



Negotiation-Based Policing in Türkiye

Early Initiatives (2009–2012)

Democratic Policing and Negotiation | Article 3 of 5
Author: SRL Research Team

Security Studies and Rule of Law Association (SRL Swiss)

Security Studies and Rule of Law Association (SRL Swiss) is a Geneva-based, non-profit, non-political civil society organisation established under Articles 60–79 of the Swiss Civil Code. The Association works to protect human rights, strengthen the rule of law and assess security policies against fundamental-rights standards.

21 October 2026

Security Studies and Rule of Law Association, 15 rue des Savoises, 1205
Geneva,
Switzerland
Website: www.srlswiss.com • Email: info@srlswiss.com

Early Initiatives and the Search for Institutional Change

Negotiation-based policing at public assemblies in Türkiye represents a potentially significant area of reform: it recognises that the police can maintain public order while actively facilitating the exercise of fundamental rights. Focusing on the period 2009–2012, this article examines early training initiatives, their institutional significance and the subsequent challenges of continuity that became apparent after 2013. The central question is not simply whether training was provided under the label of ‘negotiation’, but whether dialogue became a professional principle capable of shaping operational decisions and withstanding political pressure.

One tangible record of the early programmes coordinated by the General Directorate of Security’s Public Order Security Department emerged in March 2010, when training and certification activities were reported publicly. According to a contemporary news account, deputy provincial police chiefs responsible for security and riot-police units in 40 provinces had received negotiation training in Ankara. The same account described a programme target of training 1,027 police managers, including deputy police chiefs and the heads and deputy heads of security and riot-police departments. That figure must be understood as the stated target of the programme, not as the number of officials who had completed training. [1]

At the time, Director General of Security Oğuz Kağan Köksal stressed that force should be used only as a last resort and that disproportionate force should be avoided. The significance of the initiative therefore lay not merely in establishing another training course, but in giving communication and persuasion a recognised place in the approach to policing public assemblies. [1]

These efforts may be understood alongside debates on democratic policing and human rights that gained prominence during Türkiye’s European Union accession process. Bringing operational experience together with academic knowledge is an important foundation for such a transformation. Investment in the training of senior officers, in particular, may encourage decisions at the scene of an assembly to be considered not only in terms of intervention techniques, but also in terms of communication and options for de-escalation.

Preparatory Work and a Culture of Training

Negotiation-based policing cannot become established merely by teaching officers a handful of communication techniques. Workshops, the training of

trainers, case-study analysis and the exchange of operational experience are important for building a durable culture of learning. The contribution of police managers with academic experience to in-service training should be viewed in the same context.

Jointly reviewing case studies and video material allows officers from different provinces to consider situations they have not experienced directly. The principal value of such exercises lies in examining not only when intervention may become necessary, but also what choices of communication might have prevented the need for intervention. Certification becomes meaningful only when it is supported by continuous learning, regular application and evaluation.

The innovative potential of these early initiatives lies in a different conception of the police role. Rather than acting only after a demonstration has begun and circumstances require intervention, police officers may engage with organisers in advance and help ensure that the right of assembly can be exercised safely. This represents more than a technical adjustment: it is an attempt to reconsider the role of the police in a democratic society.

Operational Policy and Directives

The chronology requires a distinction between instruments regulating general intervention procedures and those dealing specifically with the assignment of negotiation personnel. Decisions of the Turkish Constitutional Court refer to the Directive on the Procedures and Principles of Action of Personnel Assigned to Public Assemblies, dated 25 August 2011. A separate framework concerning the deployment of negotiators was described in considerable detail in press reporting in April 2013. These instruments should not be treated as the same directive. [2, 3]

According to the framework described in the 2013 report, the functions of chief negotiator and negotiator were defined, with contact envisaged before, during and after an assembly. In provinces where more than one negotiator was assigned, the role of chief negotiator was associated with the deputy provincial police chief responsible for security or riot-police units. The reported duties and standards of conduct also included communicating group representatives' demands to senior authorities, respectful interaction and impartiality. [3]

This description is significant because it does not reduce negotiation to a final warning delivered at the scene. The existence of a directive, however, does not itself establish the quality of implementation. What matters is the extent to

which negotiators' assessments influence decision-making and whether alternatives to the use of force receive genuine consideration.

Training Content and Institutional Strategy

Training subjects reported in 2013 included the law governing meetings and demonstrations, judicial decisions, police ethics, crowd psychology, group dynamics, anger management, communication, negotiation, crisis management and risk analysis. [3] This suggests an understanding of negotiation not simply as a matter of persuasive speaking, but as a specialised function requiring legal and psychological knowledge.

The rights-based objectives of such training can be expressed in four connected aims: reducing the risk of violence; preventing unnecessary or disproportionate force; identifying and resolving misunderstandings and tensions at an early stage; and strengthening trust between the police and the public. These aims should also serve as criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of training.

Success cannot be measured by the number of courses or certificates alone. The extent to which assemblies were able to proceed, the reasons given for interventions, injuries, complaints and participants' experiences must be considered together. Evaluation on that basis can reveal any gap between the programme's objectives and outcomes in practice.

May Day in Taksim: The Possibility of Accommodation

The May Day gatherings held in Taksim Square in 2010–2012 offer an instructive example for discussing the potential of accommodation and dialogue. A study by Hakan Batırhan Kara and Mustafa Üstün, appearing in issue 53 of the Istanbul University Journal of Political Sciences, examined the perceptions of 80 officers serving in the Istanbul Police Security Department. In the study, 61.3% of respondents considered the conciliatory approach developed by the police towards trade unions and civil society organisations to have contributed to the largely incident-free celebrations. [4]

This finding offers an indication of the value attached by serving officers to dialogue and operational experience. Nevertheless, the research measured the perceptions of personnel in a particular unit; it did not independently establish the causal effectiveness of a nationwide negotiation-training programme. The lifting of the Taksim ban, accommodation among the actors and lessons drawn from previous years were among other factors considered in the study. [4]

The period therefore makes it possible to consider an alternative approach to protest management in Türkiye. It would, however, be unwarranted to infer an unequivocal success across the entire police organisation—or a purported global ‘first’—from a single favourable example.

The 2013 Turning Point and the Fragility of Reform

The 2013 Gezi Park protests exposed tensions between the stated objective of dialogue and practices involving the use of force. The European Commission’s 2014 Progress Report on Türkiye criticised excessive force at demonstrations and obstacles to accountability in relation to interventions during the Gezi protests. It also highlighted the need for greater dialogue between the police and organisers of demonstrations. [5]

These developments illustrate how vulnerable training- and directive-based reforms may remain in the absence of political and institutional safeguards. The presence of trained negotiation personnel does not mean that negotiation determines all operational decisions. Peaceful participants must also be recognised as rights-holders, while command structures must allow meaningful space for de-escalatory alternatives.

It would be inaccurate to describe the ‘end of the negotiation era’ as though all training and deployments ceased after 2013. An announcement issued by the General Directorate of Security on 28 September 2021 records the opening of a public-assembly negotiation course and a stated intention to increase the number of trained negotiators. [6] This demonstrates the continuation of institutional activity, but does not by itself establish that its practical implementation met human-rights standards.

The more accurate reading of 2013 as a turning point is therefore not that the concept of negotiation disappeared, but that the practical influence of dialogue—and the durability of the reform-oriented approach—became open to serious question.

Personnel Changes and Institutional Memory

The personnel changes that followed the corruption investigations of 17–25 December 2013 form an important part of the debate about institutional continuity. The European Commission’s 2014 report recorded that large numbers of police officials had been removed from posts, reassigned or detained. [5] Following 2016, mass dismissals from public service during the state of emergency became part of a much wider problem concerning human

rights and the rule of law, as criticised by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. [7]

Personnel changes on this scale may affect not only staffing levels, but also the transmission of professional experience and the preservation of institutional memory. The loss of officers with academic expertise and operational experience can be particularly consequential for the continuity of a training culture. Nevertheless, determining which individuals involved in the negotiation programme were removed or reassigned, through which procedures and with what specific effects on the programme would require direct personnel and training records. General figures relating to dismissals cannot, on their own, establish that causal relationship.

In the assessment advanced here, the fragility of reform cannot be explained solely by technical shortcomings. Political choices, command culture and the protection of professional expertise also warrant scrutiny. Where training encourages negotiation but management practices discourage the exercise of professional discretion, the practical effects of that training may remain limited.

Constitutional Rights and Democratic Legitimacy

Treating assemblies as if they depended on the administrative authorities' goodwill weakens the rights-based character of negotiation. That criticism of practice must not, however, be confused with a change in the constitutional rule. Article 34 of the Turkish Constitution protects the right to hold peaceful and unarmed assemblies without prior permission. The Constitutional Court has also expressly distinguished a notification requirement from an authorisation requirement. [8]

Negotiation should not become a mechanism for bargaining over whether a right may be exercised. Rather, it should facilitate the safe enjoyment of that right. The United Nations Human Rights Committee's General Comment No. 37 supports communication and dialogue before and during assemblies, while making clear that organisers and participants cannot be required to engage in such contact. [9]

The police have a primary responsibility to facilitate the peaceful exercise of rights while managing concrete risks of violence in accordance with the law. An approach that categorises participants as threats from the outset, by contrast, narrows the space for dialogue. Negotiation-based policing is therefore not

merely an operational tool; it is also a question of democratic legitimacy and ethical responsibility.

Conclusion

Despite their limitations, Türkiye's early negotiation-based policing initiatives may be regarded as important steps towards democratic policing. The effort to bring operational experience, academic knowledge and communication skills together was valuable because it suggested the possibility of a more balanced relationship between public order and fundamental rights.

Recognising this contribution does not require presenting the earlier years as an unqualified success or subsequent years as a period in which the institution ceased to function. The central questions are whether dialogue could be protected during moments of political tension, whether trained officers' expertise could be transmitted and whether decisions to intervene were subject to effective scrutiny.

The effectiveness of an institutional system must be judged not only by the directives it adopts on paper, but also by the safeguards that sustain it in practice. Negotiation-based policing should be embedded in an integrated framework extending from training and command responsibility to personnel policy and accountability. The durability of democratic policing depends on protecting professional expertise and a rights-based approach from changes in the political climate.

References

[1] Sedat Güneç, 'Toplumsal olaylar "müzakere"yle önlenecek' [Public-order incidents to be prevented through 'negotiation'], 27 March 2010, originally published by Zaman and preserved by Risale Haber. Contemporary press account of official statements.

<https://www.risalehaber.com/toplumsal-olaylar-muzakereyle-onlenecek-75074h.htm>

[2] Constitutional Court of Türkiye, Application No. 2014/17222, reference in the legal framework to the Directive on Procedures and Principles of Action of Personnel Assigned to Public Assemblies, dated 25 August 2011.

<https://kararlarbilgibankasi.anayasa.gov.tr/kbb/BB/2014/17222>

[3] Tolga Şardan, 'Biber gazına karşı "müzakereci" dönemi' [The era of 'negotiators' in response to pepper spray], Milliyet, 22 April 2013, reproduced in the Memurlar.net archive. The description of the directive and its training provisions is based on contemporary news reporting.

<https://www.memurlar.net/haber/363878/biber-gazina-karsi-muzakereci-donemi.html>

[4] Hakan Batırhan Kara and Mustafa Üstün, 'İstanbul Emniyet Müdürlüğü Güvenlik Şube Personelinin 2010–2012 Yıllarında Taksim'de Gerçekleşen 1 Mayıs Kutlamalarına Dair Algıları' [Perceptions of Istanbul Police Security Department personnel regarding May Day celebrations in Taksim, 2010–2012], Istanbul University Journal of Political Sciences, no. 53 (issue dated October 2015), pp. 137–159. The online journal record identifies 2016 as the publication year.

<https://dergipark.org.tr/en/download/article-file/254042>

[5] European Commission, Turkey 2014 Progress Report, SWD(2014) 307 final, 8 October 2014, sections on judiciary and fundamental rights and justice, freedom and security.

https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-12/20141008-turkey-progress-report_en.pdf

[6] General Directorate of Security of Türkiye, 'İçişleri Bakanı Süleyman Soylu'nun katılımıyla Toplumsal Olaylarda Müzakere Kursu Açılış Töreni Gerçekleştirildi' [Opening ceremony for a public-assembly negotiation course], 28 September 2021.

<https://www.egm.gov.tr/icisleri-bakani-suleyman-soylunun-katilimiyla-toplumsal-olaylarda-muzakere-kursu-acilis-toreni-gerceklestirildi>

[7] Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, 'Turkey: UN report details extensive human rights violations during protracted state of emergency', 20 March 2018, official press release concerning the OHCHR report.

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2018/03/turkey-un-report-details-extensive-human-rights-violations-during-protracted>

[8] Constitutional Court of Türkiye, 'Press release concerning the decision on certain provisions of the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations', 5 January 2018, especially the distinction between prior notification and permission.

<https://anayasa.gov.tr/tr/haberler/norm-denetimi-basin-duyurulari/toplanti-ve-gosteri-yuruyusleri-hakkinda-kanun-un-bazi-maddelerine-iliskin-kararin-basin-duyurusu/>

[9] UN Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 37 (2020) on the right of peaceful assembly (Article 21), CCPR/C/GC/37, para. 75.

<https://docs.un.org/ccpr/c/gc/37>