

An AP Article in the January 2 Dispatch Links Muslim Cleric Fethullah Gulen with Political Unrest in Turkey

Fethullah Gulen's Muslim religious/political movement operates in the range of 200 tax-funded charter schools in the United States. Gulen is operating in exile in a massive compound in Saylorsburg, PA.

The politics in Turkey is, of course, very complicated. Gulen was accused of orchestrating a failed military coup in Turkey in July 2015. Before and since the July 2015 event, Gulen has been blamed for engaging several anti-government tactics. Without considering whether Gulen is on the right side of the political unrest, is it good policy to fund Gulen charter schools at taxpayers' expense?

Turkey expands probe targeting Istanbul staffers

Zeynep Bilginsoy ASSOCIATED PRESS ISTANBUL – A Turkish court accepted an indictment against suspects from a religious association Thursday in a case that could have political and legal repercussions on the opposition-held Istanbul municipality.

The trial against 23 people involved with DIAYDER, which stands for Religious Scholars Mutual Aid and Solidarity Association, for purported links to outlawed Kurdish militants will begin Feb.18.

Nine of the defendants are in pretrial detention, and some are said to work for the Istanbul municipality.

The court's decision follows an Interior Ministry probe announced Dec.26 against hundreds of municipal staff for alleged terror links.

Together, the cases have prompted worries that the government could be laying the groundwork for targeting popular Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu, who is seen as a possible challenger to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in elections scheduled for 2023.

Imamoglu, of the secular opposition Republican People's Party, came to power in 2019 in elections held a second time after Erdogan's ruling party contested his win, dealing a massive blow to Erdogan in Turkey's most important city. The opposition party has recently accused the government of mishandling the economy, calling for early elections.

The 335-page indictment, accepted Thursday, says DIAYDER followed purported instruction by Abdullah Ocalan, the jailed founder of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, for setting up an alternative religious structure to Turkey's official religious authority in order to garner support from religious Kurds.

The indictment says people with links to the association were employed as imams and bathers for the deceased in preparation for Islamic funerals by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. It also says some of the suspects were handing over municipal aid to families with PKK links.

Turkey's Interior Ministry said Dec.26 that it launched a 'special investigation' against 557 employees of the Istanbul municipality and linked companies. They are accused of links to terror groups, including the PKK, far-left groups and the network of Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen, whom the government blames for the failed 2016 coup attempt.

Interior Minister Suleyman Soylu said officials had identified people with terror links among employees and argued the move was made to combat terror, including in public institutions.

'It's not political; it's a security issue,' he said.

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Imamoglu, defending his 86,000 employees, called for Soylu's resignation.

He said municipality staff must present official criminal records in order to be considered for employment, and he had asked the Interior Ministry to provide lists of suspects and information to investigate but had not heard back.

Meanwhile, other opposition mayors came out in support of Imamoglu, saying 'unjust and baseless claims' aimed to create suspicions on their municipalities and were part of 'dirty politics.'

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