Erdo?an government seizes Sözcü TV, detains many opponents amid raging financial scandal

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The government of President Recep Tayyip Erdo?an seized Sözcü TV and the news website sozcu.com.tr on the morning of Tuesday, November 17. Counterterrorism police began searching the group's building in Istanbul's Maslak district at around 4:30 a.m.

Detention warrants were issued for four people, including Funda Tuncer S?dal?, chair of the board of the Sözcü Media Group. Sözcü Media Group lawyer Ersan Bark?n said a trustee had been appointed to Sözcü TV and sozcu.com.tr but not to the group's newspapers *Sözcü*, *Tav?r* and *Korkusuz*.

The raid came just 34 days after the government took Halk TV off the air. According to media ombudsman Faruk Bildirici, Sözcü TV became the most-watched news channel on October 14, the day Halk TV went dark. Since March 2025, the number of media outlets placed under the control of the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) has risen to 11. The process picked up speed with the seizure of TELE1 a year ago. It has now entered a new stage: within 34 days, the state has taken control of the country's two most-watched opposition news channels. This amounts to the de facto abolition of the press freedom guaranteed by the constitution.

The raid on Sözcü TV was accompanied by a nationwide wave of repression. In an investigation run from ?zmir, at least 16 people were detained in dawn raids. They included lawyers who are members of the Progressive Lawyers Association (ÇHD), among them Veysi Çetin, secretary of the ÇHD's ?zmir branch, and Ülkü ?eyda Ba?araner, chairwoman of the TSS-?? union. Ba?araner was later arrested. In a separate operation run from Diyarbak?r, nine people were detained, including Bayram Bozyel, chairman of the Kurdistan Socialist Party (PSK). That operation targeted the Kurdistan National Alliance (HEVBENDÎ), founded on November 7, whose members include the PSK, PDK-Bakur and the Kurdistan Patriots Party (PWK).

Ula? Sevinç, the chairman of the Sosyalist E?itlik Partisi – Dördüncü Enternasyonal (Socialist Equality Party – Fourth International) issued a statement on social media denouncing these operations and demanding the release of all those detained.

The official pretext for the operation was cited as the "FETÖ" ("Fethullah [Gülen] Terrorist Organization") investigation reopened in 2025 against Burak Akbay, the publisher of the Sözcü Group, which is generally known for its Kemalist and nationalist editorial line. FETÖ is a group accused by the government of being behind the 2016 coup attempt, named after a deceased CIA asset and Islamist preacher in the United States. The Chief Public Prosecutor's Office claims that Akbay continued his "leadership of the organization" by financing media companies through accounts abroad. Sözcü journalists tried in the same case had been acquitted in March 2025, after the Court of Cassation overturned their convictions.

The latest wave of operations comes as the Erdo?an regime faces growing discontent in the working class and a series of political crises. The anger has grown since the preventable deaths of 19 workers at the HABA? iron and steel plant on November 9.

At the demand of the capitalist oligarchy, the government is preparing to pass a 2027 budget in which spending on defense, internal security and interest payments exceeds spending on education, health care and social assistance (around 7.4 trillion liras [US$150 billion] versus 7.2 trillion liras). The overwhelming majority of the population hates the Trump administration, yet the government is working ever more closely with it. It has also formed the Mecca alliance with Pakistan and the US- and Israeli-backed Saudi regime, amid the genocide against the Palestinians and the war against Yemen and Iran. All this refutes the government's fraudulent anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist rhetoric.

The investment fund crisis has now reached the top echelons of the Erdo?an regime. It began on September 17, when the Capital Markets Board (SPK) placed 131 funds into liquidation and froze the savings of more than 450,000 people. Former minister Fatma Betül Sayan Kaya, who was deputy chair of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) until the end of September, was arrested on November 5. According to prosecutors, Kaya and her husband had bought shares in Özata Denizcilik for 163 million liras (US$3.26 million), and their

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value had grown to about 2.17 billion liras (US$43.4 million). On September 16, one day before the liquidation decision, Kaya transferred these shares directly to Tera Yat?r?m by account transfer.

Kaya's lawyer, Oktay Süleyman Öztürk, admitted how widespread the swindle was without realizing it: "It is known that thousands of people made this gain… Apart from three to five people, most have not returned their money." He said it would be an "injustice" to "sacrifice" his client under these conditions. In doing so, he implied that the government is throwing a former member of the cabinet overboard to calm mass popular anger.

"Those arrested over the fund crisis include Korkmaz Enes Ergun, former general manager of Borsa Istanbul, Türkiye's stock exchange, and Enver Usca, former deputy chairman of the Capital Markets Board (SPK). The heads of the very institutions charged with "supervising" the market are going to prison as participants in the swindle. Meanwhile, the government is withholding the names of 141 individuals and 73 companies that made an "informed exit" from the funds just before the crisis. Its excuse is their "right not to be stigmatized."

The real reason appears to be that the list leads back to the government and the AKP. The operation against Sözcü TV came after the Kemalist New Party (YEN? Parti), the main opposition party in parliament, announced it would release eight verified files on the fund scandal. New Party Chairman Özgür Özel had said that as many as 60 members of parliament were reportedly named on the undisclosed official list.

On November 16, ?zmir deputy Ümit Özlale released the first of the eight files prepared by his New Party. It concerns Çi?dem Karaaslan, AKP deputy for Samsun and a member of the party's leadership. According to the file, on February 28, 2022, Karaaslan's sibling became an equal partner in a London company called Gainex Global Limited. The other partners were Ünsal Ban, regarded as the "original source" of the swindle, and Süleyman Y?ld?r?m, who is linked to Tera Yat?r?m. Karaaslan's husband also holds shares in companies tied to the same network and has records in the Tera Yat?r?m system. Özlale asked Karaaslan whether she knew of her family's ties and whether her political influence had been used as a "reference." Karaaslan denied the allegations and said she would take legal action.

Journalists ?smail Saymaz and Murat A??rel questioned Trade Minister Ömer Bolat's links to the fund scandal during a Sözcü TV broadcast. After Bolat filed a criminal complaint, both were placed under house arrest. A??rel was later arrested in a separate investigation. Prosecutors are seeking prison sentences of up to 14 years and 10 months for the journalists. Mustafa Balc?, also an editor at sozcu.com.tr, was arrested in October over social media posts about AKP spokesman Ömer Çelik's relationship with Osman Ar?kan Nacar, who allegedly carried out a swindle and fled. Journalist ?aban Sevinç was arrested along with Balc?.

This is a systematic campaign of political censorship. New Party Deputy Chairman Utku Çak?rözer released a report on October 11. According to the report, 25 journalists had been detained and 10 arrested in the previous 70 days. The party's next report found that 11 journalists were detained and 6 arrested in October. Those arrested include *BirGün* reporter ?smail Ar? and Derya Okatan, a journalist and member of the disciplinary board of D?SK Bas?n-?? union.

At the same time, internet censorship has reached unprecedented levels. According to the EngelliWeb project of the Freedom of Expression Association (?FÖD), access to 2,137 accounts on the social media platform X was blocked in September and October. That is nearly half of all accounts blocked between 2015 and 2025. The blocked accounts include those of Halk TV, T24 and the Workers' Party of Türkiye (T?P). Even the accounts of EngelliWeb and ?FÖD, which document the bans, were blocked.

On October 24, hundreds of journalists and thousands of other people took to the streets in at least 10 cities to protest censorship and arrests. The government answered by escalating the repression further.

The wave of repression is directly bound up with the Erdo?an government's loss of support. According to a MAK Consultancy poll conducted November 1–8, the AKP has lost 4.5 points in two months, falling to 27.5 percent.

The attack on the press follows the same logic as the judicial operations against the main opposition in the parliament. In May, a court ruling of "absolute nullity" put Kemal K?l?çdaro?lu back at the head of the Kemalist Republican People's Party (CHP). This split the CHP and led to the founding of New Party under Özel. As of the end of October, 31 district mayors and six provincial and metropolitan mayors were in jail. Among them is Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem ?mamo?lu, Erdo?an's main political rival, imprisoned since March 2025.

What the Erdo?an regime fears most is that the growing social opposition among workers and youth will erupt into a mass movement. New Party and the other parties of the capitalist establishment share the same fear. As a mass movement develops among youth and workers in Europe and beyond, they are trying to channel social anger behind the 2028 presidential elections.

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