

Swedish journalist Joakim Medin released after 7 weeks in Turkish prison

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Swedish journalist Joakim Medin was released from a Turkish prison earlier this month after spending seven weeks behind bars. Medin was arrested immediately upon arriving at Istanbul airport in late March to report on the mass protests against President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's authoritarian regime, following the arrest of Istanbul Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu.

Medin was taken to a high-security prison outside Istanbul and later charged with supporting terrorism and insulting Erdoğan. The freelance journalist was working with *Dagens ETC*, a left-leaning newspaper that describes itself as “red, green, and independent.” He was accused of helping the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK) obtain press contacts. He was subsequently sentenced to an 11-month suspended sentence in late April for insulting Erdoğan, and continues to face the charges of membership in a terrorist organisation and spreading terrorist propaganda. The trial against him for the remaining charges is scheduled to begin in September.

After returning to Sweden, the journalist declared, “From day one I’ve been thinking about what to say at this moment. It is Long live freedom. Freedom of the press, freedom of expression and freedom of movement.”

Medin's fate illustrates the fraudulent propaganda put out by the NATO powers about their war for “democracy” against Russia in Ukraine.

Addressing a press conference after his return to Sweden, Medin explained on May 17 that after obtaining documents related to the investigation against him, he discovered that Turkish authorities had begun surveillance against him during the process of Sweden's application to join NATO. “This investigation started during the NATO process. My journalism seems to have annoyed them. Then it [the investigation] was activated when I entered the country. Turkey wanted to send a message,” he remarked.

Sweden and neighbouring Finland both applied to join the aggressive military alliance after the US-provoked Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The decision by these two countries, traditionally held up as examples of “left,” “social democratic” societies, was presented in the international media and by the political establishments of both countries as an expression of the military alliance's commitment to “defend democracy” against “Russian aggression.” The intervening years have seen both countries emerge as frontline states in a massive military build-up against Russia, led by the US and major European imperialist powers.

Finland and Sweden's applications required the unanimous

approval of all 32 NATO member states, including Turkey. While Finland's application was accepted with relatively little delay, the Turkish government balked at admitting Sweden, claiming it supported “terrorism” because of its refusal to sell arms to Turkey and its supposed lenient attitude towards the PKK, which recently decided to dissolve itself.

Sweden's right-wing government, a coalition of parties led by the conservative Moderate party that depends on the fascistic Sweden Democrats for a parliamentary majority, entered into bilateral talks with Turkey to deepen cooperation on security and counterterrorism. As a condition for Ankara's approval of Swedish NATO membership, Stockholm consented to the creation of the so-called “Security Compact,” a mechanism establishing annual bilateral meetings at the ministerial level and the possibility of creating working groups focused on specific areas to discuss joint efforts to combat terrorism.

While the negotiations were led by the right-wing government, Sweden's entire political establishment enthusiastically endorsed joining NATO. The opposition Social Democrats and ex-Stalinist Left Party were especially forceful in their championing of NATO membership. Sweden's initial application to join was filed by Social Democrat Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson's government prior to its defeat in the September 2022 parliamentary election.

The inaugural meeting of the Security Compact was held in Ankara on 21 January with Swedish Foreign Minister Maria Malmer Stenergard and Justice Minister Gunnar Strömmer attending alongside Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan—just over two months prior to Medin's detention. An official press release from the Swedish government declared,

During the visit, the Swedish ministers presented a roadmap for strengthening cooperation with Türkiye on combating terrorism and organised crime to their Turkish counterparts...

The roadmap focuses on links between terrorism and organised crime, enhanced information-sharing between law enforcement authorities, financing of terrorism and organised crime, expanded judicial cooperation and increased cooperation on counterterrorism in international forums.

This begs the question as to whether this “information sharing” played any role in providing details about Medin that facilitated his detention by the Turkish authorities. One of the Turkish authorities’ charges against Medin is based on his alleged attendance at a PKK-backed demonstration in Stockholm in January 2023 at which a puppet of Erdogan was displayed.

Although the Swedish government sought to take some credit for Medin’s release, pointing to the efforts of its Istanbul consulate, the possibility of Stockholm’s complicity is strongly suggested by the collaboration it has developed with Ankara over recent years. A press release put out by NATO in July 2023 announcing Erdogan’s acceptance in principle of Sweden’s NATO membership declared,

Since the last NATO Summit, Sweden and Türkiye have worked closely together to address Türkiye’s legitimate security concerns. As part of that process, Sweden has amended its constitution, changed its laws, significantly expanded its counter-terrorism cooperation against the PKK, and resumed arms exports to Türkiye. ... Both Sweden and Türkiye agreed that counter-terrorism cooperation is a long-term effort, which will continue beyond Sweden’s accession to NATO.

Members of Sweden’s large Kurdish community, which numbers somewhere between 50,000 and 100,000, report stricter surveillance by the authorities and a more stringent approach to approving asylum applications since Sweden joined NATO. *The Guardian* reported in February 2024 that the Kurdish Red Crescent in Sweden was forced to close in December 2023 after its bank account was revoked, while public broadcaster Sveriges Radio shut down its Kurdish-language news service shortly afterwards, citing budgetary pressures.

Medin provided details at his press conference about fellow inmates in the prison that underscore the extent of Swedish-Turkish collaboration in targeting alleged “terrorists.” He recalled being able to speak with inmates in neighbouring cells in Swedish and English, including with a Kurdish prisoner who was deported from Sweden as part of its efforts to curry favour with Ankara in December 2022. The date fits with a Kurdish man deported to Turkey from Sweden due to his alleged connections to the PKK. Medin speculated that the PKK’s decision to dissolve itself may have played a role in his release, which occurred on the same day as NATO foreign ministers gathered in Antalya for consultations.

Medin’s arrest was part of a sweeping crackdown by Erdogan’s government during and after March’s mass protests. Some 2,000 people were arrested or detained for one day or several days across the country, including over 300 who were kept in custody pending trial. Although some have since been released, 71 people reportedly remain in prison. In late April, as the *World Socialist Web Site* reported, authorities rounded up some 150 members of left-wing organisations and trade unions in advance of May Day. None of this prompted the Swedish government to issue statements of condemnation as one of its citizens languished in a high-

security prison. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said following Medin’s release that the success was the product of negotiations that took place “relatively quietly.”

It took the European Parliament almost seven weeks to pass a motion calling for Medin’s release. This, under conditions in which Reporters Without Borders noted that if Medin is convicted on all charges, he could face a prison sentence of up to 27 years. Even though he has now returned to Sweden, the Turkish government could still pursue him with an Interpol notice.

Erdo?an’s mass repression has barely prompted any criticism from the major European imperialist powers. One major reason for this is that they increasingly rely on Turkey as a key NATO ally in the Black Sea region, notwithstanding Ankara’s refusal to go along with economic sanctions against Russia. Turkey plays a key role in Syria, where the European imperialists recently lifted sanctions against the regime led by former al-Qaeda terrorist Ahmed al-Sharaa. The European Union has provided some €9 billion of funding to Turkey over the past decade in exchange for its support in blocking the flow of refugees from the Middle East.

Another major factor in the absence of any significant criticism of Erdo?an’s repression is that the European powers are themselves increasingly resorting to authoritarian forms of rule. The systematic targeting of protesters against the Gaza genocide, and the deliberate promotion by substantial sections of the European ruling class of far-right and outright fascist parties, underscore their ever-more open abandonment of any genuine commitment to democratic forms of rule.

The defence of the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of movement and freedom of the press hailed by Medin upon his release is today a class question. It demands the independent political mobilisation of the international working class in the struggle for socialism.



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