



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2014 - 2019

Plenary sitting

12.1.2015

B8-0042/2015

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 and media executives, and systematic pressure against the media
(2014/3011(RSP))

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

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on Turkey, in particular those of 7 March 2014 on the 2013 progress report on Turkey¹, 12 June 2013 on the situation in Turkey², and 13 November 2014 on the Turkish actions creating tensions in the Exclusive Economic Zone of Cyprus³,
- having regard to the Joint Statement by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy / Vice President of the Commission, Federica Mogherini, and Commissioner Johannes Hahn on the police raids and arrests of media representatives in Turkey of 14 December 2014,
- having regard to the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 16 December 2014,
- having regard to Rule 123(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas on 14 December 2014 Turkish security forces arrested a number of journalists, media executives and others throughout Turkey, including the editor-in-chief of *Zaman*, Ekrem Dumanli, the head of the Samanyolu TV channel, Hidayet Karaca, other journalists and a police chief from eastern Turkey;
- B. whereas these arrests appear to be part of President Erdogan's ongoing conflict with the Hizmet movement, led by the US-based Muslim scholar Fethullah Gulen, and comes one year after police and prosecutors targeted members of Mr Erdogan's government on corruption charges;
- C. whereas on 6 January 2015 the Dutch correspondent Frederike Geerdink was arrested in Diyarbakir, interrogated by the police and released the same day after interference by the Dutch minister of foreign affairs, who happened to be visiting Turkey at that time, and on 7 January another Dutch journalist, Mehmet Ülger, was arrested on arrival at the airport in Istanbul, interrogated at a police station and released later that day;
- D. whereas in November 2014 President Erdogan presented to the public the Homeland Security Bill, now before the National Assembly, which allows extensive additional powers to crack down on subversion by expanding police powers of search, seizure of assets by courts and wire-tapping by the government; whereas this bill will increase surveillance and restrictions on criminals, but could also be used against opponents, and complements the latest crackdown on the internet;

¹ Texts adopted, P7_TA(2014)0235.

² Texts adopted, P7_TA(2013)0277.

³ Texts adopted, P8_TA(2014)0052.

- E. whereas on 17 December 2014, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the European Council's decision to open accession negotiations, President Erdogan firmly rejected the EU criticism of Turkey, affirming that the EU cannot preach to Turkey about freedom, democracy and human rights; whereas critics of Erdogan and his government have found themselves embroiled in criminal lawsuits, while many have lost their jobs, allegedly victims of government efforts to intimidate and criminalise dissidents;
- F. whereas the pressure against the media in Turkey has increased in recent years, including against owners and executives of media groups; whereas Turkey in recent years has been one for the worst countries as regards press and media freedoms, in particular as regards to the number of jailed journalists; whereas many of the journalists currently in prison are from Kurdish media; whereas some journalists are not in prison but are awaiting trial or appeal, and many more were briefly imprisoned during the year, some for as little as a few days or months; whereas the Turkish Government mostly charges journalists under the country's Anti-Terrorism Act (TMK) and the penal code articles related to 'terrorist organizations';
- G. whereas respect for the rule of law and fundamental rights, including freedom of expression, are at the core of EU values, to which Turkey is formally committed through its application for EU membership and its ongoing accession process;
- H. whereas at the beginning of 2014 Recep Tayyip Erdogan, then the Turkish prime minister, pledged a 'European year' that would revive his country's EU membership bid;
1. Firmly deplores the arrest of dozens of journalists and the raids on opposition media of 14 December 2014; stresses that these arrests are another attack on freedom of the press and diversity of opinion in Turkey and calls for the immediate release of all journalists;
 2. Calls on the authorities to produce as a matter of urgency credible and substantial indications that the arrested individuals have committed the criminal offences they are accused of, and to proceed speedily with the judicial proceedings, in full transparency and with adequate legal safeguards, or otherwise to drop all the charges;
 3. Believes that this huge wave of arrests was pre-planned and that it is no coincidence that those who have published allegations of corruption against members of the governing party are now being persecuted; calls, against this background, on President Erdogan and the Turkish Government to stop all actions aimed at silencing his critics and criminalising the dissidents by portraying them as enemies of the nation because of their diverging views;
 4. Stresses that freedom of the press, freedom of speech and lively debate are an essential part of any democratic state and that these arrests and raids are not therefore compatible with the rule of law or with democratic standards; calls on the Turkish authorities to stop prosecutions of peaceful Gezi protesters;
 5. Regrets the decision of the Turkish parliamentary commission set up in May to study prosecutors' files alleging wrongdoings by four ex-ministers not to commit for trial these former ministers accused of corruption, and condemns last month's suspension of

four prosecutors who initiated this investigation; takes the view that this is a further sign of erosion of the rule of law and of the growing government's influence over the judiciary;

6. Calls on the HR/VP, the Council and the Commission to step up the pressure on Turkey in the areas of justice, the rule of law and human rights, since these elements are crucial to the accession process and should be prioritised over single market issues; believes that the opening of negotiations on Chapters 23 and 24 on judicial reforms and fundamental rights would concretely help;
7. Regrets that 2014, which was designated 'European year' by President Erdogan, has fallen far short of expectations, since Turkey's declared EU ambitions and aspirations contrasted with many of its actions;
8. Calls for increased support for independent media within the framework of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance; underlines, furthermore, the importance of also supporting civil society organisations (CSOs), since only a transparent and well-functioning civil society can build trust and confidence among the different components of a lively and democratic society;
9. Reminds Turkey of its obligations as a member of the Council of Europe and of the need for further judicial reforms, not least because of the many cases against Turkey in the European Court of Human Rights; calls on Ankara to fully implement all the rulings of the Council of Europe;
10. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the EEAS, the Commission, the Member States, the President of Turkey, the Government of Turkey, the Turkish National Assembly and the Council of Europe.