

Turkish government detains prominent journalists

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On Thursday, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office summoned well-known journalists including Soner Yalçın, Şaban Sevinç, Aslı Aydıntaşbaş, Ruken Çakır, Yavuz Oğan, and Batuhan Çolak for questioning.

They were charged with “publicly disseminating false information” and “aiding a criminal organization.” The journalists questioned were then released with a ban on leaving the country, while some had their phones confiscated.

The Chief Prosecutor's Office announced that the operation targeting journalists was carried out as part of an investigation into the “Imamoğlu Criminal Organization.” Ekrem İmamoğlu, the Mayor of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (İBB) and presidential candidate for the Republican People's Party (CHP), has been in prison since March on charges of corruption. Additionally, a separate arrest warrant was issued against İmamoğlu at the end of October on espionage charges.

Stepped-up political arrests, operations targeting journalists, and attacks on press freedom are the steps taken by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's government to use the judiciary to build an authoritarian regime.

Attorney Hüseyin Ersöz said, “Journalist Yavuz Oğan was taken from his home by the police at 6:45 a.m. in a manner that we could call ‘de facto detention.’ This is not called ‘detention’ [officially] but has been frequently seen in recent times. No search was conducted at Yavuz Oğan's home. He was informed that he would be taken to the Istanbul Police Headquarters for questioning. When we requested to meet with him, we were told that ‘the operation was ongoing and we could meet with him an hour later.’”

The Turkish Journalists' Trade Union stated,

“Journalists do their job, they inform the public. Fabricated detention orders are a policy of discrediting. We do not accept this! Journalism is not a crime.”

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) Turkey Representative Erol Önderoğlu stated, “The endless operations targeting critical journalism and attempts to discredit those who make their living from journalism are unacceptable injustices. Unless the judiciary is freed from this political shadow, journalists and justice will continue to suffer severe harm.”

The early morning raids and detentions of journalists are designed to intimidate the press and opposition. As demonstrated by the recent “political espionage investigation” against İmamoğlu, routine election campaigning and related journalistic activities are being portrayed as criminal acts.

The *World Socialist Web Site* condemns the intimidation campaigns against journalists. Their prosecution for news reports and articles demonstrates that press freedom is under serious threat and this must be opposed on principle.

In the same “espionage investigation”, journalist Merdan Yanardağ was also arrested and a trustee was appointed to TELE1, the television channel where he served as chief editor. TELE1 was one of the few opposition channels broadcasting nationwide, and both Yanardağ and the channel had long been under pressure from the government.

The Erdoğan government claims to uphold the independence of the judiciary while using it to suppress political and media institutions. On the other hand, when a decision goes against it, it tramples on the law by disregarding the constitution.

As the latest example of this, on Thursday, Istanbul's 13th High Criminal Court announced that it did not recognize the Constitutional Court's (AYM) ruling on

Tayfun Kahraman's rights violation and release. Kahraman was sentenced to 18 years in prison in 2022 for "aiding an attempt to overthrow the government of the Republic of Turkey."

The 2013 Gezi Park protests, the subject of the case, began in opposition to plans to redevelop the park in Taksim Square into a shopping mall. The protests became the focal point of broader discontent with the authoritarian policies of Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP) government and increasing social inequality. In May-June 2013, millions of people participated in demonstrations in almost all of Turkey's 81 cities. Kahraman was president of the Istanbul branch of the Chamber of City Planners during the protests.

In its reasoned decision published in the *Official Gazette* last month, the Constitutional Court indicated that Kahraman could not be held directly responsible for the incidents unless a causal link could be established between the violent incidents that occurred during the protests, in which millions of people participated, and Kahraman's actions. The Court had previously issued a decision regarding Kahraman to suspend his execution, release him, and hold a retrial.

The Turkish Bar Association called for the removal of judges who do not comply with Constitutional Court rulings, while CHP Chairman Özgür Özel said, "Today, Turkey is crossing a threshold in the process of de-constitutionalization, de-regulation, and de-institutionalization."

Özel implied government interference in the judiciary, adding, "They are waiting for instructions from somewhere; they are not writing opinions."

The government's vendetta against the political prisoners of the Gezi Park case, which disregards the Constitution as in other political cases, and its operations to intimidate the press, represent efforts to suppress growing social discontent.

There is growing opposition worldwide to war, genocide, dictatorship, and social inequality. In Africa and Asia, Gen Z protests against inequality and attacks on democratic rights are shaking governments. Since October 2023, millions of workers and young people from the United States to Europe and Australia have staged protests and strikes against Israel's genocide in Gaza and their governments' complicity in the genocide. In the US, approximately 7 million people

joined the "No Kings" protests on October 18 against Donald Trump's attempt to establish a fascist dictatorship.

The working class must respond with its own independent political mobilization based on an international socialist programme. The struggle to resist the increasing repression of the Erdoğan government and defend democratic rights cannot be advanced without a complete political break from the capitalist system, which is the source of this repression, and from the establishment parties that defend the interests of the ruling class.



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