



EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR
PRESS & MEDIA
FREEDOM



European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF), Menckestraße 27, 04155 Leipzig
International Press Institute, Spiegelgasse 2/29, 1010 Vienna, Austria

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi
06560 Beştepe-Ankara

Leipzig und Vienna, 2. November 2016

Dear President Erdoğan,

The undersigned members of an international coalition of leading press freedom and freedom of expression groups request an urgent meeting with you following Monday's operation against the newspaper Cumhuriyet and Saturday's closure of 15 pro-Kurdish media outlets.

Police on Monday arrested and raided the homes of at least a dozen journalists working for Cumhuriyet. Among those arrested were Editor-in-Chief Murat Sabuncu and columnist Kadri Gürsel. Mr. Gürsel is also a member of the Executive Board of the International Press Institute (IPI) and IPI's official representative in Turkey.

We are deeply disturbed by this move against not only a highly respected newspaper that remains one of Turkey's last sources of critical news and information but also a representative of a major international human rights organisation. We are also extremely concerned that those detained are being held without access to legal counsel and without a clear indictment against them.

The closure of 15 pro-Kurdish media outlets, primarily covering the South East of the country, is part of an ongoing campaign to censor the Kurdish minority. It also represents a further attempt by the Turkish government to control all media coverage of the ongoing anti-terror operations in this region, and prevent independent media from investigating grave human rights abuses occurring there.

We condemn these arrests and closures as an extraordinary attack on press freedom, freedom of expression and the journalistic profession – unfortunately merely the latest example of such in Turkey. Our organisations stand in solidarity with Mr. Sabuncu, Mr. Gürsel and their colleagues, as do journalists around the world.

Prosecutors have said that Mr. Sabuncu, Mr. Gürsel and their colleagues are suspected of criminal collaboration with the outlawed Gülenist movement and the PKK. While we understand the need to take appropriate action against those responsible for July's

failed coup attempt, the arrests of Cumhuriyet staff and the sweeping closures of Kurdish media make it clear that Turkey's current state of emergency is being abused to indiscriminately target any and all who criticise the government.

Indeed, during the first three months of the state of emergency, the Turkish authorities have closed approximately 165 media outlets. Nearly 100 journalists and writers have been arrested and at least 140 journalists are currently in detention, many of whom have no connection to either the Gülenist movement or the PKK.

We would welcome the opportunity to bring our concerns to you directly.

In the meantime, this coalition calls for the immediate release of Murat Sabuncu, Kadri Gürsel, their colleagues at Cumhuriyet and all other journalists jailed for exercising their right to freedom of expression. We also call on lawmakers in Turkey to end the abuse of emergency powers that are being used to suppress legitimate dissent, further crack-down on independent media and undermine what is left of the rule of law.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter.

- The European Centre for Press and Media Freedom
- The International Press Institute (IPI)
- The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
- Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)
- The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)
- ARTICLE 19
- Index on Censorship
- The Ethical Journalism Network (EJN)
- PEN International
- The World Association of Newspapers and News Publishers (WAN-IFRA)
- The South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)