

Release Turkish journalist Merdan Yanarda?!

Ula? Ate?çi
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TELE1 Editor-in-Chief and daily *BirGün* columnist Merdan Yanarda? was detained yesterday by “anti-terrorism” police officers at the television channel where he works.

After a Supreme Board of Radio and Television’s (RTÜK) investigation of TELE1, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation into Yanarda?’s remarks last week on Abdullah Öcalan, the jailed leader of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party’s (PKK). Yanarda? was detained on charges of “Praising crime and criminal” and “Making propaganda for a terrorist organization.” He will be brought to court today.

The *World Socialist Web Site* opposes this reactionary state crackdown and demands his immediate release. The detention of a journalist for his remarks is a blatant attack on freedom of expression and basic democratic rights.

Last week, Yanarda? responded to an interview with Galip Ensario?lu, a Diyarbak?r deputy from President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an’s Justice and Development Party (AKP).

In the interview, Ensario?lu commented on the revival of the “peace process” between the Erdo?an government and the PKK, which collapsed in 2015. “Öcalan was more sincere,” Ensario?lu said of the negotiations, adding that “Kandil [PKK’s actual leadership] and Selahattin Demirta? are to blame for the end of the process.”

After stating that these remarks by Ensario?lu indicated that the Erdo?an government has renewed its negotiations with the PKK, Yanarda? criticised the isolation imposed on Öcalan for a long time in prison. He said, “If we look at ?mral? Island, Abdullah Öcalan is over 70 years old and it must be admitted that I am talking about a person who has been in prison and in

isolation for a very long time, 25 years without interruption.”

He continued: “Öcalan is the longest serving political prisoner in Turkey. If normal execution laws were applied, he should be released, under house arrest etc. The isolation imposed on Abdullah Öcalan has no place in the law. It must be lifted.”

Yanarda? then stated that Erdo?an government’s officials sometimes met unofficially with Öcalan, adding: “But you are holding him hostage, you are negotiating with him. You are making threats through him. He cannot even meet his family, he cannot meet his lawyers. Can there be such a system of execution? Abdullah Öcalan is not someone to be taken lightly. He has almost become a philosopher in prison, because all he does is read.”

Öcalan was captured in Kenya in 1999 in a CIA-backed Turkish intelligence operation in violation of his right to political asylum and brought to Turkey. Yanarda?’s mention of Öcalan’s isolation while being held on ?mral? Island in the Sea of Marmara under “aggravated life imprisonment,” is undeniably a statement of fact.

The Asr?n Law Office issued a statement yesterday saying that they have not heard from their client, Öcalan, or from three other clients on the island since March 25, 2021. “The prevention of fundamental rights and freedoms is one of the forms of torture in ?mral?,” it said, adding that “not being able to receive news from clients, cutting off all ties with the outside world, not having information about their health and conditions of detention is the most severe stage of torture in ?mral?.”

The Office recalled its application to the United Nations Human Rights Committee in 2022 and noted that the Committee had issued an injunction in

September 2022. It added, “On 19 January 2023, the Committee again reminded the [Turkish] government of its injunction, stating: ‘They [prisoners] should be granted immediate access to their lawyers without restriction.’”

The lawyers emphasized that the government’s refusal to comply with this decision and the continuation of other forms of isolation “constitute the crime of torture, together with the crime of willful misconduct in office.”

In another statement in April, the Office said that Öcalan and other clients on the island have been held “incommunicado” since March 25, 2021.

According to the Mezopotamya News, the lawyers stated: “İmralı Island is the only island prison in Turkey and is under a military exclusion zone. It is governed by an extraordinary regime ... This is isolation, and on top of that, the prevention of the right to access to lawyers, family, telephone and letters has become a separate ‘punishment’ system.” They also pointed to the “report prepared by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) on August 5, 2020, which deemed the isolation in İmralı as ‘unacceptable.’”

According to Turkish law, prisoners sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment are entitled to one hour’s visit with close relatives and one telephone call with them every fifteen days. Depriving Öcalan of even these very limited rights is clearly a violation of basic democratic rights.

In a statement released after Yanardağ’s arrest, the Turkish Journalists Association (TGC) said that the journalist had exercised his “right to freedom of expression” and had not “called for violence,” demanding his release.

The Kurdish nationalist Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP) also denounced the state crackdown, stating: “The investigation process initiated against Tele1 TV Editor-in-Chief Merdan Yanardağ for his assessment of the inhumane isolation in İmralı has once again shown that the judiciary and the RTÜK in Turkey act according to the policies of the government.”

It continued: “The RTÜK should give up this behaviour and stop its pressure on the opposition channels. We remind once again that the judiciary should not act against those who criticise the isolation of Mr Öcalan, but against those who do not apply the

law in İmralı.”

Thousands of HDP members, including former co-chairs Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, have been imprisoned for years on grounds similar to Yanardağ’s.

The HDP played a key role in the NATO-backed negotiations between Ankara and the PKK. It has faced an anti-democratic crackdown by the Erdoğan government since the collapse of this process after US imperialism resorted to using the People’s Protection Units (YPG) as its main proxy force in Syria. The YPG is a sister organization of the PKK.

In the presidential elections held last May, in which Erdoğan once again won in the second round, TELEVİ and HDP had supported Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the Republican People’s Party (CHP) against Erdoğan.

The WSWS has well-documented and irreconcilable political differences with both Kurdish nationalist parties and Yanardağ. However, the violation of basic democratic rights is at stake in Yanardağ’s detention and the imprisonment of numerous Kurdish politicians. Workers must demand for the release of journalists and all political prisoners in Turkey and internationally as an integral part in defense of basic democratic rights.



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