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# JOURNALIST

## POST

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# JOURNALISTS ARE BEING MURDERED

More than **400** journalists were arrested in Turkey since 2016 and is currently **144** journalists in prison. Journalists in prison are systematically persecuted and psychologically tortured. Journalist Mevlüt Öztaş was released 'compulsory' from the prison with cancer **874** days after he entered as intact, and after **57** days he was died in hospital.



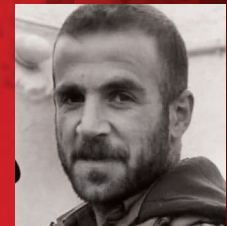
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Ufuk Şanlı  
Vatan Newspaper

23. November, 19 Uhr: Rede zum Exil mit mexikanischer  
Investigativjournalistin Anabel Hernández  
24. November, 10 bis 17 Uhr: Exile Media Forum

# Exile Media Forum

Zu der Fachkonferenz kommen jährlich Exiljournalistinnen,  
Experten und Medienleute in Hamburg zusammen, um  
Erfahrungen auszutauschen, neue Trends zu erkennen und  
Zukunftsfragen zu diskutieren.

In diesem Jahr möchten wir unseren Blick besonders auf die Situation von Exiljournalistinnen und Exiljournalisten in der Krise richten. Die Corona-Pandemie hat die Situation der Pressefreiheit in vielen Ländern weiter verschärft, Medienschaffende werden aufgrund ihrer Berichterstattung über Corona verfolgt. Auch für Exiljournalistinnen und Exiljournalisten erschwert sich die Situation weiter. Wie wird ihre Arbeit durch die aktuelle Situation beeinflusst? Welche Maßnahmen werden ergriffen, um die eigene Sicherheit zu garantieren und welche Instrumente sind dabei von Bedeutung? Diese und weitere Fragen möchten wir während des Exile Media Forums diskutieren.

Anmeldung, Livestream und weitere Informationen unter  
[www.koerber-stiftung.de/exile-media-forum](http://www.koerber-stiftung.de/exile-media-forum)

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## FROM MEVLÜT ÖZTAŞ'S PRISON DIARIES A JOURNALIST'S DAY TO DAY MAKING WAY TO DEATH

Journalist Mevlüt Öztaş was in prison innocently for 874 days. Öztaş, who was healthy when he was imprisoned, first lost his kidneys and then caught pancreatic cancer. And he passed away on August 19, 2020. Journalist Öztaş wrote about his departure day by day in his diaries. In this file, you will read about Öztaş's experiences in prison. **44**

PHOTOGRAPH: MEDIA-POLEYSE



**BELARUS: WAR WITH MEDIA IS STILLIN PROGRESS**  
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PHOTOGRAPH: NEDİM TÜRFENT ARCHEIVE



**TÜRKİYE'DE GAZETECİ OLMAK TEHLİKELİDİR!**  
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# from editor

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DESIGN:  
ADNAN SARIKABAK  
MEHMET ULGA  
HÜSEYİN TEKİN

REVISION:  
MURAT KARACA

CONTACT INFORMATION:  
Adres: Poststraße 2-4,  
60329 Frankfurt am Main  
Deutschland

Tel:+49 069 84846306  
GSM:+49(0)179 1385035

E-Mail: [journalistpost@internationaljournalists.org](mailto:journalistpost@internationaljournalists.org)

[www.internationaljournalists.org](http://www.internationaljournalists.org)

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## Hello,

**November 2** is celebrated as the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists.

As the first quarter of the 21st century is over, journalists all over the world are sadly subjected to pressure, threats, blackmail and assassinations while fulfilling their duty of informing the public.

However, the indispensable requirement of freedom of expression is the complete independence of newspapers and journalists.

Falling short to protect journalists and behaving the governments hesitant to prosecute the perpetrators of attacks on journalists encourage groups targeting freedom of expression.

Democracy is shaken from its foundations in a climate of increased fear, insecurity and anxiety due to the impunity for crimes against journalists.

International Journalists Association (IJA) took the first step with the magazine, named 'Journalist Post', to draw attention to the crimes committed against journalists in different geographies primarily including Turkey.

Besides the associations, foundations and trade unions established by the journalists, also the non-governmental organizations operating in the field of human rights supported the Journalist Post whose first issue will be published on November 2, 2020.

In this important project, the following organizations were with us with their support:

The Society for Threatened Peoples (Gesellschaft für bedrohte Völker/GbVF)

Jailed Journos

Truthfighters Association (Wahrheitskämpfer Association)

German Publishers Association (Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels)

Turkey Journalists' Union (Türkiye Gazeteciler Sendikası)

German Journalists Association (Deutsche Journalistinnen- und Journalisten-Union)

Körber Stiftung

The first issue of our magazine is chock-full of... The articles of journalists who are detained in Turkey, in the country which turned into the biggest prison for the journalists, challenge against the violations of law. Each article will illuminate us like torches against the darkness of authoritarian regimes that love ignorance.

While you read from his diary, written in the prison, how journalist Mevlut Öztaş, who caught cancer in the prison he entered healthy, was dragged to death step by step you will be heartbroken.

No editorial intervention was made to the articles reflecting the opinions of each institution or author.

Our biggest dream is to publish the Journalist Post, the first issue will be published on November 2 to show that we are giving shoulder to shoulder with our colleagues who are currently held hostage after iron bars, in certain periods.

We set out with the aim of declaring that we stand by journalists who pay a price while performing their profession especially in Turkey and all over the world and that we are shoulder to shoulder with them.

The transformation of the Journalist Post into a platform of the professional resistance against the governments dreaming of authoritarianism depends on your dear readers' support.

With your support to the IJA and the Journalist Post, you will also put another brick in the wall of the democracy fortress.

Hoping to meet in freer, healthier and happier days...

# Do not forget journalists!

“In May 2020, We painted nearly 40 journalists those under the threat of Corona in Silivri Prison and sent their portraits to the President. Did any response come from Erdogan? No. But that doesn't matter. Lets continue!”

**I**s there actually a memorial for press freedom? Yes, there is, online. On [www.wahrheitskaempfer.de](http://www.wahrheitskaempfer.de) artists have painted portraits of murdered, imprisoned and persecuted journalists. The result is an impressive collection of very different portraits. Under the motto REMEMBER THEIR FACES - REMEMBER THEIR STORIES, visitors to this online memorial can meet over 300 brave heroes of press freedom - and our collection is constantly growing. Because TRUTH FIGHTERS is an open project that 35 artists worldwide have already joined. And there are more and more.

**It is the atrocities of the powerful** that the journalists brought to light. Powerful politicians, powerful police officers, powerful drug gangs, powerful industrialists have not obeyed the law, have plundered and destroyed nature, raped, stolen or allowed themselves to be bribed. Journalists reported on this before they were intimidated, threatened, arrested, tortured and murdered. From just these people. Most of them go unpunished.

**Outrage, anger and powerlessness** - but we counter these negative feelings with something positive: Gratitude and admiration for the courage of these journalists. It is beautiful to see how much determination and curiosity speak from their faces and it is each time touching for us to do them this honor, to draw them and to unite them in our collection.

**We are physically showing** parts of this collection in a traveling exhibition around the world and are working among others with Reporters Without Borders, Amnesty International

and UNESCO.

**When almost 40 Turkish journalists** in the high security prison Silivri were threatened by Corona in May 2020, we quickly portrayed all those affected and presented their portraits as an open letter with over 100 signatories sent to President Erdogan among others.

**We advertised for more signatories** in the shop windows of bookstores, art galleries and cinemas. An answer from Erdogan? Nothing. But that doesn't matter. Keep going! In Yemen 4 courageous journalists are threatened with the death penalty, in Lukashenko's Belarus we are digging up old cases of murders of journalists and drawing admirably brave, active Belarusian journalists of the present. Our latest case is the murder of the Mexican journalist Julio Valdivia. He was beheaded, but it was supposed to look like a motorcycle accident on the train tracks.

**I would like to invite you all** to visit our project on the internet. Perhaps you know of cases that are still missing and can provide us with information. Perhaps you know artists who like to draw portraits? Or would you like to research and write texts yourself? Support this project! Our non-profit association „Wahrheitskämpfer“ (Truth Fighters) e.V. is also happy to receive donations.

*\*Susanne Köhler is a graphic designer living in Frankfurt am Main. On the occasion of the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in 2015 she founded the art project “Wahrheitskämpfer”.*



SUSANNE KÖHLER \*

 EMRE SONCAN <b>Emre Soncan</b>	 <b>Ünal Tanik</b>	 Hüseyin Aydın <b>Hüseyin Aydın</b>	 <b>Ahmet Altan</b>	 <b>Erdal Sen</b>	 Ali Kus <b>Ali Kus</b>	 <b>Hidayet Karaca</b>	 <b>Serkan Sedat Güray</b>
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 <b>Yilmaz Kahraman</b>	 Yetkin Yıldız 10. HAPTI TÜRKİE SİLİVRİ <b>Yetkin Yıldız</b>	 <b>Mustafa Ünal</b>	 Habip Güler (Türkei) - in Haft seit 2016 <b>Habip Güler</b>	 ERCAN GÜN <b>Ercan Gün</b>	 <b>Faruk Akkan</b>	 AHMET MEMİS <b>Ahmet Memis</b>	 <b>Aykut Yıldır</b>
 <b>Mutlu Çölgeçen</b>	 <b>Yakup Şimşek</b>	 <b>Nuh Gönültas</b>	 <b>Hüdaverdi Yıldırım</b>	 Fevzi yazıcı <b>Fevzi Yazıcı</b>	 <b>Yakup Çetin</b>	 <b>Mustafa Erkan Acar</b>	 <b>Mahmut Gülecan</b>
 <b>Ufuk Şanlı</b>	 <b>Osman Çalık</b>	 Tuncay Akkoyun <b>Tuncay Akkoyun</b>	 <b>Ali Özparun</b>	 <b>Gökce Firat Culhaoglu</b>	 SEYİD KILIÇ TÜRKİE <b>Seyid Kilic</b>	 Ahmet Metin Sekizkardes <b>Ahmet Metin Sekizkardes</b>	<p><b>WAHRHEITS KÄMPFER</b> www.wahrheitskaempfer.de</p> <p>Journalisten im türkischen Gefängnis SİLİVRİ von Corona bedroht Mai 2020</p> <p>PORTRAITS ermordeter und inhaftierter JournalistInnen</p>

The artists painted portraits of nearly 40 journalists who were imprisoned and persecuted. You can find the portraits at [www.wahrheitskaempfer.de](http://www.wahrheitskaempfer.de).



**PETER FREITAG** PETER FREITAG DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF THE GERMAN JOURNALISTS ASSOCIATION

# Press freedom in Germany

“Journalists’ work is increasingly hampered. As in G20 summit in Hamburg nine journalists whose accreditation was withdrawn by the Federal Press Office. But these journalists successfully defended themselves in the court. This shows that the press freedom is not bad in Germany. But cracks are growing. We’ll be awake!”

**N**ot a long time ago, freedom of the press was a matter of course anchored in the rule of law in Germany. With a few exceptions, journalists were able to pursue their profession unhindered and hardly had to fear any obstacles or reprisals. Freedom of the press is one of the foundation pillars of our democracy, that was social consensus. And if it happened that there were attacks on press freedom, then these were at the latest fended off by the courts.

**Those days are over.** The pressure on journalists is steadily increasing and the high good of press freedom has to be defended again and again every single day. In parts of society, a media-hostile discourse is seen as “good taste”. Media professionals are insulted as “press pf lies” and disseminators of fake news, as passive agents of the political and economic establishment. Right-wing extremists are calling for rallies in front of the apartments of journalists in order to intimidate and silence them. Verbal attacks and attempts at intimidation are the order of the day at demonstrations by right-wing populists, corona deniers and other conspiracy theorists.

**Journalists are increasingly** being prevented from working by force. “Political demonstrations are the most dangerous place to work for journalists in Germany,” says the European Center for Press and Media Freedom. And although journalists make use of a constitutional right in this work, government agencies apparently do not see themselves in a position to enforce this right. Again and again police officers stay passive, instead of helping the attacked, they encourage them to disappear from the scene - a declaration of bankruptcy by the rule of law.



Deutsche  
Journalistinnen- und  
Journalisten-Union

**But others are also targeting** press freedom: Public figures and so-called aristocrats, for example, but also commercial enterprises. They are increasingly trying to torpedo reporting with legal means. For the media law firms, a new business model was created as a side effect. But press freedom is increasingly becoming a precious commodity that one has to buy dearly with the help of lawyers.

**Sometimes journalists** have to enforce their right to press freedom against the state and its authorities by legal means. Just like the nine journalists whose accreditation was withdrawn by the Federal Press Office at the G20 summit in Hamburg 2017. They have successfully defended themselves against this in court.

**This shows that the rule** of law works, and press freedom in Germany is not as bad as it is in other countries, including Europe. But the rifts are getting bigger. We will be vigilant!



**GÖKHAN DURMUŞ** GÖKHAN DURMUŞ GENERAL CHAIRMAN OF JOURNALISTS' UNION OF TURKEY

# Without Facing You Cannot Fix It

After the 2016 coup attempt nearly 200 journalists were arrested. Keeping the number of journalists detained and on trial has become impossible. Those who made these unjust arrests and punishments are free of charge. they continued to lead their lives. This is the main problem in Turkey! “

**T**urkey's history is a history full of repressions against the journalists. Unsolved Murders, arrests, detentions... In Turkey there are 67 unidentified journalist murders, as stated in the official records. Between 1950-1960, 811 journalists were convicted. 31 journalists were arrested in the 1980 coup, Over 100 journalists were arrested within the scope of KCK and Ergenekon between 2010-2013, and after the 2016 coup attempt nearly 200 journalists were arrested.

Keeping the number of journalists detained and on trial has become impossible. Today in Turkey, in 2020 there are still 70 detained journalists in the prisons. 31 journalists were attacked last year. The perpetrators of the 11 assaulted journalists were not punished.

Periods and policies changed; journalists were released, but the months and years they spent between the four walls were stolen from their lives. Those who made these unjust arrests and punishments continued their lives without paying any penalty. This is the main problem in Turkey.

The issue that should be highlighted on the International Day to End Impunity for Crimes against Journalists, 2 November, is that these penalties were given to journalists within the non-impartial legal system.

The prosecutors who detained journalists with the instructions of the government, and the court committees that arrested them, came to make decisions without taking into consideration the evidence.

If I will explain this with a few examples;

Deniz Yücel, Die Welt Turkey correspondent. He spent about 1 year in prison before his indictment was even prepared. Although the court decided to “continue his detention” the day before, with the German Foreign Ministry's intervention, one day later he was sent to Germany in a hurry. What about a year that he was kept in isolation in prison? Let's never ask about it, while at last he's liberated.

Müeyesser Yıldız, Odatv Ankara Representative. She has been detained for over 100 days. Also she's arrested for a news she didn't

make. Her delict is making phone calls with a news source who obtains information through unlawful listening. Turkey's public opinion knows that is actually not a crime but she was arrested because the Interior Minister targeted her. We do not know how long she will be deprived of her freedom. Just like she was arrested in 2012 and deprived of her freedom for 16 months.

Şahin Alpay, author of Zaman Newspaper. He was arrested in 2016 on the charge of ‘being a member of the FETÖ / PDY terrorist organization’. Despite his advanced age, he stayed in Silivri Prison for 20 months. Şahin Alpay, about whom Constitutional Court ruled that there were two violations of the right to freedom of person and freedom of expression, was released on 17 March 2018 under house arrest. What about 20 month imprisonment that he lives in isolation from his family, friends and the world? Let's never also ask about it, while at last he's liberated.

Unfortunately the outlook to the freedom of press and freedom of expression in Turkey for many years like this. The journalists who wrote articles that the rulers did not like, and made comments were declared as terrorists, sent to prison and then released without even an apology.

It is not only about the journalists, unfortunately that is not in the Turkey's genetic to face up to the past and to be accountable. Just as Kenan Evren, the architect of the 1980 coup, passed away without trial, as the ministers who committed corruption stepped aside without being judged...

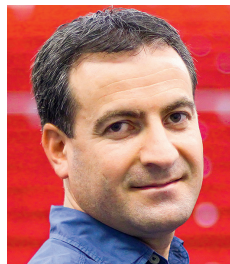
Just as forgetting the “I will find” promise given by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who was the Prime Minister of the time, to his Saturday mother Berfo Kırbayır, who has been searching for the bones of her son for 40 years...

We can protect neither democracy nor freedom of press and expression when there is impunity for crimes against journalists and there is no confrontation with the past. It is certain that the governments which cannot confront their pasts and do not admit their mistakes will not benefit this country or the people.

JOURNALIST AHMET NESİN SAYS IN TURKISH PRISONS THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF BABIES TOGETHER WITH THE JOURNALISTS AND ADDS:

# ANY BABY CAN NOT BE ENEMY

Ahmet Nesin, "They attacked to me because I wrote 'What could be the felony of a 25 year old mother with her baby that gives way her to be detained?'. I don't care about whom the injustice is committed, there is no distinction in the struggle for democracy. The days, when those who did these unlawfulnesses will be judged, are close."



ŞEMSİ AÇIKGÖZ

*Journalist-writer Ahmet Nesin, the son of famous writer Aziz Nesin, has focused his writings, television and Youtube programs especially on the AKP government and Turkish media. Nesin also explores the July 15 coup attempt to his capillaries through his programs with his witnesses. Nesin, who was forced to leave his country because of his opposition when he was only 13, took refuge in France in 2003 at last, while the AKP came to power. The reason of his asylum is intriguing; "Turkey and the world have been in trouble and that no one is aware of it yet, but when they arrive, it will be too late" he said.*

*We discussed Turkey and the Turkish media with journalist Ahmet Nesin.*

### **Why and when did you leave Turkey?**

I first left Turkey in September 1971. After the March 12 coup, there was serious harassment, especially at school and around me. When a teacher told me that my father had ruined the hometown and I had ruined my school in class, I went to England at the age of 13.5 as a result of a big argument fol-

lowed by a fight.

### **Were you in peace in England or did you stand in peace?**

In 1977, I was expelled from the UK for my speech as the school's chief representative at the British student association's Congress and stayed in Turkey until 2003.

### **When the AKP came to power in 2003, you went abroad again and defected to France. Why?**

In 2003, I defected to France because of the AKP and Erdoğan's power. I said in my application grounds that Turkey and the world have been in trouble and that no one is aware of it yet, but when they arrive, it will be too late. I have unlimited residence permit in France. So I didn't run after the July 15 coup attempt, I have a residence permit here and I stay here.

### **How does it feel to make predictions and be right at the end of the road?**

I have been trying for years to understand that so many Democrats, revolutionaries and socialists cannot see this, rather than my prediction. It's not the first time, and we're very



Ahmet Nesin says that as the fear of getting caught and prosecuted, the more the rulers will become more fascist and increase the number of dictatorial activities to prevent it.

PHOTOGRAPH BY SELAHATTIN SEVİ

experienced in our incompetence. What were those: Turgut Özal, the deputy prime minister of the September 12 coup, was first touted as a Democrat to this country. There was no need for the centre-right or the Religious, the left and the Liberals did it very well.

After that, we had Tansu Çiller, both feminists and Democrats made the same mistake at first because she was a woman. However, this is politics, it should not have gone through gender. However, it was written and drawn that Devlet Bahçeli was a Democrat and a chance according to Türkiye, because the nationalists decried the murder for a period. And finally, Muh-sin Yazıcıoğlu incident happened. So to say he's supposed to be remorseful and he's going to make some confessions. Hitler could have done it, and I will never accept the begging for forgiveness of all these murders. Now it is said that Demirel's right was defeated when Erdogan showed his true face. However, the era of his coalitions were one of the bloodiest periods. There is a strange understanding on the left of Turkey that they want to change the system without offending the state, this is impossible.

**I want to bring the matter to today's government. Especially after December 17, 53 newspapers, 34 TV channels, 37 Radio, 20 magazines, 6 News Agencies, 29 publishing houses were shut down in Turkey. Even though the 30th Article of the Constitution exists (Press tools and equipment cannot be confiscated...). About 300 thousand sites were blocked from access. What do you think makes the government so reckless or cowardly?**

Every person or institution can do wrong. This is the case in the world, and there are serious mechanisms of self-criticism. Even countries apologize. But countries like Turkey and its inhabitants are always right, and there is no self-criticism on their agenda. Because self-criticism is equivalent to a little education and reading, it stays away from countries like us and their people.

**In 2002, when the AKP came to power, Turkey ranked 99th in the World Press Freedom Ranking. It is now 154 among 180 countries. in order. Adding reporters that the government does not count as journalists, we are at the end of the list. How do you consider that?**

Falling from 99 to 154 does not mean that fascism has come to Turkey, we have a dictator. The whole problem in Turkey is 99, including the left. to accept that there is fascism in Turkey when it is in line is to fight according to it. There will come a time when Erdogan and his supporters will say that there is fascism in Turkey. Because they will also face trial. Fascism is not the judgment of people, but the reasons for it. Then it's more important why it was done than who it was done to. We never think about it. We don't.

**Why did government deviate from what you describe as "fascism"?**

The fear of being caught and tried increases, especially when the power feels that the time for its own trial is slowly approaching, and to prevent this, it becomes more fascist and dictatorial activities increase. Erdogan is the clearest example of this. And Nedim Şener as a journalist. Bridesmaid doesn't



Gazeteci-yazar Ahmet Nesin, "Nedim tartışmıyor, korkudan devamlı bağırıp hakaret ediyor. Bağırınca da biz çok korkuyoruz. Nedim gibiler cinayete çok meyyaldir." FOTOĞRAF: SELAHATTİN SEVİ

argue, he screams and insults out of fear. And when he scream, we are very afraid. I'm scared to death that I'll encounter Nedim, because he can really do anything for the country and feel innocent. People like Nedim are very prone to murder.

**So, will everyone be a "Nedim" if this process continues like this?**

I don't think everyone comes as far as Nedim, but I believe there is romance in our fighting system. It is difficult to explain, but a revolution is not made without hurting, or if the people do not want or support what is wanted to be done, it is not called a revolution. That's why even Mustafa Kemal is misrepresented. The hat revolution, the letter revolution, women's suffrage, which was the result of the Great Uprising of the base, is called the revolution. It is seen as a gentle struggle against the state when these are considered to be Revolution. Mustafa Kemal was pretty strong yet he could not make the land reform that could be the main revolution. After that, İsmet İnönü couldn't do it either. Who was blocking it? The landowner Adnan Menderes. Revolution means hurting someone, or rather, the oligarchy.

**November 2 is also the International Day to fight impunity for crimes against journalists. 'In Turkey, there are journalists who have died of cancer in prison. For example, Mevlut Öztaş, Uşak correspondent of Cihan media. He came out of prison after 874 days later, where he was put alive, with cancer and died 57 days later. Ahmet Altan, 70, on the other hand, is still in prison for working as a journalist. And many more... What would you like to say about that?**

Just looking at it from a journalist's point of view is sickness I've been saying all along. There are hundreds of patients

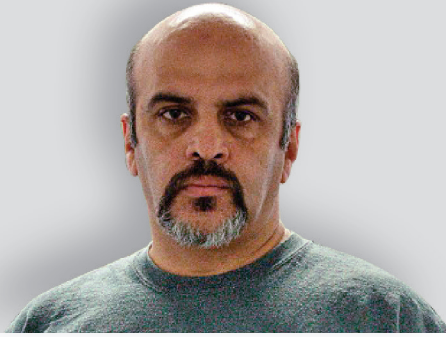
in there who are close to death, and for me, their profession does not matter. And so many babies. I don't care about his family's opinion, the baby can't be my enemy. I posted a photo of a 1.5-month-old baby and wrote, 'You don't know what crime the 25-year-old mother could have had enough to go to jail with the baby' and those who consider themselves democrats attacked me. I don't care who gets oppressed, there's no distinction in the struggle for democracy. But for us, it is there.

**Who will ask and write the account of the widespread corruption and lawlessness in Turkey? How will society be aware of what is happening in Turkey? What does society want?**

If you look at the people that society has chosen to date, you will understand. This state give the "doctor" title to the one who says bring a fellow-wife instead of cheating. We are obliged to that doctor due to the profession. Then we should not find odd the journalists and academics who call Erdogan a democrat. Erdogan said: 'I will turn the train line between Mersin and Anamur into a high-speed train.' He was applauded when he said it. Do you know? There was no train line between Mersin and Anamur. So there was no line to dial. These doctors, journalists or academics come out of these people.

**In cases where leaders are sued, Erdogan has set a record. The figures are as follows; Evren 340, Özal 207, Demirel 158, Sezer 163, Gül 848 and Erdoğan 36 thousand 66. 12,298 were tried and 3,831 were sentenced. How do you read these numbers?**

I didn't know if it would be a shame if I gave the only answer, but in the words of the young people, 'I don't give a hang'



ERKAN PEHLIVAN

# Journalists' stories should be announced to the world

“The oppression to the freedom of expression and the press has not previously occurred to such a level that is performed for last four years in Turkey. “The most effective way to help journalists there is to get their stories to the world and report the extent of the repression.”

## Why our work is so important

**W**It was only a few weeks after the attempted coup in 2016 that I met the first journalists in exile from Turkey. They were all around my age and were very concerned about their loved ones and friends. Many of their colleagues were arrested for allegedly being members or leaders of a terrorist organization overnight. One of them, I call him Murat for security reasons, still had his wife and three children in Turkey at that time.

**But they too made it a few months** later and came to Germany. I am now very good friends with these four journalists in exile. They can speak German today so that they can handle their own daily issues. They only ask questions when it comes to the complex German bureaucracy. Except for one, all of them are working.

**Their children go to kindergartens,** schools and the daughter of one of the colleagues will get her “ABITUR” next year and then go to university. They found friends, mainly Germans. They invite their German neighbors to dinner and celebrate birthdays and religious holidays together. Some get Turkish sweets for Christmas, others get then Grandma’s apple strudel for Ramadan.

**They refer to me as their German colleague.** And yes, it’s a little bit true. My Turkish has improved significantly through the friendship with my exiled colleagues. I still can’t get the German accent off completely. This makes me more likeable, according to some of the colleagues. At the end of last year we got together to help the persecuted colleagues in Turkey and other countries and also to raise the voices of the exiled journalists higher.

**As a result of this work, I now have dozens** of exiled journalists among my friends and acquaintances. There are not only of Turkish origin. Now there are also Syrian colleagues among them and also the first ones from Iran.

**We have collected a great deal of information** about the situ-

ation of press freedom and our colleagues in Turkey and continue to do so. More than 170 journalists and media workers are behind bars in the country. If colleagues are released, others are arrested again, then for the second or third time. Officially, the country is the world’s largest prison for journalists. It is especially difficult for unknown journalists. They are often denied medical care. A form of torture that, as in the case of Mevlüt Öztaş, led to death. He was not allowed to leave the hospital until the cancer had spread throughout his whole body.

**But colleagues are also being persecuted** in Iran and Syria. A Syrian colleague told us that 15 journalists alone from his circle of friends were imprisoned in Damascus. In total, hundreds of colleagues are likely to be behind bars in Syria. We don’t know how many of them perished. But we stay tuned and will also take action here. The world has a right to know how things are going with the media in Syria. And we owe it to our colleagues to make their stories public. It’s dark and lonely behind the gray walls. Making their stories public gives them and their families hope. We experienced this from our colleagues in Turkish prisons, who are very happy to know about published reports on their cases and to receive letters from abroad. And their tormentors need to know that we are documenting their crimes and that they will eventually be held responsible for those.

**In countries like Turkey there has never been** a truly free press. It has always been very difficult to report critically about the government in this country. However, the extent of the persecution of colleagues and the suppression of press freedom and freedom of expression in the past four years, has never happened before. Similarly in Syria, Iran and China. And there is only one way to help the colleagues there: to publish their stories and to report on the extent of the oppression. It is therefore all the more necessary to support our work!

# Turkey's “dissident” media problem

“Yaşar Kemal described the Soviet Union, as a hunchback of world socialism. The majority of the journalists those position themselves as ‘anti-government’ are the hunchback of the media.”

**A** journalist whose profession and life has been taken away, not seeing a single star for four years, longing to look far –far- away because of the meters-high walls surrounding his five-step courtyard, waiting for a cloud or a bird to pass over him to perceive the depth of the small sky above, naturally has a lot to say about the government and the media it possesses.

However, there is a problem of opposition in Turkey, as big as the ruling problem,” and there is the dissident media problem just as big as the state-sponsored media.

Media organizations claiming to be dissidents such as Halk TV, Fox TV, and Sözcü Daily are as responsible as the government and its media for the demolition of freedom of thought and expression and journalists’ imprisonment.

Some colleagues in the opposition media sometimes label

journalists who do not share their political views as “terrorists” or just ignore them and support the policy of pressure and intimidation implemented by the politicians – intentionally, I believe.

Opposing media outlets, which put their ideologies and feelings before journalism principles, set up barricades hand in hand with the government on the path of imprisoned journalists to freedom.

There is no fundamental difference in terms of their perspective of freedom between Sabah Newspaper and “dissident” Sözcü Newspaper, or between the government’s A Haber TV channel and Fox TV’s news bulletin. Both sides are content with just voicing their own circles’ demands for freedom.

If the ruling party changed in Turkey tomorrow, Sozcu daily would replace the Sabah newspaper, and the Fox chan-



## EMRE SONCAN IMPRISONED JOURNALIST/ SİLİVRİ PRISON

The letter Emre Soncan wrote to our magazine.



## Who is Emre Soncan?

He was born in 1982 in Bursa. Graduated from Bahçeşehir University Faculty of Communication. He completed his master's degree in Journalism Department of Marmara University. He started journalism in 2004. He completed his master's degree in Journalism Department of Marmara University. He started his career in 2004. After working as a trainee at CNN Türk for a short time, he started working as a reporter at Zaman Newspaper's news desk. Soncan, who has made news in the field of politics in Istanbul, made many reputable interviews and special news.

In 2009, he was assigned to Ankara news desk of Zaman Newspaper. He prepared special news in the fields of defense and security in Ankara. In 2011 He published his first book, 'Keş Dağında Bir Alperen', whose topic is Muhsin Yazıcıoğlu's suspicious death. In 2012, he was appointed as the Presidential correspondent of Zaman Newspaper. He followed then the President Abdullah Gül and published his second book, "7 Years in Purgatory", which tells about Gül's presidential days in 2014.

During this time, he did not quit working as defense reporter. He wrote news on the defense industry, military projects, tenders, corruptions and recent history.

At this period, he also started his doctoral studies in the field of "Security Strategies". However, Soncan, who was detained with many other journalists on July 25, 2016 after the coup attempt on July 15, 2016, was arrested four days later and put in Silivri Prison. His doctoral study was also interrupted.

Emre Soncan is one of the best reporters in Turkey in the field of defense. He is a successful journalist who has academic aspect as well as field experience. He is known as a meticulous, hardworking, productive, analytical journalist. Emre Soncan, who was sentenced to 7.5 year imprisonment, has been in prison for more than 4 years.

nel would serve as a substitute for the A Haber TV channel. There would be no significant development in terms of freedom of thought and expression.

The great novelist Yaşar Kemal described the Soviet Union as the hunchback of international socialism. Likewise, most journalists who position themselves as 'anti-government' in Turkey are also the hunchback of genuine opposition media.

"Whoever has a heart, they will suffer," says Dostoevsky. Neither the government media nor the opposition media in Turkey have a heart. Since they do not know what the suffering is, they will never understand the pain of the thousands of people in prison.

In brief, a government can only be monitored and balanced with an independent, liberal media, and brave, conscientious journalists. This independent and liberal media is a dream for Turkey at the moment. For this dream to come true, we have no choice other than waiting for journalists to be released from prison.

And unfortunately, we will be here for quite a while...

*Emre Soncan, Arrested journalist, Silivri Prison, September 2020*

FROM THE PRISON DIARIES OF MEVLÜT ÖZTAŞ

# GOING TO DEATH OF A JOURNALIST DAY TO DAY

Journalist Mevlüt Öztaş was in prison innocently for 874 days. Öztaş, who was healthy when he was imprisoned, first lost his kidneys and then caught pancreatic cancer. He passed away on August 19, 2020. Journalist Öztaş wrote about his departure day by day in his diaries. In this file, you will read about Öztaş's experiences in prison.



Mevlüt Öztaş, Cihan News Agency Uşak korrespondent. PHOTOGRAPH: MEVLÜT ÖZTAŞ ARCHEIVE

## ŞEMSİ AÇIKGÖZ

**H**aving started his career in journalism in 1995, Mevlüt Öztaş has worked under Cihan News Agency in several cities of Turkey. When he was arrested in the city of Uşak, where he worked last as a journalist, on February 1, 2018, no accusations were made on him other than his news coverage, social media posts and his communication with politicians.

When he first got into prison, Öztaş was healthy. He first lost one of his kidneys and then the other one lost 13% of its functions. Then he developed hypertension under the dire conditions of the prison and eventually became pancreatic cancer. When he was discharged on the terminal status of his cancer on June 23, 2020, there was no hope of survival left for him. The cancer was stage 4 and had invaded into his full body.

He only had 57 days with his family before he passed away on August 19 2020. He documented his walk towards death on a daily basis in his diary. The following are taken from the diary.

### **'MASAK proves my innocence'**

March 15, 2018 (From the Petition that He Submitted to the Court): The report of MASAK (Financial Crimes Unit) proves my innocence. As identified in the Report, my only memberships are Uşak Journalists Association and Uşak Union of Publishers. Other than the two I have no other membership to any other organization.

### **'His Son Develops Speech Disorder'**

My two daughters are college students and the other one is at high school. I also have 3,5 year old son who needs care and treatment (Öztaş's son, Ali Yekta, develops speech disorder after the arrest of his father). My wife was diagnosed with hepathitis in 2013. She should not actively work in any job because of hepathitis, yet, she Works on daily basis to take care of me and our family, that is, when she can. In such difficulties, I would like to help my family and ask for release.

### **'The Integrity of my Family got Broken'**

July 10, 2018: I am in prison for 160 days. I am married with four children. My wife is sick. My family has no income. The integrity of our family got broken. I didn't get to see my children for a long time and they are psychologically affected.

July 12, 2018: I saw the doctor for my disease.

July 26, 2018: I saw the doctor and gave blood sample for analysis.

### **'There was No Respect for the Privacy of the Patient'**

July 27, 2018: I was examined by an ophtalmologist, a urologist and a nephrologist. I asked for the removal of my handcuffs and doctor-patient privacy during the examinations. It was rejected.

### **'I don't Want the Surgery'**

July 30, 2018: I gave blood and urine, and got my ultrasound taken for the diagnostics purposes of my diseases.

Prison conditions are terrible. The water is frequently out and the wards are far from being hygienic. Hot water is provided 45 minutes a day and 21 people in the ward has to take

their showers in 45 minutes. We are 21 people for a ward for 8. We wait for an hour to use the toilet. I have no locker to put my clothes and personal stuff. There are only 5 lockers in the ward.

Doctor told me that I needed surgery for the hernia in my left groin. Yet, a ward-mate of mine told me that he got infected in the hospital after surgery because the conditions in the hospital were terrible. He faced the risk of paralysis. This gives me anxiety and I don't want the surgery.

### **'My Right Kidney Lost Its Function'**

November 1, 2018: I was diagnosed with chronic kidney deficiency and hypertension. My right kidney lost its function and the left one is functioning with 87% capacity.

November 2, 2018: I saw the doctor. He told me to go back tomorrow that he would refer me to a dietician. The next day, the prison staff member named Turgay did not let me see the doctor.

January 17, 2019: I saw the doctor. I got medicine for hypertension and my stomach.

February 1, 2019: I saw the doctor for my disease. I was given Ürikoliz.

February 14, 2019: I saw the doctor for hypertension. I got medicine for hypertension and iron deficiency.

February 28, 2019: I saw the doctor for my disease. My blood pressure is 11/6 and I am 69 kilos.

March 7, 2019: I saw the doctor for my disease.

March 14, 2019: I saw the doctor. My blood pressure is 9/5 and I am 72 kilos. I got stomach medicine.

MART28, 2019: I saw the doctor. I was referred to Afyon Kocatepe University for hernia surgery.

### **'I have been arrested for a long time, yet, no crime has been substantiated!'**

June 10, 2019: I have been arrested for membership to an 'Armed Terrorist Group'. Yet, no substantial evidence to back the accusation, such as; arms, ammunition, equipment, organizational structure etc, has been presented. Because they do not exist. Cihan Media, for which I worked, has been involved in the protocol invitation lists of governorate, law enforcement and municipality, just like Turkuvaz Media, Doğan Media and Demirören Media groups. I worked for a totally legitimate institution.

September 30, 2019: I want to see the doctor. (P.S: My demand was responded at all.)

### **'My Crime: Being a Journalist!'**

October 30, 2019: Here are the accusations about me: 1) The meetings that I had for journalistic purposes, 2) Having worked at Cihan Media, 3) Having oppositional coverage to the government, 4) Following the protest in front of the courthouse for journalistic purposes, 5) My coverage being shared on social media, 6) Some education coverage that I have made, 7) Some phone conversations that I had for journalism purposes, 8) Using Bank Asya, a perfectly legitimate and state approved bank, for my salary payment.

### **'My Petitions are not Being Repended'**

November 1, 2019: The unresponded petitions that I submitted to directorate of the prison have been as follows: The petition that demands blanket on December 3, 2018, the

**MEVLÜT ÖZTAŞ  
STATES THAT DESPITE  
ANY DISCIPLINARY  
CRIMES OR REPRI-  
MAND HE IS PLACED  
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“I HAVE DIFFICULTY  
OF BREATHING. I AM  
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BEING CAUGHT BY A  
DISEASE WITHOUT  
CURING.”**

petition dated March 25, 2019, the petition dated May 13, 2019, the petition dated May 22, 2019, the petition dated July 11, 2019, the petition about my defense documents being given to my family dated October 18, 2019, the petition that demands blanket on October 31, 2019.

November 11, 2019: I had to write 4 different petitions to print out my defense in the court. I submitted petitions on September 17 and 20 and October 2 and 10. Yet, it was of no use, because when I was finally able to send my defense, the decision had already been made about me.

#### **‘I am Being Punished for Being a Journalist’**

January 2, 2020: On December 24, 2019, the court decided the continuation of my detention. I have been on trial for 1541 days, 703 of which have been in prison. Throughout this time, no single accusation has been substantiated. I am being tried for being a journalist and being punished for doing my job.

January 14, 2020: I went to Afyon state hospital and doctors asked for urine sample for analysis. I wanted to go to toilet for providing the sample but the guards did not allow me. I had to do it standing there. Doctor-patient privacy was violated.

January 17, 2020: I wanted to see the doctor. It was rejected despite my hypertension.

January 31, 2020: I saw the doctor for my disease.

#### **‘I was put in Solitary Confinement’**

February 11, 2020: I was put in solitary confinement because of the petition I placed.

#### **‘I Have to Drink 2 Liters of Water on a**

#### **Daily Basis, Yet There is No Water’**

February 13, 2020: I am in solitary confinement. I am a renal (kidney) patient and I have to drink 2 liters of water everyday. Yet, I only had 1 liter in two days. They do not provide Access to drinking water. The water system in my cell does not work.

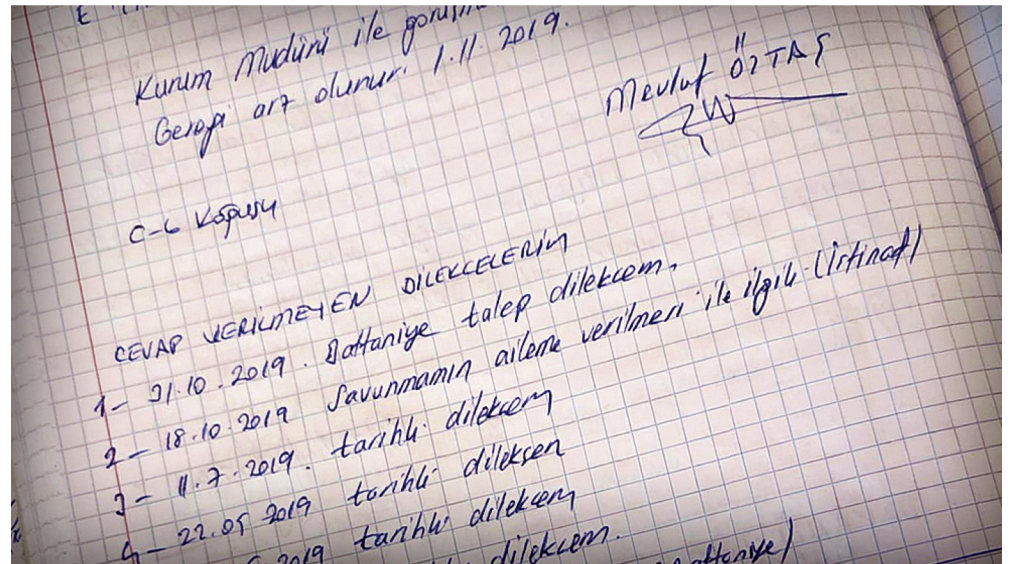
February 18, 2020: 24 months 2 weeks and 3 days after my detention, I received the justified decision for being sentenced to 9 years 3 months.

#### **‘I face the Risk of Drowning’**

February 19, 2020: (From the Petition He Gave to Prison Administration) Despite the fact that I have never had any disciplinary issues I was put in solitary confinement. I have several health issues. I have had surgeries for stomach hernia and esophageal reflux. Reflux recurred and my gastric juice goes into my trachea. This is why I have the risk of drowning. I have had two episodes of that and I got over them with the help of my ward-mates. I also have hypertension, asthma and renal disease. My habitat should be clean and warm. This place is dusty and cold. I have trouble breathing. I am anxious that I will develop a non-curable disease. Therefore I demand this solitary confinement to end.

#### **‘I am Afraid of My Organs Lose Their Functions’**

February 20, 2020: In my 49 years of life I have never got involved in any crime. I have no relevance to the crimes that have been attributed to me. Among them, the expression, “membership to a terrorist organisation” is killing me. I have only done journalism. Since the of my detention, my Access to lawyer was prevented, the copies of digital materials were not given to my family and I was



Mevlüt Öztaş behaves as a journalist also in prison and he noted all his experiences

PHOTOGRAPH: MEVLÜT ÖZTAŞ ARCHIVE



not brought face to face with the people who testified against me. In prison, I have developed asthma, reflux, sight impairment, chronic kidney deficiency, hypertension and hernia in my left groin. I am extremely concerned that these conditions will progress, new diseases will develop and more of my organs will lose function.

I am not a terrorist. It is killing me in the spirit that I am being given the same sentence with bloody handed child murderers.

February 21, 2020: I wrote a petition to see the doctor. I am sick.

#### **Accusation: Having contact with Parliament Members for News Coverage**

March 2, 2020: (From the Petition He Submitted to the Court) The accusation that was addressed to me is the details of the communications that I had with parliament members of the time, Durmuş Yılmaz from Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) and Özkan Yalım from Republican People's Party (CHP). In the same, I have had communications with the Nurullah Cahan, municipal mayor from Justice and Democracy Party (AKP), parliament members, İsmail Güneş and Mehmet Altay, and provincial head Basri Yıldırım, all

from the AKP. These communications were not mentioned. Is that a crime, by all means, anyway?

All in all, I have only done my job; journalism. The justice that was delivered for Deniz Yüzel, the correspondent of Die Welt, should be delivered for me as well and I should be released.

#### **'Everyone here Got Depressed Because of Coronavirus'**

March 12, 2020: Not enough precautions were being taken in prison against Coronavirus. All the convicts and detainees use the same phones, which are not disinfected. The lack of measures created panic attacks and everyone got depressed here.

#### **'Chlorosis Started on My Body'**

March 29, 2020: I was taken to the hospital in emergency today. Liver deficiency started alongside kidney deficiency and chlorosis started. That is what they said.

#### **'My Only Aim is to Survive'**

March 30, 2020: (From the Petition He Submitted to the Court) On March 11 2020, the first case of Coronavirus was declared in our country and this created a huge anxiety in prison. I was specifically anxious because scientists have declared that 73.8% of the people that lost their lives to Coronavirus

had hypertension. With chronic kidney deficiency and hypertension I am in this risk group. The guards of prison are always in contact with inmates, so any virus on any guard would mean the infection of the whole prison.

My sole aim is to survive. I am facing death as of now. I demand to be released by the court pending a trial with judicial review measures.

#### **'I will Have Surgery Today'**

March 31, 2020: My pancreatic duct has been clogged, my body developed liver deficiency and this started internal bleeding. When doctor said, "We will identify the matter that created the clog in the duct after the pathology results" I realized I had cancer.

April 6, 2020: I was extremely weak. I went to doctor's office in a wheelchair. Doctor called for ambulance but the prison administration sent me to the hospital with prison van, not with the ambulance.

Since my situation was serious, they referred me to Ankara City Hospital. I was traveling in the ambulance with my hands cuffed to the sledge. When we got to the hospital they did not accept me saying they did not have prison ward in there. We struggled for acceptance for a couple hours but they

The photo of he, his wife, 3 daughters and son while he was in prison. PHOTO: MEVLÜT ÖZTAŞ ARCHIVE



**Mevlüt Öztaş: I couldn't play with my children to my heart's content, especially with my Ali Yekta. When he was 18 months old, they arrested me as if I was a bandit. I could not hug and smell to your heart's content. Father longing for son and son for father tormented us for 47 months.**

did not accept me. Then we went to the Dışkapı Yıldırım Beyazıt Hospital again my hands were cuffed and I was escorted by two soldiers.

I got even weaker and eventually I had passed out in the chair that I was sitting. I was able to hear what was being said but did not have the power to respond. Then we got to the prison ward of Dışkapı Hospital, I regained some of my strength. There they also did not want to accept me because I had some missing documents. Then the referral documents arrived and I was finally hospitalized.

It feels very cold. I am cold, all the time. I asked for another blanket. I had hard time eating the food they gave.

**'I Didn't Have the Chance to Play**

**with My Little Ali Yekta'**

April 24, 2020: I didn't have the chance to play with my children, especially with my little Ali Yekta. I got arrested when he was 18 months old, as if I was a terrorist at large, as if I was a bandit. I couldn't snuggle and sniff him enough. Father longin for his son, son longing for his fater; they tortured us for 47 months.

Aplir 25, 2020: I was given two units of blood in oncology department.

**'My Life Flashes Before My Eyes'**

April 27, 2020: My first chemo therapy session started at 4 pm and ended at 10 pm today. I will receive no less than foru cures. Based on the results of that, two more cures are possible. If I take 4 cures I will stay 96 more days in

the hospital in Ankara. If it is 6 cures, it will be 144 days.

Dear God! I am in prison, I am sick and I am separated from my family.

It could be the diseases that I have but I got veru emotional. Now, my life, my family flahes before my eyes and I watch it as if it is reflected onto the walls of the hospital.

April 28, 2020: I was given the second session of the first cure of my chemo therapy.

April 29, 2020: I was given the third session of the first cure of my chemo therapy. The second cure will start after 21 days.

April 30, 2020: I appeared before the health council. They will evaluate whether I can stay in prison with hy-

pertension, kidney deficiency and pancreatic cancer.

May 6, 2020: I was told that I had a tumor mass with a diameter of 14 mm in my liver.

May 8, 2020: My blood and urine analyses were made. My pulse and blood pressure were taken. The X ray of my lung was taken. My temperature was 37.8. The hospital staff panicked out of my situation and intervened.

### **'I am Being Treated at the Hospital Due to the Efforts of My Daughters'**

May 9, 2020: After the third session of chemo therapy they started getting blood sample everyday. They started injecting on my arms. I appreciate the efforts of my daughters. It is with their efforts and prayers I am being treated here at a hospital. Otherwise they were planning to send me back to the hospital under such circumstances. God bless my daughters!

### **'I started Losing Hair'**

May 10, 2020: I started losing my hair today. I drove my hands through my hair in the bathroom and my hands were full of my hair. Then I cleaned the bathroom, combed my hair and did it again. I was still losing it. At that very moment I accepted the fact that I had cancer. I tried to deny it until then. For the last two weeks, I was giving a tube of blood everyday, being injected on my both shoulders and taking serum. With all these happening I had not realized that I had cancer but the hair, it changed everything.

It is hard to believe but I feel pain on the needle puncture points where I was injected for 9 days after my appendectomy 34 years ago. I could not sleep out of pain at night.

"The oppressor thinks he oppresses us. No. The oppression does not stay with us yet being oppressor always hangs with him." (Saadi Shirazi)

### **'Yesterday was Our Marriage Anniversary'**

May 17, 2020: Yesterday was Our Marriage Anniversary. It has been four years now that I have been separated from my wife and my children. May Allah damn those who put us in this situation and who supported them for every year, every month, every weeki every day, every hour, every minute and every second that we have been under these circumstances. May those who slander us, accuse us of being terrorist and get us separated from our loved ones suffer for the amount that we suffered.

May 20, 2020: I had the first session of the second cure of my chemo thereapy. I was



also given two units of serum.

May 22, 2020: The third session of the second cure of my chemo is over as of today. I took a shower. My hair leaves me with the water coming down my body. Doctor is applying a threpy that will take five days. It is the second day today. I feel excessively weak. I can only get out of bed for prayers and food.

### **'I Couldn't Buy Gifts to My Children for Four Eids'**

It is edl al fitr today and fort he fourth time I am alone during the eid, away from my family and children. It is just me and the walls around me here. There is no one to talk to. It is just the health professionals who deal with the analyses and the guards that bring my food. My late father used to buy new clothes at every eid to family members. I couldn't buy anything for my children for many eids now. And I am sorry for that my family, I am very sorry.

### **'If only I had an Omlette with Tomatoes and Pepper and a Cup of Tea Now!'**

May 27, 2020: It is my 59th day in the hospital. Fort he last two daysi I have been making omlette with tomatoes and pepper. I wish I had tea with that. I missed the ones that I used to make in prison. I am dreaming the days that I will make ones at my home. This and scrambled eggs with garlic sausage. I am starving now, dreaming about them.

May 31, 2020: I was discharged from the prison ward of the hospital and brought to Sincan L3 TType Closed Penitentiary. I was put in ward A3. It is a ward for three people but I am alone because of Coronavirus.

The last sentence Mevlüt Öztaş penned in his diary is as follows: "Life is a non-repetition process. The regrets do not being anything back!"

**ÖZTAŞ, WHO HAS NOT LOSE HOPE DESPITE THE NEGATIVES THAT HE EXPERIENCED; UNDERSTANDS THAT HE HAS CANCER, WHEN HE STARTS LOOSING HIS HAIRS, "I TAKE MY HANDS TO MY HAIR, MY HANDS WAS FILLED WITH MY HAIR. THAT IS THE TIME I UNDERSTOOD I WAS CANCER."**

# Belarus: war with media is stillin progress

The government only took into custody 215 journalists in August-September. Many of our colleagues spent 5 to 30 days in prisons. 54 journalists severely beaten by security guards or injured by plastic bullets. “

**BORIS GORETSKIY** / VICE-PRESIDENT OF THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS



While journalist Semen Pegov was taken into custody in Minsk. PHOTOGRAPH: DMITRY BRUSKO, TUT.BY



During August and September months, the authorities in Belarus 215 times imprisoned journalists. Many of them spent from 5 to 30 days in prisons. 54 journalists suffered from violence: they were severely beaten by security officials or wounded by rubber bullets.

Repressions against media in Belarus started this year in May, when the presidential campaign was announced. Banker Viktor Babariko, blogger Sergei Tikhanovsky (after his arrest, his wife Svetlana Tikhanovskaya became a candidate for presidency) and others decided to challenge Alexander Lukashenko, who has been the President for 26 years.

From the very beginning of the campaign journalists, who covered pre-election meetings, were detained and sent to prisons for allegedly participation in unauthorized protests.

The next wave of repression was in mid-July, when spontaneous protests took place in Minsk and other cities of Belarus. Then, the police detained dozens of journalists from different media during the actions, took them to police stations and confiscated their equipment.

Since July, the authorities have stopped issuing accreditation to foreign journalists. In Belarus it is compulsory, and in case of work without accreditation, foreign colleagues can be detained and imprisoned. Several hundreds of foreign journalists could not receive accreditation and were forbidden from entering Minsk. About 50 journalists, who nevertheless decided to enter the country, were detained at the border and were not allowed inside.

The peak of pressure on the media was in the end of the election campaign. Journalists in the regions were preventively arrested even before voting day, film crews of foreign TV channels

were detained and deported from the country.

And since August 9, every day the number of imprisoned and beaten journalists went to dozens. We saw a real violence wave from the authorities: targeted beatings of press media, shooting of rubber bullets, detentions, a complete shutdown of the Internet in the country for 3 days, hundreds of blocked websites.

Just can you imagine: the evening of August 10, it was still daylight. People were just gathering for protest. Armed security forces appeared in the area of the office of Belarusian Association of Journalists, they fired rubber bullets at groups of people. The soldier turned to Natallia Lubneuskaja, the journalist of Nasha Niva, she was wearing a blue Press vest, and she had a badge on her chest and held a phone in her hand. The soldiers shot at her leg from 10 meters. After that, she spent more than a month in the hospital with a terrible wound. Until now, nobody of the police officers was prosecuted for any fact of violence. Not anyone.

After the elections.

Mass protests continue in Belarus. Moreover, the authorities continue their repression. Police imprisons journalists almost daily. They continue to be in prisons. The websites of many non-state media remain blocked. The government media continue to lie openly, humiliating the honor and dignity of protesters and journalists from the independent press. In the meantime, the courts decide for more and more arrests of journalists.

In such circumstances, the Belarusian Association of Journalists thanks everyone who expressed and continues to express solidarity with their Belarusian colleagues. Please, do not be silent about Belarus! Your support is very important to us!

*You can always read news about media in Belarus on our website Baj.by*

# If you are not for the government being a journalist in Turkey is dangerous!

That was the year 2016. Images those captured in Hakkari had fallen into Turkey's agenda. In the newscast, the Special Operations Team handcuffed more than 50 workers, young and old, and laid them on the ground while saying 'You will see the power of Turk...' Journalist Nedim Türfent, who prepared the newscast, was arrested and has been in prison for years.



İSMAİL SAĞIROĞLU

The comment in the caption was made by a user of eksisozluk, a forum site, when journalist Nedim Türfent's 8-year and 9-month prison sentence was approved by the court. However, 3 years ago, Türfent, at the first court after being held in prison for 13 months, said: "as the baker makes bread, the doctor does surgery, the journalist also makes news." (1)

## **Punishment without trial!**

After the first hearing, 5 more hearings were held. Türfent never, not even once, saw the face of the judge, and he attended all of the hearings in Hakkari via the audio and video information system (SEGBIS) from the prison where he was detained in Van. He was accused of "being a member of an armed terrorist organization" and "making propaganda of a terrorist organization in a chained manner," according to a statement by 20 witnesses. The 'witnesses', who are alleged to have the statements based on the charges against him, said at the hearing that they "it is the first time hearing the name Nedim Türfent and forcibly signed their statements while under torture." The court respected not the witness statements they heard in the courtroom, but

the 'state-ments they gave while under torture' by the same witnesses. Türfent was sentenced to eight years and nine months in prison on charges of "membership of an armed terrorist organization."

## **Honorary membership from PEN**

Türfent, whom Turkish courts consider "guilty" and "terrorist", was last awarded honorary membership by the UK PEN. "We are proud and honored to have Nedim among our members. We will continue to stand by you until you fully regain your freedoms."

## **"I've been tortured"**

Türfent, in his defence in court, said: "I was tortured while being detained. Police officers with masks on their faces harassed me from the back of my body. A security guard stepped on my head with his foot and took a selfie. There are reports of torture available. I was threatened with death by posting my photo on a Twitter account called JITEM, where photos of the people killed were shared." (4) he explained the difficulties he had experienced one by one. If we take the film back, Why did this happen to Türfent?

## **"You'll see the power of the Turkish"**



The year is 2016. There is a curfew in the Yüksekova district of Hakkari. Photographs taken at a construction site have fallen on Turkey's agenda. In the video, a Special Forces Team handcuffed 50 old and young workers and saying "You will see the power of the state of the Republic of Turkey... I know all of you... who betrays will see the power of the Turkish... what the hell did this state do to you... you will see the power of the Turkish..." to them.

The journalist who announced the news was Nedim Türfent. Nedim Türfent was working for the Dicle News Agency. Türfent received death threats from the social media accounts called "JITEM" "immediately after the news published with the headline" you will see the power of the Turk", and was soon detained, arrested and sent to prison at the entrance road to Van on May 12, 2016. (5)

#### **How's he doing in prison?**

Nedim Türfent has been in prison for about 1605 days. He writes letters to publicize the situation in prisons, especially after the pandemic. In his last letter, he wrote that the prison authorities had imposed a limit on the use of water in Van prison, where he remained, "a quota-limit was imposed on water, which has not been applied to date, but at the time when the virus became so widespread. A quota of 50 liters of hot water and 150 liters of cold water per person is in effect as of September 23." said he. Türfent also stressed that the prison had a quota of 12 books per person, no subscribers to Yeni Yaşam newspaper and no opposition TV channels were streamed. (6) in another letter, he stated that very high rates of electricity bill were received from prisoners, and that the products sold in the cafeteria were of very poor quality and expensive. (7)

#### **Eyes on the ECHR**

After the period of emergency, which started after the events of July 15 in Turkey, began to be a very difficult process for journalists. Although it is said that the OHAL is over, in the last 4 years, applications, Court decisions are shown that this process is not finished. In Turkey, where the most journalists in the world are in prison (8), now hope is at the European Court of Human Rights. A 4-day visit to Turkey by ECtHR President Robert Spano in September was given an honorary doctorate from Istanbul University, where many academics were fired, caused a Great Depression of trust and opened a debate on the court's impartiality. But it is still hoped that the lawlessness will return from the ECHR. The last word; Nedim Türfent's lawyer Veysel Ok; "Nedim is being held in prison because of his news while he should be rewarded for them.. Our call to the ECtHR is to examine Nedim's case as a priority and to make a decision on infringement. And we want the Turkish government to immediately eliminate this injustice and lawlessness. Nedim's story is the story of Kurdish journalists in Turkey." (9)

Resources:

- 1) <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/187443-gazeteci-turfent-dava-sinda-tahliye-yok-taniklar-iskenceyi-anlatt>
- 2) <https://www.mlsaturkey.com/tr/gazeteci-nedim-turfent-4-yildir-cezaevinde/>
- 3) <http://yeniyaşamgazetesi2.com/pen-nedim-turfente-onursal-odul-verdi/>
- 4) <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/187443-gazeteci-turfent-dava-sinda-tahliye-yok-taniklar-iskenceyi-anlatt>
- 5) <https://freeturkeyjournalists.ipi.media/tr/nedim-turfent-bir-gazeteci-davasi-onlarca-hukuksuzluk/>
- 6) <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/415337/tutuklu-gazeteci-nedim-turfent-yazdi-sistemik-bir-tecrit-altindayiz>
- 7) <http://yeniyaşamgazetesi2.com/nedim-turfent-tedbir-yok-tutuklulara-test-yapilmiyor/>
- 8) <https://jailedjournos.com/tutuklu-gazeteciler-listesi/>
- 9) <https://bianet.org/bianet/ifade-ozgurlugu/225770-gazeteci-nedim-turfent-1500-gundur-cezaevinde>

# Ball fell into Prison Yard

"I and journalist Ziya Ataman were in Van High Security Prison. We used to make round balls out of stale bread or newspapers. We would put the notes we had written to each other, attach the room number on it, and throw it from the courtyard to the courtyard with all our might. This turned into a communication channel."



**İDRİS YILMAZ** / FREELANCER JOURNALIST \*



Journalist İdris Yılmaz (center) posed for the prison photographer with his friends in prison. PHOTO: İDRİS YILMAZ ARCHIVE

Journalist Ziya Ataman is one of the victims of the restrained and intimidation policies Kurdish Journalism is subjected to. He was arrested in Van on 11 April 2016 with a scenario that was a product of silencing and obedience policies.

He has been in prison for 6 years, awaiting his freedom. Here is Ataman's short story...

Ziya Ataman started working in Media sector first by distributing Azadiye Welat and Özgür Gündem newspapers.

He had to go to first Diyarbakır and then to Van due to the pressure he faced by law enforcement forces in the district where he lived. He was detained here while working as a DİHA reporter. One day after detention, he was arrested on the allegation of "membership in an organization".

#### **Witnesses Testified under torture**

The only evidence cited as the reason for Ataman's arrest was the witness statements made by some individuals. These persons withdrew their statements, saying they were forced to "testify under torture". The only evidence of the prosecutor's office was lost. But that didn't work. Ataman was not released. An indictment was prepared against him exactly 20 months after his arrest (December 2017).

#### **He could not make an effective defense**

Journalist Ataman, who was taken to the court through the Audio and Video Information System (SEGBİS) from the prison where he was detained, could not make a proper defense due to system malfunctions. He was only able to speak for a few minutes. In order not to prove his innocence, conditions were made difficult and Ataman was subjected to severe psychological pressure.

#### **He was given 14 year-3 month imprisonment**

The court's decision hearing took place on September 24, 2019. His colleagues and lawyers were waiting for a release order at this hearing. But what happened was not the expected. Despite the lack of concrete evidence, journalist Ataman was sentenced to 14 years and 3 months in prison for "being a member of a terrorist organization".

#### **His health is not good**

Journalist Ataman, who has been in prison for about 6 years, is struggling with intestinal diseases. During his detention, Ataman's health problems worsened. Although he wants to be treated, his current condition is not heartwarming.

#### **His trial was not fair**

When the process of Journalist Yaman's lawsuit taken into consideration, we witness to the fact of violation of rights which many journalists, politicians and thinkers were exposed to.

Defense and prosecution regimes contradict with the "Right to a Fair Trial" stated in European Convention on Human Rights, also signed by Turkey. In the first sentence of the 1st clause of the 6th article of the contract this principle has been highlighted as: "Everyone has the right to request a fair and open hearing within a reasonable time by an independent and impartial tribunal established by law, which will decide on both the rights and obligations of his civil rights and the charges against him." However, despite this, Ataman was

deprived of his right to a fair trial.

#### **Signature campaign has been started**

A petition was launched on change.org to release Ataman from Van High Security Prison where he is imprisoned. In the campaign launched by journalist Selman Keleş with the title "Freedom for the sick imprisoned journalist Ziya Ataman", it was pointed out that Ataman was not guilty, he was not treated in the current prison conditions and his right to a fair trial was violated.

#### **"We met at the prison after years"**

Our friendship with Ziya started many years ago. The year was 2016 January. I was being released from the prison where I was imprisoned because of the news I wrote. The weather was very cold. My body, which was left between walls for a long time, was in contact with intense oxygen for the first time and my legs and body were trembling as the incredible coldness hit my skin. Ziya was among a group of journalists who welcomed me. It was the first time we met, but we hugged like two friends who have kept their loyalty for centuries. This friendship became stronger every day. Afterwards, imprisonment separated us again, and years later we met again in Van High Security Jail. Prison conditions are very harsh. Even a plant that ends up in a few steps of ventilation is not tolerated. In their morning counts, the guards looked out at the bottom of the courtyards and immediately plucked the insects and the plants you chatted with. Despite all the heavy pressure, our conversations with Ziya usually started after the night count. When I say chat, I'm talking about text chats, not voice.

#### **Balls falling in the prison yard**

We used to make round balls out of stale bread or newspapers. We would put the notes we had written to each other, attach the room number on it, and throw it from the courtyard to the courtyard with all our might. This turned into a communication channel. We would usually read the incoming notes evenings after the counts were done and write their answers so that the guards would not take them away. In this way, our conversations would darken in the accompaniment of steeped tea, and it would break the deep silence of the jail cell. We met with Ziya again in such a conversation. We would write the words as small as possible. And we used to convey what was happening within us devotedly on paper.

Ziya used to talk about her dreams that he would make after his freedom. He would also criticize the unfair judicial system that put him in jail. "Hello, Heval İdris, where were we in our conversation?" said Ziya and he would tell his thoughts. I would feel his discomfort from the letters he wrote. 1626 days have passed since Ataman's arrest, I miss him so much. I wish him to regain his freedom as soon as possible.

*\* Journalist İdris Yılmaz, who prepared this article, spent 21 months in Elazığ Prison. He was sentenced to 6 years and 3 months in prison and was released. His file is at a higher court stage. If his sentence is approved by the Supreme Court, he will go back to prison...*

# Now there is nothing that will scare me now, because the deads become without fear!

"I was died in the war I fought for the people, those who throw stones to me despite having any knowledge about me as a result of the sayings of the state and the government, and accusations of the executioners waited me in the boiler room, to live in a democratic and free country. There is nothing to horrify me. because the deads become without fear!"

**I have been an independent journalist since 2003.** I did crime reporting between 2009 and 2016. I don't know what the concept of "courthouse" evokes in anyone else's mind, to me, it is synonymous with a knife in the heart and means pain, desparation, tears, hopelessness, grief, sorrow and any other sentiment built around these. Th courthouses are like cemetaries. They are the meeting points of those who are practically buried alive into the prisons because of killing someone and the next of kins of the victims. A mother grieves for a son that she has just buried and the other one burns in the heart for another one that has just become a murderer. You would see young people that run to the courthouse berafooted upon hearing their father's detention. The walls are cold like a those of a morg. Actually, it doesn't matter whether you come naked or dressed up, you feel cold there. You watch the parting of those who brought their lives together with great ceremonies, with great fights.

**You get overwhelmed,** go to the room of a prosecutor who hands you a poetry book. You get to read a poem which turns out to be about the eyes of a boy who was raped when he was four. What would you expect from poetry penned by a prosecutor anyway? It speaks like an indictment and is all about pain.

**You get hungry eventually** and go to the canteen. Your food is served by a childhood friend who was imprisoned because of

poverty and loyalty in an ashamed manner that stil bears traces from prison. You then get out of the building to light a cigarette and someone approaches to ask for one; she has got her wallet stolen.

**You realize that there is no difference** between stealing money, ending a marriage, raping or killing someone. Because the people that end up in the courthouse are less-than-complete by all means. Couthouses resemble cemeteries where the deceased and her loved ones get together for a short while.

**Then you watch the arrest** of those prosecutors who witness all that pain around the clock with you, who are begged for "hope" and "justice", who work for thousands of tearful, just because they did not obey the command "be unjust!". You watch their arrest knowing for sure that they are innocent.

**The couthouse is then torn down** out of injustices. You can't run from the wreck and stay under the debris.

**I don't know what the concept of "courthouse"** evokes in anyone else's mind but it reminds me a cemetary in which I buried myself too.

**As politics is the occupation for the fool,** the wise would look for justice, demand it and talk about it.

**This is why I wrote "torture is a crime,"** state is in charge of



ARZU YILDIZ EXILED JOURNALIST/ CANADA

justice and cannot commit crime” on my facebook page when I saw soldiers and civilians beaten up and put down in their underwear at stables in the aftermath of the rather shady military coup attempt of July 15 2016. It was the next night they issued an arrest warrant for me, that is for saying that “torture is a crime against humanity”. The warrant was issued for terror propaganda. I didn’t turn myself in. I lived like fugitive with my older one that was 7 years old and the younger one that was just seven months. Then, I had to leave them both!

**Because that courthouse was not even** the cemetery that it was where desperate and incomplete people gathered. It was like a boiler into which people were thrown regardless of their guilt or innocence. It was a boiler where people were burned to cover the truth and keep the fear warm and fresh. It was a boiler where no one heard the screams of the burned!

**Throughout my professional life as a journalist**, I have never been sued for falsified news. I have never been refuted. Before my arrest warrant, I have been prosecuted and sued countless times, all of which were about “disclosing state secrets” and “violation of secrecy”.

**July 15 became a total ambiguity** and a pretext to turn the courthouses into boilers in which the dissidence from every walk of life was thrown.

**I have many friends who are in prison** for no crime. I have seen my daughter, whom I had to leave when she was 7 months old, after 3 years. It took three years for me to reunite with my children. There are many others who are still waiting.

**My older daughter, Emine**, whom I left when she was 7 years old, knew that I was her mother and she was coming to her mother. But my younger one, Fatma Zehra, came here like a year ago and she still does not recognize me in full as a mother.

**Fatma Zehra had could not get** used to a woman she did not recognize, a country she did not know, a house she had never lived in and a table she had never sat. I almost hear you say; she is very young and she will get used to them. You know what? I have learned it the hard way that you can not be a mother to someone when it is too late.

**She goes to bed every night saying**; “Let’s think positive. Maybe I will see my grandfather and my mother (grandmother)”. She still thinks that she cannot fly back her home because of the coronavirus.

**She misses her home** and the people that she thinks as her parents and she has hopes or reunion. But, I, do not exist for her.

**I also have nothing to long** and hope for. A past, a language, friends, knowledge, money, identity...None of them. I am full of nothingness.

**I have rejected money**, property and comfort many times, for which people sell out their souls. So, they cannot threaten me for the things that I had already given up and never expected.

**I have died in the war** that I fought for the people to live in a free and democratic country. The people, who have been waiting for me in the boiler, who want to stone me to death, just because of the accusations of the government. The people, who know nothing about me!

**There is nothing** left to scare me anymore, because the dead are not afraid of anything.

## Who is Arzu Yıldız?

Arzu Yıldız has worked on media organs such as; Bir TV (32. Gün), Star TV, Medya Kronik, Taraf Daily, Haberdar, T24 and Grihat as an independent journalist.

An arrest warrant was issued for her for saying “torture is a crime, state is in charge of justice and cannot commit crime, and torture is a crime against humanity” in the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt of July 15, 2016. Then she lived as a fugitive for four months. Then she fled to Greece and stayed in refugee camps. Flying in Canada in November 2016, Yıldız applied for asylum. She got reunited with her older daughter in two years and younger one in three.

She delivered pizza in Canada and worked in factories and restaurants. She currently delivers food and performs free journalism at Gazete Davul.

Having penned 4 books, Yıldız delivered a speech at a conference organized by the Human Rights Commission of the Canadian Parliament and Canadian Association of Journalists. Currently, she is a member of Canadian Association of Journalists, PEN Canada and Association of Writers in Exile. She is also involved in a documentary project with James Cullingham, an academic and writer on “freedom of expression” and “refugee journalists”.

# TURKEY, THE GREATEST JOURNALIST PRISON OF THE WORLD

Committee to Protect Journalists describes China and Turkey as “world’s greatest journalist prisons”. Committee says, “Currently, in Turkey dozens of journalists who have not jailed yet face with trials or appeals. Journalists abroad were convicted in absentia and being arrested if they return to the country.”

KAMİL ARLI

The pressure on the media and journalists in Turkey is increasing each passing day. Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), the Turkish state agency for monitoring, regulating, and sanctioning radio and television broadcasts, closed the TELE 1 TV channel for five days due to its critical show about the Ottoman Sultan Abdulhamid II., which demonstrated the extent of the censorship in the country. One hundred sixteen media outlets shut down through the presidential decrees during the state of emergency, which played havoc with the press’s freedom. According to a report by the International Federation of Journalists, 177 journalists are still in Turkey’s prisons. A report by Reporters Without Borders titled 2020 World Press Freedom Index ranks Turkey 154th out of 180 countries in press freedom.

#### **European Council: There is extra ordinary pressure on journalist in Turkey**

An extraordinary pressure on journalists continues, the joint report of twelve international organizations focusing on press freedom says despite the state of emergency ended in the country. The annual report published by international media organizations that support the “Platform for Improving the Safety of Journalists and the Protection of Journalists” established by the Council of Europe, states that the number of journalists arrested and detained for doing their job after the coup attempt in 2016 and the state of emergency exceeded 200.

#### **Censor increases; No freedom of speech on social media**

Amnesty International’s annual regional human rights report dated 2019 underlines that press freedom and speech were demolished in Turkey. “There is no judicial independence and freedom of speech in Turkey, the censorship is increasing, journalists are behind bars,” the report states.

Amnesty International’s report heavily criticizes the ruling AK Party and judiciary over press freedom: “The courts blocked online content, and criminal investigations were launched against hundreds of social media users. In August, a new regulation came into effect that requires internet broadcasting platforms to apply for licenses to the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK). The content of the platforms will be monitored by the RTÜK, expanding its censorship powers over online content. At least 839 social media accounts were investigated for allegedly “sharing criminal content” related to “Operation Peace Spring.” Hundreds of people were taken into police custody, and at least 24 were remanded in pre-trial detention.” (<https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/turkey/report-turkey/>)

#### **Committee to protect journalists: Turkey among the worst jailer of journalists in the world**

The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) criticizes Turkey over press freedom in its 2019 report. (<https://cpj.org/reports/2019/12/journalists-jailed-china-turkey-saudi-arabia-egypt/>) The report defines Turkey as the second-worst jailer of journalists following China. “Dozens of journalists not currently jailed in Turkey are still facing trial or appeal and could yet be sentenced to prison, while others have been sentenced in absentia and face arrest if they return to the country,” the committee says.

#### **59 journalists sentenced to 200 years in total in 2019**

The 2019 press freedom report released by the main opposition party (CHP) lawmaker Utku Çakırözer points out that the pressure of the AKP government on the media continues increasingly. The number of arrested journalists increased eleven times in 16 years, he says. “Only in 2019, 59 journalists were sentenced to 200 years in prison. Between 2001 and 2004,



the number of journalists detained was 10. Today it has increased 11 times, reaching 110. In 2019, 59 journalists were given a total of 200 years in prison, 11 journalists were detained, 19 journalists were arrested. We are ranked 157th among 180 countries in the world in terms of freedom of the press.”

**Reporters without borders: Pressure on the internet media on the rise**

According to a report by the Reporters Without Borders (RSF), Turkey ranks 154th out of 180 countries in the 2020 World Press Freedom Index. The report emphasizes that Turkey is one of the top jailers of journalists in the world. The report underlines the increased censorship on online media in Turkey. According to RSF’s partner organization, Bianet, at least 586 news reports were censored in 2019. Countries such as Belarus, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Brunei, and Bangladesh, according to the report, have a higher rank than Turkey. Rwanda is following Turkey as the 155th country on the list.

**Media pressure increases in 2020**

Turkish Journalists’ Association released a media monitoring report in 2020 in cooperation with the European Union as part of a project titled “Media for Democracy, Democracy for Media (M4D).” The report exposes the AKP’s oppression on the dissident media outlets by listing several press and speech freedom violations. Some of the highlights in the report are as follows: Presidency’s Directorate of Communications decided to “cancel” all press cards of journalists working for dissident media, despite the cards were not expired and registered as “valid” in the government electronic database (e-devlet) system in January.

After the reactions, the press card cancellations were revoked. Anonymous people simultaneously attempted to attack three journalists from Sputnik while they were their houses.

Right after, the three journalists were briefly detained. Odatv News Director Barış Terkoğlu and reporter Hülya Kılınc were detained after sharing the funeral footage of the MIT (Turkish intelligence) officials killed in Libya. Then, two journalists and Oda TV Chief Editor Barış Pehlivan were arrested.”

**One man; one voice**

Dogan Holding sold Turkey’s largest media group to the Demirören Group, known for its close relationship with the government. The group includes the Hurriyet daily, Posta daily, CNN Turk TV, and Kanal D TV. With this sale, most of the media and the distribution of newspapers passed under the government’s control.

**No advertisement to the dissident media**

The Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning did not include any opposition media in the media organizations list given public service advertisement. The ministry issued invitations for tender over its investments, services, and activities to be carried out in 2020. The tender specifications announced on June 10 listed the media outlets to broadcast the ministry’s public service ads, advertisements, and promotions.

These included the following media organizations: Akit TV, TGRT News, TVNet, Ülke TV, Bloomberg HT, Ekoturk, Bengütürk, Kanal M, Uçankuş TV, A Spor, many other newspapers and websites.

**Dissident media is not on the list**

Dissident newspapers such as Sözcü, Cumhuriyet, Yeniçağ, Birgün and TV channels such as Fox TV, Halk TV, KRT, Ulusal Kanal, and Tele 1 were not included on the list. 2 thousand 750 ads (82 thousand 500 seconds in total) have been assigned to the media outlets included on the list. The ministry also preferred the websites of pro-government newspapers and TV channels to broadcast promotional videos on digital media platforms.



ALEXANDER SKIPIS \*

# Freedom of expression is the heartbeat of democracy

“A citizen wants to contribute his country’s politics through public debates. This can lead to a demand for political change. Therefore, It is not surprising that the authoritarian regimes like China, Russia, Egypt and Turkey or Hungary are so willing to prevent the free exchange of ideas.”

Freedom of expression is the heartbeat of democracy. Freedom of expression and democracy are inseparable. Freedom of expression is the basic condition for a public opinion-forming process to take place in a society in which all citizens can talk and discuss together about how their country should develop. Central to this is the possibility for citizens to shed light on and criticize the actions of their government. And when the unlawful machinations against the own population of an injustice state come to light, as it did in the USSR at the time of Glasnost, it will be extremely difficult for this state to stay in power.

A citizenry that calls for freedom of expression wants to know what is going on in their country and to participate in the discussion about solutions to social problems. It does not want to have to blindly trust its government, but rather to ensure through free information that it fulfills its mission for the good of the people. It wants to influence the politics of the country through public debates and contributions to the discussion. This demand can logically lead to the demand for free elections and political change. It is therefore not surprising that authoritarian regimes such as the communist cadres in China, those in power in Belarus, Egypt, Turkey or Hungary are so keen to prevent the free exchange of opinions.

Freedom of expression is there so that we, as a civil society, can enter into a discussion about the important issues of our coexisten-

ce. In this sense, freedom of expression demands more than a simple statement, with which one emphasizes one’s own position in a self-satisfied manner and then does not care about anything else. An expression of opinion should always be thought of as the basis or continuation of a conversation in which you discuss topics with others and come up with possible solutions. You should be open to the arguments of the other person, who might know more about a topic than you do. Your own opinion is only part of this process.

But unfortunately, many people are so hardened in their views that they cannot stand alternative opinions or even contradictions. Unfortunately, the reaction in such cases is often not curiosity or interest in what the other person has to say - the other person might know something I do not know - but discrimination and hatred. In addition to authors, publishers, booksellers, artists and scientists, it is mainly journalists who have to experience this again and again. And when they speak out against autocratic rulers for these unpleasant truths, they live particularly dangerously. A government’s statement that journalists are terrorists or enemies of the state is contrary to the principles of a democratic society. Democratic states must ensure that all citizens can express their opinions without fear for their freedom or their lives.

\* General Manager of the German Book Trade Association



DR. KAMAL SİDO \*

# Media workers must be protected in Turkey and at the world

It is disgusting to silence media professionals with threats, extortion or even murder. It is also unacceptable the state presidents refusing to tolerate the criticism of their policies, as a result persecuting the media workers and putting them in jail for years.

*“The violence on the streets must end. The authorities are not allowed to protect the perpetrators.”*

This sentence is from the last interview that Hisham al-Hashimi gave to UTV. A short time later, on the evening of July 6, 2020, the 47-year-old Iraqi journalist and extremism expert was shot by at least one assassin in front of his home in the Zayouna district of the Iraqi capital. Seriously injured, Hashimi was taken to hospital, where he died from his wounds. Previously, Hashimi had received many death threats from both radical Sunni and Shiite groups. They have been fighting each other for years in Iraq and many other countries. Critical media professionals are among their common enemies. Hisham al-Hashimi was threatened and probably also murdered for researching and publicly reporting on the lawlessness and impunity in Iraq.

It is abhorrent to silence media professionals with threats, extortion or even murder. It is also unacceptable when heads of state persecute media workers and have them thrown into prison for years because they refuse to tolerate criticism of their policies. So does Turkish President Erdogan with critical journalists, for example. The head of the Samanyolu broadcasting group, Hidayet Karaca, has been in custody in Turkey since December 2014 just for doing his job as a journalist. He is one of 2,000 media profes-

sionals in Turkish prisons.

Kurdish journalist Nedim Türfen from Van is not in a better position. He has been imprisoned since 2018 for reporting on the crimes of the security forces against the population in Turkish Kurdistan and for campaigning for a peaceful solution to the Kurdish question. He hasn't even received his indictment to date. The way the Turkish judiciary deals with the journalist and writer Ahmet Altan is similar. He is 70 years old and was sentenced to life imprisonment on February 16, 2018. He is in custody since 2016.

On the “International Day of Press Freedom” on 3rd of May, the The Society for Threatened Peoples published with the active support of the International Journalists Association a memorandum in which we demanded the release of all media professionals in Turkey.

Today, on the occasion of the “International Day to End Impunity for Crimes Against Journalists”, on the 2nd of November, we remember media professionals who are imprisoned or lost their lives in Turkey and around the world.

*\* Dr. Kamal Sido, ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities and nationalities specialist at the Society for Threatened Peoples (STP), Middle East advisor to the STP*

# CHALLENGES FACED BY JOURNALISTS IN TURKEY'S PRISONS

The journalists, who are guilty for writing, are not released whereas tens of thousands of ordinary criminals were evacuated due to the Korona. Even they are being held in severe isolation conditions, mistreated and tortured. They have limited access to health facilities. They even have difficulties to meet the most basic human needs."

İSMAİL SAĞIROĞLU JAILED JORNOS COORDINATOR \*

In prison, the guardian responsible for the library was collecting book requests from prisoners on some days of the week. A prisoner wanted a book written by Ahmet Altan. "We don't have that book in our library. But if you want the author stays here" said the guardian laughingly. Journalist, novelist Ahmet Altan has been in high security Silivri prison for 4 years. Because of 3 column writings; he was sentenced to 10 year-6 month imprisonment.

He is 70 years old and is in the biggest risk group against coronavirus. He is almost waiting for his death in the prison which has far exceeded capacity.

Despite all these, Ahmet Altan wrote a book called "I Will Never See the World Again" in her prison cell and this essay book has received awards in many countries. It was named one of the best 20 books of 2019 by Amazon. (1) He is now working on writing his new novel.

What about the other imprisoned journalists in Turkey... Under which situation face the remaining journalists in prison in Turkey? What do they complain about the most? What do they miss? How do they spend time in a prison cell? Can they access healthcare services?

We, Jailed Jornos as a team, follow closely the situations of journalists in Turkey's prisons cells and write an article for the ..... magazine.

## **Virus in the prison!**

When the virus pandemic started, the AKP government issued an amnesty. They released prisoners under arrest for

theft and similar common crimes.

But they continue to keep journalists and political prisoners in prison.

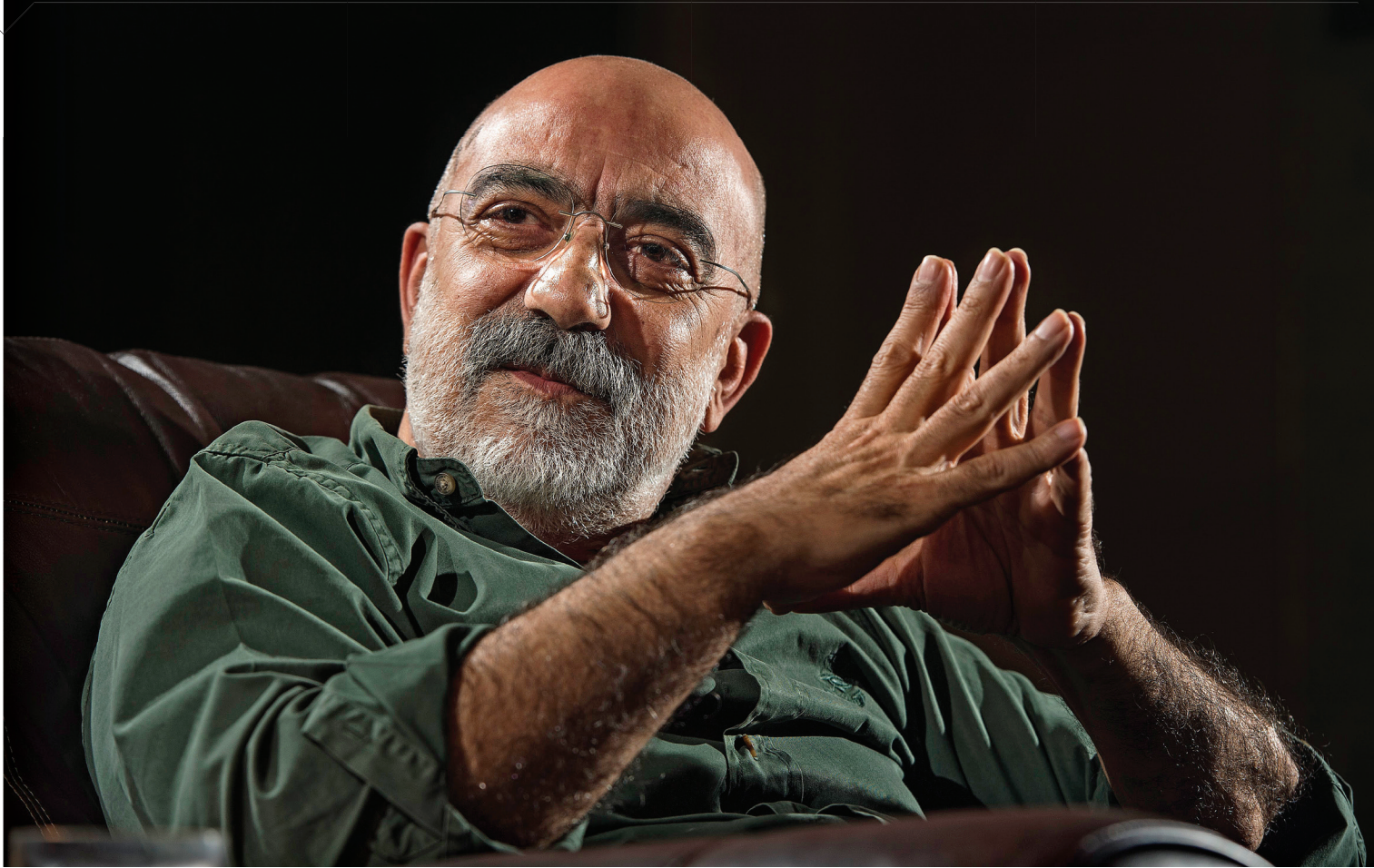
Journalist Nedim Türfent, who was sentenced to 8 years and 9 months for "membership in a terrorist organization", states that the hygiene conditions in Van Prison where he is imprisoned are very poor.

He states that the measures against the epidemic are very insufficient. Some shortcomings detected by Türfent, who has been in prison for more than 4 years, are as follows; "There is no free disinfectant distribution. Meals with high nutritional value and support immunity are not offered. Vegetables and fruits purchased from the outside canteen turn out to be rotten. Sports, chat, course etc. all social activities were stopped. Prisoners are kept under strict and absolute isolation. Prisoners are taken to the infirmary too late. The doctor is not often in the infirmary." (2)

## **Non-diagnostic journalist**

Çetin Çiftçi, prisoned in Turkey with worsening health conditions, is having a hard time due to the pandemic. Çetin Çiftçi, who has been detained in Ankara Sincan Prison for a year, was sentenced to 6 year-3 month imprisonment. While in prison, he was hospitalized three times for heart problems and once for kidney problems. His virus test was positive in May and he was in the hospital for 2 weeks. when he left the hospital and returned to prison

His condition hasn't improved when he left the hospital



70-year-old journalist-writer Ahmet Altan was sentenced to 10 years and 6 months in prison for 3 articles he wrote.

and returned to prison. According to the information given by her wife, Selda Çiftçi, he cannot eat and constantly loses weight. He has been suffering from

stomache ache, abdominal pain and backache for a long time. Selda Çiftçi suspects that her husband has cancer and says that treatment should be started as soon as possible: “The patient cannot recover for 2-3 months. There is no contact visitation. Phone calls are limited. I have no idea what he’s doing when he’s sick. Give my husband back. Whatever the diagnosis and treatment is, let’s do it. When he gets well they get him again. It wasn’t even diagnosed in that environment.” (3)

#### **Health problems**

There are other journalists in prison whose health conditions are deteriorating. Journalist Melih Gasgar, who was imprisoned in Balıkesir prison, has a chronic heart disease and passed out 3-4 times in prison. Despite losing weight constantly, he is not allowed to be tried without detention.

Journalist Ziya Ataman, who is in Van Prison, also has problems with his intestines and cannot receive the necessary treatment under prison conditions.(4)

#### **Apathy!**

The only danger for the imprisoned journalists in Turkey is not the virus! Another problem is apathy. 95 percent of media is under government control and there are very few people who bring up the imprisoned journalists.

In this period, although some journalist unions, non-governmental organizations, and the names like CHP Deputy Sezgin Tanrikulu and HDP Deputy Ömer Gergerlioğlu try to

make the voice of journalists in prison heard, their attempts are inadequate.

Journalists who are not particularly “famous” complain about being forgotten in prison. Business journalist Ufuk Şanlı, who had been a reporter for various publications including Zaman, Sabah and Vatan newspapers and wrote for the Middle East news website Al-Monitor, has been in prison for nearly 4 years and has been sentenced to 7 years and 6 months in prison. Ufuk Şanlı states that he was not visited by any of the deputies, and that nobody, even the journalist organizations, came to visit: “We want to be remembered by the Journalists Association of Turkey, Turkey Union of Journalists, Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Without Borders, and, because it’s my professional field, by the Association of Economic Journalists.” (5)

As Ufuk Şanlı, many journalists whose names have not been heard in the international public area, are left to be alone.

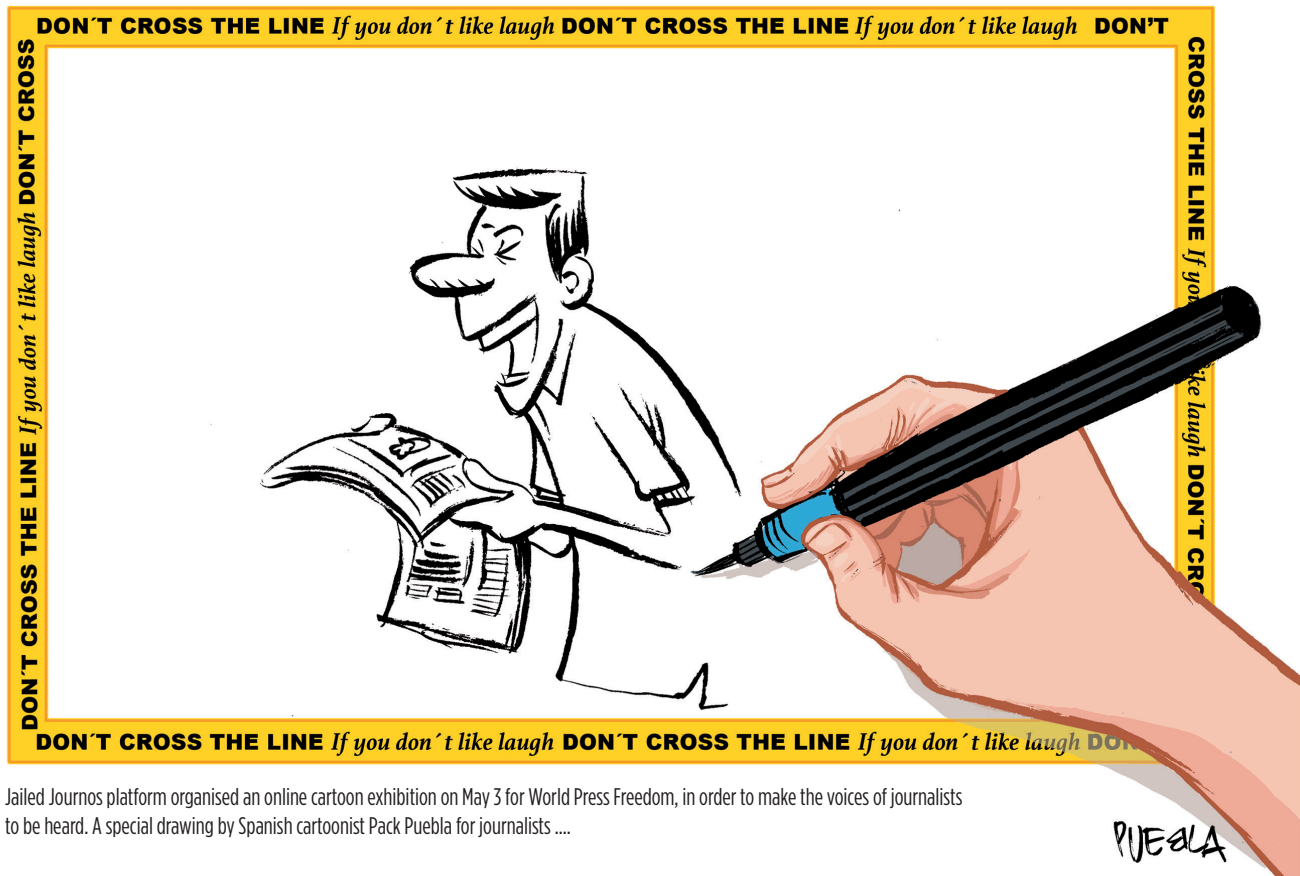
#### **Ventilation problem**

Journalists in Turkey, like criminals committed aggravated crimes, are held in high-security prisons. In such prisons there are fences even above the ventilation areas.

The area where they can spend time outdoors is only 4 steps to 7 steps. That is the area where they can see the sky, but between them and the sky there are also wire nettings and barbed wires.

#### **Families also have problems**

The families of imprisoned journalists are also experiencing problems. The spouses of imprisoned journalists are



Jailed Journos platform organised an online cartoon exhibition on May 3 for World Press Freedom, in order to make the voices of journalists to be heard. A special drawing by Spanish cartoonist Pack Puebla for journalists ....

going through a major financial crisis. They have to meet the expenses for home and children. At the same time, money is required for the journalists who remain in prison. In prisons, expenses such as food and electricity are collected from the prisoners. Since there are no social assistance networks on this issue, there are no funds from which they can receive support.

Another problem experienced by families is related to health. Especially children are psychologically affected by their father or mother being in prison. For example, the son of journalist Ahmet Uzan, detained for 4 years, has been receiving psychological support for 2 years. Uzan's younger daughter does not remember anything about her father. "Would my father take me to the park or hold me?" asks she questions like this. (6)

#### Prohibitions!

The most difficult issue for journalists in prison is; book and newspaper bans. Imprisoned journalists have the right to have 10 books per person in their wings. Magazines are also included in this number. Newspapers opposing the government, such as Yeni Asya and Evrensel, are not allowed. Also, there are very few books in the prison libraries.

#### Difficulty to reach computer

Journalists also have difficulties in accessing computers in prison. Especially when they need a computer to prepare their defenses, this period is limited to only 2/3 hours a week. Some journalists do not even have this right. They prepare their defenses in handwriting.

"I don't have access to the computer. A laptop for writing my articles..." (7) stated Ahmet Altan, but his request was not answered.

#### Cruel treatment

Journalists may face police detention, although not often,

and ill-treatment in prison. Journalist İbrahim Karayegen, released after 2 year imprisonment, states that he was subjected to physical violence and insults at the Istanbul Police Department TEM Branch. "I faced with inhuman and degrading treatment." (8) says Karayegen.

Journalist İdris Sayilgan, who was released after being in prison for a while, informed: "I was beaten by the guards on the first day I went to prison".(9)

About Barış Pehlivan, who was sentenced to 3 years and 9 months in prison for reporting on the secret activities of the Turkish National Intelligence Organization in Libya; it was revealed that he was shot on the back twice by the guards while entering the prison, and this was confirmed by the camera recordings.

*\* Jailed Journos was established to give the voice to journalists in prison and tell their stories. Its purpose is to help journalists in prison and their families. It has no commercial profit purpose. It works on a voluntary basis.*

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PINAR GAYIP / ETHA KORRESPONDENT

# State is forcing the journalists to struggle

“There are many imprisoned journalists. We must show solidarity to each of our friends, not just to those in sight. Because, we can only survive on the field and in the prisons, where they try to imprison us, only with the spirit of solidarity.”

**A**ctually, it's hard to tell. Do people get arrested for their news? In Turkey, unfortunately, I am one of the journalists who is made a “member of the organization” by the state due to their news, and who is alleged to be “propagating the organization”. So the state is actually forcing us journalists to fight in some way...

**On September 10th**, the Turkish Journalists ‘ Union announced that 72 Press employees had been taken prisoner. All the grounds for arrest are news. Because what all the imprisoned journalists care about is reporting the truth and getting it to the public. At this point in Turkey, we are contradicting the power. They want to make us pay somehow.

**I've been working at the Etkin News Agency (ETHA)** for years. Instead of being called to testify when the address of my home and workplace was clear, the house where I stayed with my colleague Semiha Shaheen was raided in the middle of the night with long-barreled guns. The illegal process continued after a week of detention.

**They say prison conditions** are not good or bad, but in correspondence with my fellow prisoners who are in other prisons, I can say that Bakırköy women's prison, where I stayed for 14 months, is “the best of the bad.”

**We were left in prison** by the cops in the middle of the night. They wanted to do the naked search app, which we call “thin search.” I think that was the most important moment. They want you to take off your shoes, get completely undressed—they're doing breech and vagina searches—in some prisons. Of course, we did not agree, we argued that it was an inhumane practice. We knew our rights. After all, they couldn't implement it. But we know that there have

also been those who have been subjected to this practice.

**Prison is a tough area.** It is not the wall or iron bars that enslave a person, but their thoughts. During the 14 months I was under arrest, I tried to produce myself.

**In prison, where I was under arrest**, there was often a ban on newspapers/magazines. It's so hard because, as a journalist, you're faced with not being able to follow the agenda. We were trying to learn something from the limited newspapers by interpreting between the lines, trying to understand the facts from comments made on news channels known for their proximity to power. Because we know that their problem was not to convey the facts to the public, but to say what the government wanted.

**Compared to many of my colleagues**, I had a “lucky” process of captivity. My colleagues outside have never lost their solidarity. Their letters, the news for me/us, the interviews, and the most beautiful thing was to go eye-to-eye with them when I turned around in the courtroom, to feel the warmth of their smiles.

**One of the things I often expressed** when I was in prison was the importance of solidarity. I was one of those arrested journalists who felt solidarity, saw it... But there are a large number of detained journalists who are not known what they experienced. We must show solidarity for each of our friends, not just for those in plain sight. Because we can only survive in the spirit of solidarity, both in the field and in the prisons where they are trying to take us prisoner.

*Pinar Gayip, a reporter for the Etkin News Agency (ETHA), which broadcasts on socialist lines, spent 14 months in Bakırköy women's prison. She is currently on trial without arrest and has been barred from leaving Turkey by a court order.*



EWOUT KLEI \*

# “Look after the press freedom”

“The power of a free and an independent press guided by democratic ideals is a force that scares authoritarian leaders. Although Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Narendra Modi and Victor Orbán do not share the same religion or ideology, they have the same goals: To silence all opposition to their power to control the judiciary, the press and the narrative.”

*‘Take care of the liberty of the press, for that is the only support of your national liberty. If we have no liberty to speak freely to our fellow-citizens, or to give them timely advice, it will be very easy for our oppressors to act their sinister parts; and it is for that reason that those, who cannot bear to hear their conduct enquired into, are always exclaiming against the liberty of free speech and of the press, and could with that nothing was printed or sold without permission.’*

*Joan Derk van der Capellen, To The People of the Netherlands (1781)*

The freedom of speech and of the press are fundamental to a liberal democracy, in which individual rights and freedoms are officially recognized and protected, and the exercise of political power is limited by the rule of law. I am very grateful to live in the Netherlands, where journalists, intellectuals and dissidents are not persecuted, oppressed or thrown into prison, where the government respect the freedom of religion of its citizens, where we have an independent judiciary, a parliamentary representative democracy and a multi-party system. Of course not everything is perfect and we journalists and intellectuals have always be watchful and resilient against anti-democratic forces, but in comparison to other countries we enjoy a lot of freedoms. The Netherlands is ranked at place 5, out of 180 countries, on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders (RSF).

Of course, even in the Netherlands, it has not always been the case. 18th century journalist, intellectual and dissident politician Joan Derk van der Capellen tot den Pol, who criticized corruption, favouritism, religious discrimination and other abuses, was forced to

write his pamphlet *To the People of the Netherlands* (Aan het Volk van Nederland) anonymously. But he convinced his readers, the people of the Netherlands, of the necessity to express your thoughts freely, to discuss politics freely, to inform the public truthfully about what is really going on. When Dutch newspaper *De Post van den Neder-Rhijn*, which fought for the same cause as Van der Capellen, made a secret agreement between Stadholder William V the Prince of Orange and his adviser the Duke of Brunswick public, the latter had to resign.

The power of a free and independent press, driven by democratic ideals, is a force that authoritarian leaders fear. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Narendra Modi and Victor Orbán don't share the same religion or ideology, but do have the same goals: to silence all opposition to their rule, to control the judiciary, to control the press, to control the narrative.

In these illiberal post-truth times the need for freedom and the truth are perhaps more important than ever. The truth is on the march. Even in these days. We are obligated to defend journalists, intellectuals and dissidents, because they defend our democratic values. In fact, they keep our values alive by their fire. Liberty needs the heroes of the past – Van der Capellen, Emile Zola, George Orwell, Sebastian Haffner, Václav Havel – but also needs the heroes of the present – Ahmet Altan, Osman Kavala, Soulaïman Raïssouni, Omar Radi, Mir Shakil-ur-Rahman and many others.

*\* Historian and the editor of the De Kanttekening magazine published in Netherlands*

# TURKEY AS JOURNALIST PRISON!

According to the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders (RSF) while Turkey was **99th** among **180** countries in 2002, today is **154th**.

because there is no fair trial in Turkey, over **200** journalists escaped abroad!

**34** foreign journalists were deported.

Press cards of **3804** journalists were canceled.



Faruk Akkan  
Cihan N. Agency



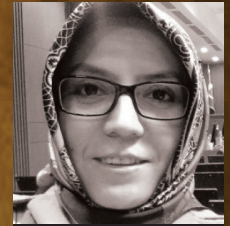
Hamza Günerigök  
TRT



Mehmet Baransu  
Taraf Newspaper



Erkan Akkuş  
Bugün TV



Hanım Büşra Erdal  
Zaman Newspaper



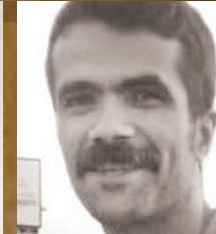
Hidayet Karaca  
Samanlyolu TV Channel



Mehmet Bilal Çolak  
TRT



Muhsin Gün  
Habertürk



İsmail Çoban  
Azadiya Welat



Mutlu Çölgeçen  
Millet Newspaper



Murat Çapan  
Nokta Magazine



Fevzi Yazıcı  
Zaman Newspaper



Gültekin Avcı  
Bugün Newspaper



Kazım Canlan  
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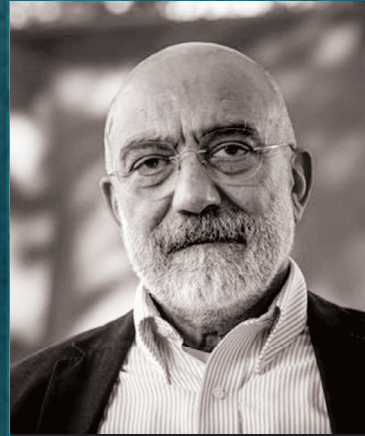
# IN TURKEY MEDIA WAS SILENCED

In Turkey after 2016

**34** TV channels, **53** newspapers, **37** radio stations, **6** news agency, **20** magazines and **29** publishing companies were closed by statutory decrees of AKP government. Thousands of journalists were tried and many of them were arrested for the news they wrote.



Aziz Oruç  
DIHA



Ahmet Altan  
Gazeteci-yazar



Tuncay Akkoyun  
Zaman Newspaper



Ayşenur Parıldak  
Zaman Newspaper



Ercan Gün  
Fox TV



Emre Soncan  
Yeni Hayat Newspaper



Ahmet Torun  
TRT



Çetin Çiftçi  
Özgür Gündem



Alaattin Kaya  
Zaman Newspaper



Aytekin Gezici  
Journalist



Erdal Şen  
Meydan



Ali Ahmet Böken  
TRT



Ercan Baysal  
Star Newspaper



Ali Ünal  
Zaman Newspaper



Cuma Ulus  
Millet Newspaper