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Situation of journalists in Turkey

Greens/EFA motion for resolution

Tabled by ***Rebecca Harms, Bodil Valero, Ernest Maragall, Ska Keller, Barbara Lochbihler, Benedek Jávor, Ulrike Lunacek, Ernest Urtasun***
on behalf of the Greens/EFA Group

The European Parliament,

– having regard to its previous resolutions on Turkey, in particular that of 15 January 2015 on freedom of expression in Turkey: Recent arrests of journalists, media executives and systematic pressure against media(1) ,

– having regard to its resolution of 14 April 2016 on the 2015 report on Turkey(2) ,

– having regard to the Commission's Turkey 2015 report of 10 November 2015 (SWD(2015)0216),

– having regard to the joint statement of 16 July 2016 by Vice-President/High Representative Federica Mogherini and Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn on the situation in Turkey,

– having regard to the Council conclusions on Turkey of 18 July 2016,

– having regard to the statement of 21 July 2016 by Vice-President/High Representative Federica Mogherini and Commissioner Johannes Hahn on the declaration of the state of emergency in Turkey,

– having regard to the EU-Turkey High Level Political Dialogue of 9 September 2016,

– having regard to the fact that respect for the rule of law, including freedom of expression, is at the core of EU values,

– having regard to the right to freedom of expression enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), to which Turkey is a state party,

– having regard to the recommendations contained in the Opinion on Articles 216, 299, 301 and 314 of

the Penal Code of Turkey, adopted by the Venice Commission at its 106th plenary session (Venice, 11-12 March 2016),

– having regard to Rule 123(2) and (4) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas an attempted coup d'état took place in Turkey on 15 July 2016, in which more than 250 people were killed and more than 2 100 injured;

B. whereas defending democracy, with a full commitment to human rights and the rule of law, is important, as is cooperation between the EU, the Council of Europe and Turkey in this regard; whereas Turkey is a key partner of the European Union;

C. whereas, according to the European Federation of Journalists and the Turkish Journalists' Association, following the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 the Turkish police have arrested at least 99 journalists and writers, most of whom have had no charges brought against them to date, bringing the number of media workers detained on charges believed to be related to their exercise of the right to freedom of expression to at least 130, as of 20 October 2016; whereas 64 of those journalists arrested after 15 July 2016 have been released; whereas the detained journalists have been denied the right of access to a lawyer and are being kept in inhumane conditions in which they are being threatened and mistreated; whereas there are claims that the co-editors-in-chief of the closed daily newspaper Özgür Gündem, Bilir Kaya and Inan Kizilkaya, have been tortured in prison;

D. whereas restrictions on the media and pressure on journalists were already considerable before the failed coup; whereas, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists, the Turkish authorities have, following the attempted coup d'état, closed down the offices of more than 100 broadcasters, newspapers, magazines, publishers and distribution companies, leaving over 2 300 journalists and media workers without jobs; whereas the press credentials of at least 330 journalists have been revoked;

E. whereas among those journalists detained are, for example, well-known novelist Asli Erdogan, who was also an Advisory Board member and columnist for the Kurdish daily newspaper Özgür Gündem, which is now closed, academic and columnist Mehmet Altan, and his brother Ahmet Altan, a writer and former editor of the weekly newspaper Taraf;

F. whereas, according to Human Rights Watch, many of those legal actions were taken in the absence of any evidence of participation by those accused in the failed coup attempt; whereas the right to a fair trial must be ensured, and whereas the judicial system's handling of media-related cases shows a lack of impartiality and independence;

1. Strongly condemns the attempted coup in Turkey of 15 July 2016; supports the legitimate institutions of Turkey; deplores the high number of casualties; expresses its solidarity with the victims and their families;

2. Acknowledges the right and responsibility of the Turkish Government to respond to the coup attempt; stresses, however, that the failed military take-over cannot be used as an excuse for the Turkish Government to further stifle legitimate and peaceful opposition and to prevent journalists and the media in their peaceful exercise of freedom of expression through disproportionate and illegal actions and measures;

3. Calls on the Turkish authorities to release those journalists and media workers being held without compelling evidence of criminal activity, including well-known journalists such as as Nazli Ilicak, Sahin Alpay, Asli Erdogan, Murat Aksoy, Ahmet Altan and Mehmet Altan; stresses that the journalists should not be detained on the basis of the content of their journalism or alleged affiliations, including in cases

where charges are brought against them, and underlines the need to ensure that pre-trial detention remains an exception;

4. Recalls that a free and pluralistic press is an essential component of any democracy, as are due process, presumption of innocence and judicial independence; reminds the Turkish authorities that the utmost care must be taken when dealing with the media and journalists, as freedom of expression and freedom of the media remain central to the functioning of a democratic and open society;

5. Regrets that emergency provisions have also been used to harass family members of journalists who have fled abroad or gone into hiding, including by cancelling their passports or temporarily detaining them instead of those accused;

6. Is seriously concerned about the closure of more than 150 media outlets; calls for them to be reopened, their independence restored and their dismissed employees reinstated in accordance with due process; calls on the Turkish authorities to end the practice of misusing provisions in the penal code to appoint trustees to private media organisations and to halt executive interference with independent news organisations, including in relation to editorial decisions, dismissals of journalists and editors, and pressure and intimidation against critical news outlets and journalists; condemns the attempts by the Turkish authorities to intimidate and expel foreign correspondents;

7. Calls on the Government of Turkey to narrow the scope of the emergency measures, so that they can no longer be used to curtail freedom of expression; stresses that investigations related to alleged involvement in the attempted coup should be carried out in accordance with due process and impartially and on the basis of convincing evidence and not on guilt by association, which may result in collective punishment;

8. Stresses that Turkey faces a real threat from terrorism; reiterates, however, that the broadly defined Turkish anti-terrorism legislation should not be used to punish journalists for exercising their right of freedom of expression; calls, as a matter of urgency, for the implementation of the Venice Commission recommendations of March 2016 and the reform of the anti-terrorism legislation;

9. Calls on the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the Member States to continue monitoring the practical implications of the state of emergency closely and to ensure that all trials of journalists are monitored;

10. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and the President, Government and Parliament of Turkey.

Recommended

Press release

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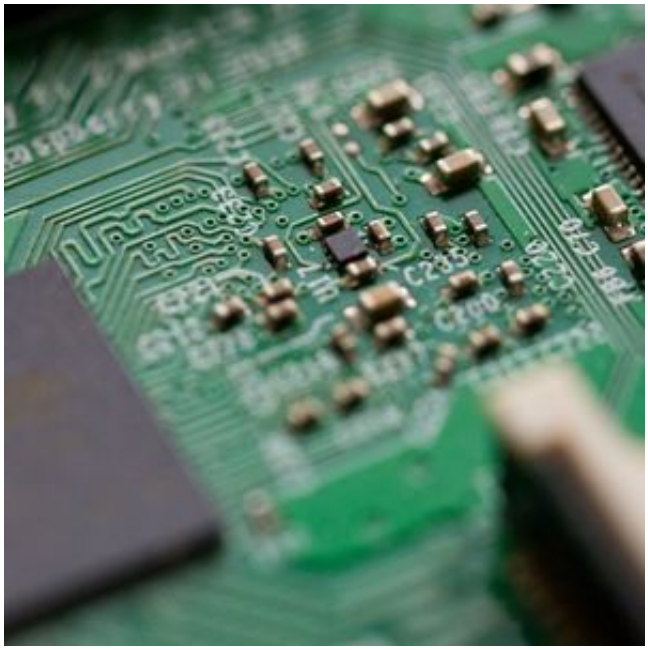


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