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Repression Practices Against the Press and Journalists in Turkey

As the 2023 elections approach in Turkey, the AKP-MHP government's crackdown on dissent, especially against the Kurds, is increasing. As a result of the economic, social and political crisis in Turkey, reactions against the government are rising. In order to divert these reactions, repressive methods are increasing in intensity. International legal norms and principles of democracy are becoming dysfunctional and serious problems are being experienced in the field of human rights.

The AKP government ended the democratic solution project after losing its majority in the June 2015 elections. In the 1990s, the AKP changed the form of the evacuations of the villages, the unsolved murders of the opposition and the Kurdish press, especially in the field of press and media, and reverted to repressive methods that exceeded those of the 1990s. The AKP developed an alliance with the ultra-nationalist party MHP and determined the methods of intimidation of the society as the decisive policy. 2016's attempted coup used to suspend democratic and human rights norms and build an autocratic government.

In the aftermath of the attempted coup in 2016, Turkey has stepped up its unlawful attempts to shut down, seize and arrest democratic-legal institutions and, in some cases, to intimidate them by kidnapping them. The Turkish state's policy of crushing dissent, which has been in place since the 1980s, has varied and softened over time, but has always been essentially one of intimidation. The aim has always been to prevent them from organising through anti-democratic, anti-human rights methods, to create an atmosphere of fear and to render them dysfunctional. In the 1980s, this took the form of torturing and imprisoning the Kurds and opposition groups to death, in the 1990s it took the form of disappearances through unsolved murders, and in the period of AKP-MHP rule, it has taken the form of creating non-existent crimes through false confessions and putting them in prisons, punishing them through the legal system it has seized and rendering it dysfunctional. There have always been problems with freedom of thought and expression in Turkey. Since the 1990s, Turkey has justified its repressive practices with the fight against terrorism and convinced international public opinion. The real reason is to suppress and disable its opponents.

In his report to the 35th session of the Human Rights Council in 2018, David Kaye, the UN rapporteur on freedom of opinion and expression, presented a comprehensive report on freedom of opinion in Turkey. He stressed that "Turkey has fallen behind the 1982 constitution with its practices" under the AKP-MHP government. "At least 177 media outlets have been shut down, 231 journalists have been detained, more than 150 journalists have been arrested, and Turkey has used a 'vague' anti-terrorism law, the full extent of which is unclear, as a pretext to prosecute journalists, artists, writers, academics, press organisations. Kaye said there were serious doubts about a fair trial because of interference in the judiciary. "

Kaye said that journalists, intellectuals and intellectuals who wanted to show solidarity with the Ozgür Gundem newspaper employees against the pressure they were facing due to their editorial line were put on trial and arrested. Kaye noted that the crackdown on Kurdish media has reached very serious dimensions, noting that Kurdish-language television stations have been shut down and media outlets close to the Alevi faith have been shut down and censored. ¹

Since Mr. Kaye released his report, the crackdown on the press and media has intensified. The Turkish state has resorted to extreme forms of violence against demonstrations and events that were not banned even in the 1990s. One of the most prominent examples of this is the violent attack on demonstrations organised by the Saturday Mothers. The Saturday Mothers are a protest organised by mothers every week in Istanbul's Galatasaray Square to question the fate of people who disappeared by unidentified assailants in the 1990s and to find out where their bodies are. From the beginning of 1990 to 1998, according to unofficial data, around 17,000 people disappeared and their fate is unknown or the perpetrators are unknown. In order to bring this to light, events held every Saturday, led by the Saturday mothers, are not only banned, but are also attacked by the police, often resulting in arrests.

In order to understand the extent of the attacks on journalists and the media in Turkey, we believe it is necessary to look at some of the journalists who disappeared in the 1990s and the recent arrests of journalists in the press who were arrested on the basis of the testimony of so-called confessors or so-called 'secret witnesses' and unlawful wiretapping.

The press and practices against journalists in the 1990s:

Ozgur Gundem newspaper : Launched on 30 May 1992. In the 1990s, 8 reporters and writers and 19 distributors of the newspaper were murdered in unknown circumstances. 486 of its 580 issues were prosecuted and its staff were sentenced to a total of 147 years in prison. During its 683-day run, the newspaper was shut down for a total of 335 days, three times for 30 days, fifteen times for 15 days and twice for 10 days. During the period of its publication, various attacks were carried out against journalists and distributors associated with Ozgur gundem. The newspaper's building in Kadirga, Istanbul, its central office in Cagaloglu and its office in Ankara were bombed on 3 December 1994. Ersin Yildiz, the transport officer at the Kadirga office, was killed and 23 employees were wounded. The perpetrators of the bombing have not yet been found, but the newspaper was closed down and many of its journalists and staff have been imprisoned for decades.

Musa Anter: He is the writer of the newspaper, born in Mardin, and a Kurdish sage. He is a well-known and respected figure amongst Kurds and has played an important role in the peaceful resolution of the problems between them. On 20 September 1992, he was ambushed and killed by Jitem (Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter Terrorism Unit) in Diyarbakir, where he had been summoned to settle a dispute between two families. The

¹ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/170/40/PDF/G1717040.pdf?OpenElement>

case, which remained unsolved for a long time, came to light when Abdulkadir Aygan, a former Jitem member, confessed that Musa Anter was killed by the team he was part of. The prime minister of the time, Suleyman Demirel, denied the killing of the journalists, saying "they are militants disguised as journalists, they are killing each other." Despite the revelation that the murder of Musa Anter was carried out by Jitem, the investigation, although opened, has not progressed and will soon be closed due to the statute of limitations.

Kemal Kilic : He was the urfa representative of the Ozgur Gundem newspaper and a board member of the urfa branch of the Human Rights Association. On the evening of 18 February 1993 he was killed in an armed attack on his way home, the perpetrator remains unknown.

Ferhat Tepe : Bitlis correspondent for the Ozgur Gundem newspaper. On 28 July 1993 he was abducted by plainclothes men with walkie-talkies as he was leaving his home. On 8 August 1993, the 18-year-old reporter was found dead by a fisherman on the Sivrice shore of the Caspian lake in Elazig. The perpetrator remains unknown.

Nazim Babaoglu : On 12 March 1994, when he was 17 years old, he disappeared in Siverek, Urfa, where he had gone for a news report and since then there has been no information about his fate. It is believed that he was murdered and buried like other unknown perpetrators.

Mehmet Sait Erten : He was a reporter and employee of the Kurdish-language newspaper Azadi, born in 1964. On November 3, 1992, he was murdered in Diyarbakir in an armed attack. He worked as a reporter for Deng magazine and Azadi newspaper in Mazidagi, Mardin. After two years of unsolved murder, in 1994, Cemal Tutar, the head of Hizbullah's military wing, confessed that the murder was committed in collaboration with Jitem and Hizbullah, but no investigation was opened against Jitem.

Halit Gungen: Born in 1971, he was a reporter for the newspaper 2000 e dogru. On 16 February 1992, two days after the news report "Hezbollah is being trained in the cevik force centre" was published in 2000'e dogru magazine under his signature, he was attacked and murdered in his Diyarbakir office on 18 February 1992. After the murder remained unsolved for 8 years, in 2000 it was revealed in Hezbollah confessions that it was committed by Hezbollah under the direction of Jitem, but the court did not initiate an investigation against Jitem.

Cengiz Altun: He was the Batman correspondent for the Yeni Ulke newspaper. He applied to the prosecutor's office because he was threatened many times, the last application was dated November 1991. He was murdered on 24 February 1992. The perpetrator, Ismail Emsen, was caught by chance a year later. Ballistics examination of the gun on the perpetrator's person revealed that it had been used in the killing of Cengiz Altun. Ismail Emsen confessed that he was a Hezbollah sympathiser and that he had been given the gun by his brother Metin Emsen, but his brother was not prosecuted and the case was closed. In the "Susurluk Report" prepared by Kutlu Savasin, the head of the Inspection Board of the

Prime Ministry, on the reality of the counter-guerrilla after the accident in Susurluk, he stated that Cengiz Altun was killed by state security forces.

Izzet Kezer: He was a reporter for the Sabah newspaper. He went to Cizre to cover the Newroz celebrations and was shot dead by security forces on 23 March 1992. Although he was a Turkish journalist, his perpetrator remains unknown.

Mecit Akgun: He was a reporter for the Yeni ulke newspaper, killed in Nusaybinde on June 2, 1992. The perpetrator remains unknown.

Hafiz Akdemir: Reporter for the Ozgur Gundem newspaper. He was killed on 8 June 1992 in Diyarbakir. He was preparing a news dossier on crimes committed by state security forces, including forced evacuations of villages, torture and Hezbollah's relations with the state, when he was attacked by gunmen on his way from his home to his workplace. His body was abducted by the police and buried secretly without being shown to his family. On 17 January 2000, a CD found in a house used by Hezbollah as a safe house revealed that the crime had been carried out with the collaboration of Hezbollah and the state. The perpetrator was arrested by Interpol in Vienna in 2008 and handed over to Turkey. He was released under the name of retrial.

Cetin Abayay: He was a reporter for the Ozgur Halk Batman office. On 29 July 1992 he was attacked with a gun. Died on 30 July 1992 - the perpetrator remains unknown.

Yahya Orhan : He was a reporter for Ozgur Gundem in the Gercus district of Batman, he was murdered on 9 August 1992, the perpetrator remains unknown.

Huseyin Deniz: He was a member of Turkey Pen. He was killed in Ceylanpinarda on 9 August 1992 in an armed attack, the perpetrator remains unknown.

Yasar Aktay : On 10 November 1992, he was the victim of an armed attack in Mazidagi, Mardin. The perpetrator remained unknown and the case was closed due to the lapse of time. After the September 12, 1980 coup d'état, he was imprisoned for 6 years for his political views.

Namik Taranci: He was the Diyarbakir representative of Gercek magazine. He was killed on 20 November 1992 in an armed attack. Taranci was imprisoned for 6 years during the coup d'état of 12 September 1980. After his murder remained unsolved for two years, it was revealed that it was a Jitem-Hezbollah collaboration, with the confessions of Hezbollah members.

Mehmet Ihsan Karakus: On March 13, 1993, Silvan was the site of an armed attack, and in 1996 two members of Hezbollah were killed by the JITEM, according to a 1996 Ronahi interview.

Seyfettin Tepe: He was a reporter for the Yeni Politika newspaper. On 28 August 1995 he was killed in Bitlis in an armed attack, the perpetrator remains unknown.

Ugur Mumcu: He was a writer for the Cumhuriyet newspaper. On 24 January 1993, he was assassinated in his home on Karli Street in Ankara when a bomb exploded in his car, the perpetrator remains unknown.

Metin Goktepe: He was a reporter for the Evrensel newspaper. On 8 January 1996, on his way to a news story, he was detained by the police and tortured to death. The prime minister, the police chief and the Eyup public prosecutor initially made contradictory statements, but after public pressure it was revealed that he had been beaten to death in custody. 11 police officers were put on trial, 7 of them were sentenced to 7 years and 6 months in prison, but after a short period in prison they were all released with an amnesty.

In Turkey, this list could include dozens of well-known names such as Ahmet Taner Kislali, Cetin Emec, Hrant Dink.²

PRESS CRACKDOWNS UNDER THE AKP: Under the AKP, operations against Kurdish journalists began in 2009. Under AKP rule, arrests have been made at a level exceeding that of the September 12 military coup. While a total of 24 journalists were arrested in 1980, in 2012 alone 105 Kurdish journalists and 35 distributors were arrested and imprisoned. All journalists were imprisoned for their reporting.

In Turkey, writers, lecturers, publishers and journalists have been subjected to investigations, sometimes for expressing their opinions, sometimes simply for being a vehicle for expressing them.

Journalists and press workers are imprisoned under the anti-terrorism law and the Turkish penal code in connection with the organisation. In the 1990s, journalists were killed or disappeared by unidentified assailants, and in the AKP era they are imprisoned on terrorism charges. While prominent journalists such as Ahmet Altan and Mehmet Altan are internationally embraced, Turkey is able to hide the news of journalists with a Kurdish origin by linking them to terrorism in the international arena and in public opinion. Yet, according to research, 70% of journalists in Turkey are anti-government and are involved in reporting on rights violations against the Kurds. It is clear that the basis of the prosecutions is journalistic activities, freedom of information and freedom of opinion. Reporting on a press statement, a published interview, reporting on a human rights violation by security forces are all taken as evidence of participation in "terrorist organisation" activities.

Almost all of the cases involve the expression of certain opinions, possession of newspapers and magazines, computer records, wiretaps and "secret witness statements".

Crimes attributed to some journalists arrested and prosecuted under the AKP:

Kenan KIRKAYA Dicle News Agency (DİHA) Ankara Representative Kenan Kırkaya states that he is accused of "making propaganda for the aims and objectives of the organisation in all of his news reports" and describes the charges against him in the indictment as

² https://www.academia.edu/45684219/ÖLDÜRÜLEN_GAZETECİLER_1905_2017_

follows: "especially criticism of the Turkish government, the prime minister, the judicial system and law enforcement forces"; "expressions and discourses bordering on insult"; trying to "thereby create public opinion that the state is committing violence and oppression against the Kurdish people"... Kırkaya says that he was alleged to have carried out so-called journalism in minefields, which have nothing to do with journalistic activities and constitute a terrorist offence, and that the prosecutor said to him, "Your news is more dangerous than the bullets fired by terrorists". Kenan Kırkaya's news reports, his telephone conversations with colleagues and his relations with news sources are criminalised.

Zuhal TEKİNER Zuhal Tekiner, Concessionaire of Dicle News Agency (DİHA), claims that she was arrested on charges of reporting news in line with the aims of a terrorist organisation and that only one news item was placed in her file, and that this news item was "2010 May 1 Taksim Celebration". In the indictment, the prosecutor's characterization of "news containing terrorist organisation propaganda obtained from open sources made by the suspect" is based on the following news articles on the DİHA website: "1) Meeting of Hundred Thousands, 2) Flocking to Taksim Continues, 3) Karanfi l was left on Kazancı Slope for those who lost their lives in 1977, 4) Here is Taksim, Here is May Day, 5) Istanbul Started to Gather from 3 Arms for May Day" are news reports.

Pervin Yerlikaya Babir, the company manager of Dicle News Agency (DİHA), said that the charges against them are related to the institution they work for. The entire indictment consists of official interviews and news reports. In a conversation with Pervin Yerlikaya, she stated that "DİHA is a press and broadcasting organisation that operates according to all official regulations in Turkey, and that the prosecutor clearly demonstrated his intentions by claiming that "the problem is your editorial line" during the interrogation. He states that the accusations against him are based on his administrative and accounting work. Stating that "they work with a subscription system and sell the news they produce", Yerlikaya stated that "his phone calls with the bank, checking whether money was coming in or going out, checking the accounts and bank statements were included in the indictment as criminal elements".

Özlem Ağuş : Özlem Ağuş was arrested for being a member of an armed terrorist organisation; she was imprisoned on the allegation that she "participated in demonstrations and press statements and organised them". Ozlem Ağuş was taken into custody on 6 March 2012 in an operation under the name of KCK following her exclusive news report "I was harassed by the soldier in Kürkçülerde", which took place in Pozantı, and was arrested and imprisoned on 9 March 2012 together with "TT", a Pozantı victim she had an exclusive interview with.

Zeynep KURİŞ: She was arrested on the allegation that the news she had reported in line with her duty was "revealing the privacy of the state and the government". The news she reported, the places she went to report, were alleged to be evidence that she was a member of the KCK". The "privacy of the state" is the "sexual abuse case" in the news article titled "Abuse allegation in Pozantı prison" published on 24 February 2012.

*Turabi KİŞİN : His telephone conversations with the readers of Özgür Gündem newspaper about news, advertisements, news photographs, etc., his telephone conversations with Hüseyin Aykol, Editor-in-Chief and Ankara Representative of the newspaper, his telephone and internet conversations with the employees of Dicle News Agency and Fırat News Agency, his participation in and reporting on the Fegi Hüseyin Sağnıç Language Awards Ceremony organised by the Istanbul Kurdish Institute in 2008, his speech when receiving the award of Azadiya Welat newspaper on behalf of its executives, his speech for the imprisoned Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper Vedat Kurşun are all listed as evidence in the indictment.*³

These are just a few examples. Since 2016, the AKP-MHP government has increased its repression of dissident, predominantly Kurdish journalists and media, who criticise the government, as well as thousands of dissidents, democrats, academics, representatives of civil society organisations and so on.

Rights violations against the Kurdish press in June alone:

Journalists Under Attack: 25

Journalists Raided at Home: 25

Detained Journalists: 35

Journalists Subjected to Mistreatment: 49

Journalists Blocked from Following News: 35

Journalists Under Investigation: 27

Journalists Prosecuted: 5

Journalists Sentenced: 16

Journalists on Trial: 156

Number of Arrested Journalists (as of 01 July 2022): 76

Broadcasting Ban Decree: 4

Access Restricted News: 12

Most recently, on 7 June 2022, an operation was carried out against Kurdish media institutions, 30 journalists were detained and 16 journalists were arrested after 8 days of

³ <https://chp.org.tr/yayin/tutuklu-gazeteciler-raporu/download>

detention. Dicle Firat Journalists Association made a statement: "On the 30th anniversary of the murder of Hafız Akdemir, who was murdered by the state-backed Hezbollah in Diyarbakır's Sur district in June 1992, an operation was carried out against the free press in Diyarbakır. 20 of his followers were detained on this day when we were preparing to commemorate Hafız Akdemir, one of the names of the free press tradition who did not bow down, and to demand the trial of the perpetrators."

All digital materials were confiscated during raids on JİNNEWS' office and Pia, Pel and Ari Production Companies. The police blockaded Ari and Pia Production Companies on June 8 and prevented access to these institutions by saying 'the search is ongoing', despite the fact that there is no legal basis for this. Our colleagues were detained for 8 days at Diyarbakır Security Directorate without any explanation as to what they were accused of. On the day of the operation, our colleagues were targeted with information served to the media via TRT 1, the official state broadcaster."

With the arrest of 16 journalists, the number of imprisoned journalists rose to 76. "In an attempt to quell the public outcry following the arrest of our colleagues, the Diyarbakır Security Directorate betrayed itself with the photographs it served through the partisan press. Cameras, cameras, newspaper archives and photographs of the martyrs of the free press, who are our honour, were tried to be presented as criminal evidence. This in itself showed that the operation was a war on journalism and the government's approach to the press." ⁴

Journalists and media executives arrested in this operation: As it is still not known what they are accused of, we are unable to include the charges in our report. Only Aziz Oruc, editor of the Mezopotomya agency, visited the prison on June 16 with his family. Stating that they were passed over with a few questions during the prosecution process, Oruc said, "But we learned at the prosecutor's office that the news we made, the programmes we filmed were not enough, even the questions we asked were considered a crime. We learned that we were facing a serious journalism crime." Reminding that he had been doing a program called 'Voice of the Street' for more than a year, Oruç said, "All the programs were monitored, my questions were searched for criminal elements, and as if that wasn't enough, a young man who spoke to me was detained for 'Why did you speak'. The young man who was detained in Isparta and brought to us waited for days without knowing why he was detained. "It is clear to us that this is because of the news they are reporting and their Kurdish identity, as can be understood in the statements made by Aziz Oruc."⁵

Remziye Temel: Production company representative

Serdar Altun Presenter: Dicle Firat Co-President of Journalists Association

⁴ <https://diclefiratgazeteciler.org/basin-aciklamalari/we-can-only-provide-an-environment-where-freedom-of-expression-is-guaranteed-through-a-joint-struggle>

⁵ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/465062/diyarbakirda-tutuklu-bulunan-gazeteci-aziz-oruc-cocuklarim-soruyor-baba-haber-yaptigin-icin-mi-buradasin>

Omer Celik: Presenter and editor of Mesopotomia Agency

Ramazan Geciken: Cameraman and journalist for Pel and Ari production company

Suat Doguhan: Company official and cameraman

Mazlum Dogan Guler: Cameraman

Lezgin Akdeniz: Cameraman

Nese Toprak presenter

Elif Ungur presenter

Mehmet Sahin presenter

Mehmet Ali Ertas: Xwebun newspaper editorial director

Safiye Alagas: Jinnews muduru

Aziz Oruc : Mezopotomya agency editor

Zeynel Abidin Bulut: Editor of Xwebun newspaper

Ibrahim Koyuncu: Cameraman

Abdurrahman Oncu. Cameraman

Conclusion: In our report, we did not go into all the details. We did not include the names of all the journalists who have been killed, tortured and imprisoned. In short, in Turkey, repression against Kurds is carried out in all areas. Demanding to defend their identity and culture means being oppressed. We believe that the international community has been silent and unresponsive to the repression against Kurds.

We urge the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Committee on Arbitrary Detentions and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression to take a stand against the repression of Kurdish journalists, to pay special attention to the treatment of Kurdish journalists, to contact the families, lawyers and executives of journalists and media workers and executives in an effort to bring the truth to light and to take urgent action against the unjust treatment of Kurdish journalists.

DIRECT LINKS ON THIS REPORT:

- 1) <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G17/170/40/PDF/G1717040.pdf?OpenElement>
- 2) https://www.academia.edu/45684219/ÖLDÜRÜLEN_GAZETECİLER_1905_2017
- 3) <https://chp.org.tr/yayin/tutuklu-gazeteciler-raporu/download>
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- 5) <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/465062/diyarbakirda-tutuklu-bulunan-gazeteci-aziz-oruc-cocuklarim-soruyor-baba-haber-yaptigin-icin-mi-buradasin>

