



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Plenary sitting

12.1.2015

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MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statement by the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

pursuant to Rule 123(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on freedom of expression in Turkey: Recent arrests of journalists, media executives and systematic pressure against media
(2014/3011(RSP))

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on behalf of the S&D Group

European Parliament resolution on freedom of expression in Turkey: Recent arrests of journalists, media executives and systematic pressure against media (2014/3011(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Turkey,
 - having regard to the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 16 December 2014,
 - having regard to the statement by the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights of 15 December 2014,
 - having regard to the joint statement by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission and the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations of 14 December 2014,
 - having regard to the Turkey 2014 Progress Report of 8 October 2014,
 - having regard to Rule 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas on 14 December 2014 Turkish police arrested journalists and media executives, including Ekrem Dumanlı, editor-in-chief of the newspaper ‘Zaman’, and Hidayet Karaca, general manager of the Samanyolu broadcasting group; whereas a warrant issued by a judge in Istanbul states that they were under criminal investigation for forming an organisation that had ‘by pressure, intimidation and threats attempted to seize state power’ and had done so ‘through lies, depriving people of their liberty and falsifying documents’;
- B. whereas the police raids and arrests of a number of journalists and media representatives are incompatible with freedom of the media; whereas those arrested ‘expect that the principle of presumption of innocence will prevail and recall the inalienable right for an independent and transparent investigation in case of any alleged wrongdoing, with full respect of the rights of the defendants’;
- C. whereas a number of those arrested in December 2014 have been released; whereas on 19 December 2014, an Istanbul court announced the release of Ekrem Dumanlı, subject to probation and a travel ban pending completion of a criminal investigation, but the continued detention of Hidayet Karaca, pending completion of the investigation; whereas on 31 December 2014 an Istanbul court rejected a prosecutor’s objection to the release of Ekrem Dumanlı and seven other persons;
- D. whereas intimidating statements by politicians and proceedings launched against critical journalists, combined with the ownership structure of the media sector, have led to widespread self-censorship by media owners and journalists, as well as to sackings of journalists;

- E. whereas there is a high concentration of media ownership in the hands of business conglomerates with interests going far beyond the free circulation of information;
- F. whereas the government's response to the allegations of corruption in December 2013 cast serious doubts on the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, and demonstrated an increasing intolerance of political opposition, public protest and critical media;
- G. whereas the Government of Turkey should address media freedom as a matter of priority and provide an adequate legal framework guaranteeing pluralism in line with international standards; recalling the government's endeavours to ban access to social media, its restrictive approach to freedom of expression, and the pressure exerted on media outlets and journalists;
1. Condemns the recent police raids and the detention of a number of journalists and media representatives on 14 December 2014 in Turkey; recalls that a free and pluralistic press is an essential component of any democracy, as are due process and judicial independence; stresses, therefore, the need, as regards this latest round of arrests, in all cases (i) to provide ample and transparent information on the allegations against the defendants, (ii) to grant the defendants full access to the incriminating evidence and full defence rights, and (iii) to ensure the proper handling of the cases to establish the veracity of the accusations without delay and beyond reasonable doubt; stresses that these actions call in question respect for freedom of the media, which is a core principle of democracy;
 2. Expresses its concern over backsliding in democratic reforms, and in particular the government's diminishing tolerance of public protest and critical media; underlines the importance of press freedom and respect for democratic values for the EU enlargement process, and affirms its belief in the need to continue the accession negotiations with Turkey;
 3. Stresses that a number of provisions of the Turkish legal framework and their interpretation by members of the judiciary continue to hamper freedom of expression, including freedom of the media; recalls that freedom of expression and media pluralism are at the heart of European values and that an independent press is crucial to a democratic society, as it enables citizens to take an active part in collective decision-making processes on an informed basis and therefore strengthens democracy;
 4. Expresses its deep concern at the number of journalists in pre-trial detention, and calls on Turkey's judicial authorities to review and address these cases as soon as possible;
 5. Stresses that court cases against journalists and writers, together with numerous dismissals, intimidation, harassment and other forms of pressure against critical outlets and journalists must stop; emphasises that such actions hamper journalists' ability to fulfil their professional duties, including by informing the public of corruption cases and other issues of public interest, as well as their exercise of freedom of expression, the result being widespread self-censorship on the part of media owners and journalists; recalls that the right to spread, share and receive information is enshrined in the International Covenant on Political and Social Rights, to which Turkey is a party;

6. Calls on the Turkish authorities to review the provisions of the legal framework that are used to restrict the rights of freedom of expression, association and assembly and the right of access to information, and to bring those provisions into line with international standards; further calls for an end to pressure and intimidation against critical outlets and journalists;
7. Notes that website bans are of disproportionate scope, given that in August 2014 more than 50 000 sites were inaccessible in Turkey while only 6 000 had been banned by court order;
8. Notes that the Action Plan for the Prevention of Violations of the European Convention on Human Rights does not envisage revision of all relevant provisions of the Anti-Terror Law or of the Criminal Code that have been used to limit freedom of expression; stresses the need to reform these laws as a matter of priority;
9. Considers that the recent developments curtailing freedom of the media and freedom of expression highlight the need for more, not less engagement between Turkey and the EU, particularly on the rule of law and reforms in the area of fundamental rights;
10. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, and the Government and Parliament of Turkey.