decision of the ECtHR’s 2014 decision in Öcalan v. Turkey (2). If Turkey again fails to implement the Courts decision, the Committee of Ministers should use all mechanisms at their disposal, including but not limited to initiating infringement proceedings.**
- 2. Öcalan’s detention conditions should be considered within a transparent legal framework so as to allow structured, confidential and lawful communication with relevant actors. Such communication may, where appropriate and in accordance with applicable law, involve representatives of the Kurdish political movement, competent Turkish authorities, and possibly other national and international actors**
- 3. Öcalan must be allowed to freely play his role as the legitimate representative of the Kurdish people and main interlocutor with the Turkish state in the ongoing negotiation process.**
- 4. Turkey must undertake the necessary legal and institutional reforms to ensure that all life sentences are reducible in law and in practice under Article 3 of the Convention.**
- 5. An independent review mechanism, subject to judicial oversight and insulated from political influence, must be established and applied without discrimination to all life prisoners.**
- 6. The first review must take place no later than after 25 years, with subsequent reviews at reasonable intervals.**
- 7. The mechanism must include strong procedural safeguards such as access to legal assistance, the right to be heard, access to documents, and the right to appeal adverse decisions.**
- 8. The prison regime must be designed to support the personal development and reintegration of prisoners into society.**
- 9. The mechanism must apply universally to all prisoners, including those convicted under the Penal Code provisions on security and constitutional order, as well as under the Anti-Terror Law; categorical bans on conditional release must be abolished.**
- 10. Turkey must provide the Committee of Ministers with transparent and comprehensive statistical data on the number of persons sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment, those currently prosecuted under this regime, and their distribution over the years.**
- 11. The reform process must be conducted with the meaningful participation of bar associations, civil society organizations, and independent experts, and must be transparent and accountable.**