

Turkey's War on Free Expression. Journalists Imprisoned for Doing Their Job

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Journalists, academics, public figures, human rights activists, even young children criticizing regime policy risk imprisonment on charges ranging from insulting the president to terrorism, espionage or treason.

Turkey imprisons more journalists than any other country. Istanbul-based Zaman and its English language edition, Today's Zaman, is the nation's largest circulation broadsheet.

On Friday, Erdogan seized control of its operations, continuing his war on free expression, tolerating no dissent, wanting critical voices silenced – using state prosecutors and rubber-stamp courts to serve his interests.

Press freedom in Turkey sustained another major body blow. New management and staff will replace current personnel. Friday was the last day Zaman and Today's Zaman could comment freely.

It released a [statement](#), expressing grave concern about what it called “the darkest and gloomiest days in terms of freedom of the press (and) rule of law.”

“Journalists are now frequenting courts, not their newsrooms.” Many are imprisoned for doing their jobs.

“Two TV channels from the opposite ends of the political spectrum, Benguturk TV and İMC TV, have recently been dropped from the state-run communications satellite Turksat” – the same crackdown used against other broadcasters to silence them.

Erdogan ignores constitutional law. Article 26 “safeguards freedom of expression and thought...”

Articles 28 and 30 guarantee freedom of the press, stating:

A printing house and its annexes, duly established as a press enterprise under law, and press equipment shall not be seized, confiscated or barred from operation on the grounds of having been used in a crime.

Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights, binding on Turkey, states:

Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas

without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

Zaman and Today's Zaman have been heavily "pressure(d)" by regime authorities "for more than two years," its now ousted management said – using "accreditation bans, tax inspections, meddling with its advertisers and threats to its readers."

We have now been threatened with confiscation through the appointment of trustees. We are deeply concerned about all these developments that undermine Turkey's democratic performance.

We believe the only way out of this nightmarish atmosphere is to return to democracy and the rule of law. We are publishing our concerns to inform the Turkish nation, intellectuals who believe in democracy and the wider world.

Separately, [Zaman reported](#) police in riot gear used tear gas and water cannons on a crowd of supporters, forcibly storming the broadsheet's offices, scuffling with staff inside.

Zaman's daily editor-in-chief Abdulhamit Bilici called Friday's state-ordered assault on press freedom "a black stain" on Turkish history.

Zaman's editor-in-chief Sevgi Akarcesme said "(p)olice did not let us inside our offices in our own newspaper building. This is pure despotism. They physically blocked me, both men & women," she tweeted.

Staff inside were ordered out. The order came from Istanbul's Criminal Court of Peace on request from the chief public prosecutor's office.

It claimed Zaman follows orders from what it called the "Fethullahist Terrorist Organization/Parallel State Structure (FETO/PDY)," allied with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Turkey calls it a terrorist organization.

According to Zaman, "(t)his means that the entire management and the editorial board of Feza Media Group companies will be replaced by the three-member board named by the court."

Addressing a crowd of supporters, editor-in-chief Akarcesme called Friday a "black day for democracy. Today we are experiencing a shameful day for media freedom in Turkey. Our media institutions are being seized...(T)he Constitution has been suspended."

Washington remains unconcerned. State Department spokesman admiral John Kirby merely calling Friday's action "troubling" shows contempt for press freedom – stopping well short of condemnation and demanding reinstatement of Zaman's staff.

A previous article said since August 2014 elections elevated Erdogan from prime minister to president (formerly a ceremonial role), reign of terror governance followed.

He's been systematically solidifying his grip on power, despotic rule by any standard, seizing Zaman his latest police state action.

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