

“ÖZGÜR BASIN VARSA, ÖZGÜR TOPLUM VARDIR  
THERE CAN BE NO FREE SOCIETY WITHOUT FREE JOURNALISM

# **GLOOMY PICTURE** OF FREEDOM OF PRESS IN 2018





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IN 2018

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**A PUBLICATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF PRESS RELATIONS AND  
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We have been experiencing a process unprecedented in the history of our Republic in all fields of life. The “court-ruled government”, presumably governing the country for the last 17 years, is not blaming everybody, every institution with a politics of denial and slander to conceal that social state has ended; freedom of thought and independence of judiciary have been wiped out and the economy has hit the bottom. Distressed by unemployment, citizens are crying out that they are hungry, while the “one man” who has destroyed the principle of merits in government and entrusted the Treasury of the government with his son-in-law to is assailing everyone with an increasingly flagitious discourse. Most of the organs of press which have been applauding the actions of AKP government although it has destructed all national values of the Republic, silenced universities and the judiciary, sold factories, lands, ports, rendered farmers unable to produce and awarded all large contracts of the government to pro-government businessmen with guaranteed dollar payments, have unfortunately become as dangerous as the ruling party itself.

The pro-government press created by the ruling party by cracking down on journalists and television channels, and offering them the resources which actually had to be spent for the public good, totally disregards the freedom of information and disseminates the lies and falsifications of the ruling party as if they are the representatives of the government. The so-called journalists writing and speaking in dozens of newspapers and television channels, as instructed by the “one man”, are stuck in-between their conscience and financial interests.

Most painfully, the honorable journalists who do not compromise on their journalist identity and thoughts are slandered and blamed by other so-called journalists. These so-called journalists placed to the majority of press with the support of the ruling party have become instruments of the ruling party’s intrigues. Real journalists face trials, get fired from their jobs and imprisoned as a result of the irrational and unlawful intrigues where these so-called journalists also play a role. Nobody can argue that there is freedom of thought and press in a country where dozens of journalists are in prison. Moreover, someone who agrees act as a pro-government

journalist for personal interests, while his/her colleagues are fired and sent to prison through fictitious indictments and unlawful practices, cannot be referred to as journalist. Despite all these circumstances, honest and honorable journalists continue doing their job and inform the public with facts based on true information and documents. In a period when the freedom of press, which forms the foundation of human rights and democracy, is insensible violated, not only are journalists deprived of their freedom of reporting facts and true information, but also the public is deprived of its freedom of getting information.

Today, many of the journalists who have not compromised on their principles are in prison. We are faced with not only a ruling party which cannot govern the country but also a pro-government press issue, which undermines the people's freedom of information with the instructions of the government. For this reason, our two valuable journalist deputies who have not compromised on their principles address the problems of the press from all aspects in this report.

Utku akırözer, Eskişehir Deputy, discusses the miserable situation of our press in the section titled "Freedom of Press in 2018: Gloomy Picture".

Atila Sertel, İzmir Deputy, discusses the problems of the long-neglected local press and evaluates the suggestions for solution in the section titled "Local Press in Turkey".

I would like to cordially thank Mr. Utku akırözer and Mr. Atila Sertel for their work and hope that this valuable report will add strength to the fight for freedom of press.

Sincerely.

**Kemal KILIÇDAROĞLU**  
**Chairman of Republican People's Party**

## **GLOOMY PICTURE OF FREEDOM OF PRESS IN 2018**

The most important indicators of a functioning democracy in a country include freedom of press and freedom of expression. The availability of a pluralist, polyvocal and diversified media atmosphere where every view and criticism can be freely expressed is the most fundamental assurance for our citizens' right to information.

In a country where even journalists are deprived of the right to criticize and freedom of expression, one can assume that all other fundamental rights and freedoms are also in jeopardy.

As also reflected in the legislation of Turkey, the UN conventions, European Convention on Human Rights and the judgments of European Court of Human Rights in addition to our Constitution and basic laws all include provision that secure the freedom of press unexceptionally. However, all these look good on paper only, and Turkey tops the list of countries that restrict the freedom of press and expression most in practice. This worrisome picture is also highlighted in the reports of international organizations which closely follow up the infringements of rights and freedoms around the world.

- Freedom House defines Turkey as “not free” in its 2018 and 2019 editions of the report “Freedom in the World” as. Turkey has performed worse than Iraq, Tunisia, Mozambique, Burkina Faso, Ukraine and Pakistan according to this list.
- In the global freedom of press ranking of Reporters Without Borders for the year 2018, Turkey ranked 157th out of 180 countries. Turkey has been the country that has imprisoned the highest number of journalists for three consecutive years now.
- Even NATO, where Turkey is a permanent member, is criticizing Turkey for the pressures and restrictions of freedom of press.
- According to the report prepared by International Committee for Protection of Journalists (CPJ), Turkey is the third country where the highest number of journalists is in prison.



- International Press Institute (IPI) emphasizes that the criminal charges put forth against journalists in Turkey are a clear demonstration of the violation of European and international standards of law and the misuse of the counter-terrorism legislation.
- World Report 2018 of Human Rights Watch (HRW) states that journalists continue facing trials and imprisonments only because they do their job, that newspapers and television channels are no longer independent and their broadcasts and publications predominantly promote and support the government's political trajectory.
- In its report titled 'Turkey: freedom of expression in jeopardy. Violations of the rights of authors, publishers and academics under the State of Emergency', English PEN states that Turkish Government has been suppressing intellectuals and journalists with opposing views.
- Turkey is the country with the second highest number of applications filed for violation of rights and judgments issued for violation of rights at the European Court of Human Rights. Turkey has become the Council of Europe member state that has violated the freedom of expression most in 2018, after 2017.

## **PRESS: THE TARGET OF POLITICIZED JUDICIARY**

The primary responsible parties for this picture are both the suppressive and prohibitive one-man regime that conceals facts from the public and acts intolerantly against oppositional views and the increasingly politicized judiciary that has lost its impartiality and independence.

Journalists in Turkey face charges such as “being a member of terrorist organization”, “propaganda of terrorist organization”, “insulting the President” only because their views, news reports and comments voiced as part of their activities as journalist. They undergo investigations and get detained, sentenced for indemnification and even imprisoned on the grounds of such accusations.

- 142 journalists are in prison as of 2019. One of these journalists is Eren Erdem, who had unveiled the true face of FETÖ members in his books published many years ago. He is now under arrest, facing the accusation of assisting FETÖ based on the statements of anonymous witnesses. The court issued a judgment for release of Eren Erdem, however an upper court issued a warrant for arrest again while he was waiting for release at the prison. So he was arrested again before being released. He started a hunger strike for justice in the prison against all these unjust treatments. Even this decision of him has become a cause for investigation by the prison administration.
- 516 journalists have been detained since the declaration of state of emergency, and 118 journalists were detained only in 2018. 105 journalists appeared before the court in 2018.
- Journalists face trials for heavy life sentence, life sentence, heavy imprisonment, judicial fines and compensation penalties. Verdicts of conviction have been issued for 80 of these cases. Journalists have been subject to 430 years of imprisonment and compensation fines of hundreds of thousands of liras in total.
- The individual applications filed by journalists with the Constitutional Court have been pending for more than two years. The judgments for “violation of rights” issued by the Supreme Court in relation to journalists Turhan Günay, Şahin Alpay and Mehmet Altan must set a precedent for the applications filed by other journalists who are under arrest.



- The dailies *Cumhuriyet* and *Sözcü*, and renowned journalists including Emin Çölaşan, Necati Doğru, Murat Sabuncu, Erdem Gül, Musa Kart and Kadri Gürsel had to appear before courts in suits initiated with allegations of assisting FETÖ. Some of them remained under arrest for months.
- Recently, a vast majority of suits initiated against journalists are based on allegations of insulting the President. 53 journalists have been convicted for this reason. During this period, every discourse, news report and view can be regarded as an insult on the President, resulting in journalists facing heavy penalties. The number of investigations initiated on the grounds of the accusation of insulting the President, under Article 299 of Turkish Penal Code, has reached 20,539 during the past two years, while prosecution has been initiated for 6,033 of these investigations.
- The concept of “politicized judiciary” has been most clearly manifested in the trial of the two reporters from the daily *Cumhuriyet*. Duygu Güvenç and Alican Uludağ have been subject to investigation on the grounds of the accusation of “humiliating the state” after writing that the judgment in the trial of Pastor Andrew Brunson, who caused a diplomatic crisis between Turkey and the US, would indeed be issued by politicians instead of the judiciary.
- Nurcan Gökdemir from the daily *BirGün* faced an investigation on the grounds of the accusation of insulting the President although he used the word ‘Erdoğan’ only once in a news article about Berat Albayrak, and she was called on to give a statement within 7 days.
- All types of news reports that infuriate the ruling party have been punished by court judgments. Ergün Demir, the owner of daily *Astakos Haber* in Kocaeli faced an investigation for a news report about İsmail Devrim, an unemployed citizen who committed suicide because who could not afford to buy schools pants for his son.
- The television channel *Hayatın Sesi TV* faced an investigation on the grounds of propagandizing 3 terrorist organizations in its broadcasts.
- Even students studying journalism have been imprisoned in Turkey. Berivan Bila, a student at Karadeniz Technical University, was arrested for a banner that reads ‘Journalism is not a Crime’.

- Not only the journalists but also scientists with articles published in newspapers, students re-posting already published caricatures and even members of parliament face restrictions on freedom of thought and expression. Bülent Şık, a Chemical Engineer, faced an investigation for a series of articles published in the daily *Cumhuriyet* with the title “Government conceals the products that caused cancer in Turkey, but we unveil them! Here is the list of toxins!”.
- Four students of Middle East Technical University who carried a banner during their graduation ceremony, showing the famous caricature “*World of Tayyips*” published on the front cover of the caricature magazine *Penguen* in the past, were arrested. Investigations were initiated for CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and 72 CHP deputies who shared the same caricature in their social media accounts to support the students.
- The lawyers who started a demonstration named “Justice Watch” to protest the detention and arrest of the managers and columnists of the daily *Cumhuriyet* have faced trials.

## NEW DANGER: FINALIZED CONVICTIONS

We have talked about the problems of journalists facing investigations, trials and months-long arrests because of what they have written and drawn for many years. Now, some of these journalists who have been released have to go to prison for a second time as a result of the finalization of their conviction. Murat Aksoy and Atilla Taş are just two key examples. Similarly, Ayşe Düzkan also went in to the prison in past days because of her finalized conviction.



Many colleagues who have been unjustly arrested in the lawsuits of *Sözcü*, *Cumhuriyet*, and *Editors on Duty* now face the risk of having their freedom restricted for a second time.

The journalists who have similarly been convicted in the past but released through a judgment of suspension will have to go behind the bars depending on the judgments to be issued in new suits.

## **JOURNALISTS ARE THREATENED AND TARGETED**

In Turkey, journalists and organs of press are not only exposed to the risk of judicial trials and closure, but they are also threatened and pointed as target almost every day by the President, ministers, government spokesmen and the spokesmen of other pro-government parties, in addition to instructions directed towards the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) and the judiciary against them.

The penalties imposed on Halk TV and FOX TV by RTÜK following the instructions of the President totally destroy the freedom of press and restrict citizens' right to information. The three-day suspension of broadcast penalty and 1 million TL fine imposed on the Prime-Time News Program of FOX TV, and the bans imposed on the "Halk Arenası" program moderated by Uğur Dündar on Halk TV are attempts to prevent people from learning about the truths before the elections.

FOX TV newscaster Fatih Portakal has faced threats and accusations that restrict his freedom and even jeopardize his life.

Actors Metin Akpınar and Müjdat Gezen have been pointed by President Erdoğan as target only because of their thoughts, and been called on to give statement, which are very disquieting in terms of freedom of press.

## **4,000 JOURNALISTS JOBLESS**

An overwhelming majority of the media is under the control of the government. And the victims of the monopolization of the media, handovers and economic pressures are the journalists who become jobless.

- According to the data of International Press Institute (IPI), nearly 170 newspapers, magazines, radio and television channels have been shut down following the failed coup attempt in Turkey. These shutdowns have rendered 3,230 journalists jobless.
- At least 700 journalists have become jobless following the shutdown of Anka News Agency, Habertürk Newspaper, Vatan Newspaper, the sale of Doğan Media Group to Demirören Media Group, cancellation of the licenses of many radio and television channels by RTÜK and the decision for reduction of minimum staff positions by Press Advertisement Authority.
- According to the data of Turkish Journalists Union, the unemployment rate in media sector has reached 30 percent.

## **INTERNET JOURNALISM ALSO FACES BANS**

Not only the printed and visual press but also digital news platforms have also been affected from the restrictions, pressures and bans.

RTÜK has been assigned the power to supervise not only radio and television broadcasts, but also the audio-visual broadcasts through internet.

- According to Internet Freedom 2018 report of Freedom House, Turkey has been included in the category of “countries with no freedom of internet” together with countries like China, Russia, Iran and Saudi Arabia.



- According to Reuters Institute’s Digital News Report 2018, Turkey is one of the countries where security concerns are highest in the use of internet.
- Many social media postings which could be considered in the scope of freedom of expression have been subject to investigations and prosecutions, while many of them have resulted in arrests. Ministry of Interior declared that 42,406 social media accounts had been investigated in and prosecution had been initiated for 18,376 users in 2018.
- Wikipedia, the world’s biggest online encyclopedia, has been banned in Turkey for the last 21 months.
- Prohibition of access to opposition news portals has become systematic. 63 prohibition of access judgments have been issued against website sendika.org since 25 July 2015.
- During the first 10 months of 2018, RTÜK imposed fines with a total amount of 4,653,451 TL on radio and television channels.

## **EVEN PRESS CARDS HAVE BECOME INSTRUMENTS OF PRESSURE**

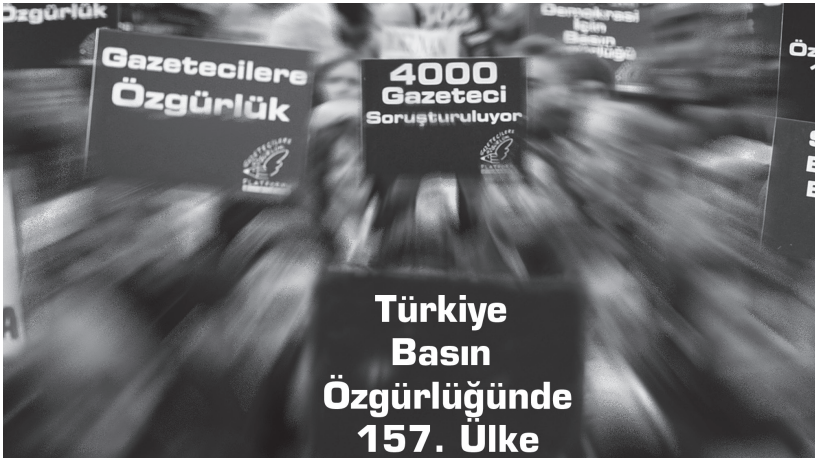
Another practice that has been restricting the freedom of journalists recently is the decisions for the cancellation of press cards earlier issued by the Prime Ministry Press and Information Directorate general and now by the Presidential Communication Department. As the practice of accreditation has been rolled out across all public institutions during the rule of AKP and press card is required to obtain this accreditation, this has become another factor which poses the risk that journalists cannot freely perform their occupation.

- The press cards of 1,954 journalists have been cancelled during the past 3 years.
- Journalists face the risk of losing their yellow press cards if they are finally convicted in suits initiated or to be initiated in 2019.
- The Regulation on Press cards, published on 14 December 2018, inflicts another blow on the freedom of press. According to the Regulation which has been prepared with an understanding that regards journalism as a “terrorist activity”, the individuals to be granted a press card must “not have engaged in acts of supporting

terrorism”, “not have committed crimes against the constitutional order, national defense and state”, “not have encouraged people for hatred and hostility, “not have praised crimes and criminals, “not have acted against national security and not been involved in terror or acts against public order” or “must not have adopted such acts as a habit”. Through these additional provisions, the existing press cards of journalists convicted of these crimes can more easily be cancelled, while it gets more difficult to obtain new cards. According to the Regulation, the Presidential Communication department can arbitrarily decide who is a journalist and who is not. The Regulation also introduces critical changes about the composition of the press card commission. While the representation of professional organizations and labor unions in the field of press is limited, the Presidency has been given the discretion to identify the limited number of professional organizations and labor unions to be represented in the Press Card Commission.

## **THREATS AND VIOLENCE ON THE PRESS REMAIN UNPUNISHED**

The ruling party, which does not hesitate from targeting and threatening journalists, keeps silent as the obstructions, threats and attacks on journalists and organs of press remain unpunished and unsanctioned.



- In the lawsuit filed against 150 people, including a deputy from the ruling party, who attacked the daily *Hürriyet* with stones and rods two times, 25 out of the 26 suspects tried without arrest have been acquitted, while the other one suspect has been sentenced to an imprisonment of only 1 year and 8 months for “violating the immunity of workplace at nighttime”. However, that penalty has also been deferred and the suspect has been released.
- The groups who left a black wreath in front of FOX TV building could easily shout out their words of violence and threat.
- Ministers can slap journalists who have only asked questions, can verbally threaten them and arbitrarily apply accreditation.

## **FOREIGN JOURNALISTS ALSO UNDER THREAT**

Foreign journalists are also detained, arrested and even killed in Turkey.

- Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was killed at the Istanbul Consulate of Saudi Arabia. Many press organizations, in addition to the UN, have published reports pointing to the involvement of Saudi regime in this murder. Neither the body of Khashoggi nor the murderers could be found. The Government could prevent the escape of the Saudi squad who committed the murder, and the Saudi Consul, from Turkey, has led a campaign highlighting the responsibility of the royal family of Saudi Arabia in the international arena.
- Deniz Yücel, who is a citizen of both Turkey and Germany, was arrested with the accusation of “propagandizing terrorist organization” in February 2017. One year later, he was released following the pressures of Germany.
- Austrian citizen Max Zirngast was detained and then arrested in September with the accusation of “being a member of terrorist organization”. Zirngast has been released in recent days after two months under arrest.
- Şener Levent, Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Afrika* published in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, was called on to give a statement by the Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office of Ankara due to news articles published in relation to the operation of Turkish Armed Forces in Afrin.



## **COST OF PRIVATIZATION: 2018 PAPER CRISIS**

Another factor threatening the freedom of press in Turkey is economic difficulties.

As a result of the privatizations carried out during the term of AKP governments, Turkey has become the importer of many products which it used to produce in the past. The press and publication sector has experienced the real consequences of the privatization of Turkish Cellulose and Paper Factories Inc. (SEKA) through the paper crisis that broke out after the surge in exchange rates in 2018.

- The prices of paper used for newspapers and books increased by almost twofold relative to prices in 2017, following the exchange rate crisis. Having difficulties in affording the rising paper prices, newspapers had to make a choice out of the options to shut down, suspend operation for a certain period of time, reduce the number of pages, and increase prices.
- The dailies *Habertürk* and *Vatan* were shut down. The daily *Aydınlık* suspended publication for three days. *Sözcü* abolished its inserts.
- Many dailies reduced their number of pages, while some dailies had to increase their price.



- Some local dailies in Izmir, Sakarya and Diyarbakır decided to publish their printed version only at the weekends.
- Official Gazette stopped publication of its printed version after 98 years.

## **EMBARGO ON ADVERTISEMENTS AS A RETALIATION AGAINST CRITICISMS**

Another important issue that materially affects the broadcast life of television channels and newspapers, and that prevent journalists from freely performing their profession is the decrease in advertisement revenues. Public institutions and the private sector exposed to the pressure of the government, tend to have their advertisements published according to the requests and preferences of the ruling party rather than their rating shares or circulations.

- The embargo of advertisements applied on opposition or critical media continued in 2018 as well. The dailies *Cumhuriyet*, *Sözcü*, *Yeniçağ*, *Evrensel*, *BirGün*, *Milli Gazete*, *Karar*, *Aydınlık* and others do not have access to a very large part of the advertisements published on other newspapers.
- The daily *Karar* has declared to its readers that that they are exposed to an embargo on advertisements, and that public agencies and private sector were constantly instructed not to publish advertisements in their newspaper.



- While the pro-government newspapers are purchased more for distribution at libraries, airports, THY airplanes and other public institutions, critical newspapers are not given this chance. This double standard even leads newspapers to hide their real sale rates.
- The local press which receives official advertisements from the Press Advertisement Authority in proportion to their circulation has seen their revenues declined significantly although the advertisement fees have been increase, due to the decline in the number of advertisements. This has been deeply affecting the local press organs which try to survive on advertisement revenues.
- Many local dailies have decided to public their newspaper once a week, not to public on Sundays, to print monochromatic copies, reduce the number of pages or to shut down. If the existing circumstances continue, many more local newspapers will inevitably shut down or resort to redundancies, which will lead to the vanishing of diversities and polyvocality and to reduced voice for different groups in many Anatolian cities.

## **DISTRIBUTION MONOPOLIZED**

Distribution business implies not only a technical activity of bringing newspapers to vendors, but a fundamental issue that directly concerns the freedom of press and the public's right to information.

- Following the shutdown of YAYSAT, one of the two firms which have been performing distribution business for decades, now only one company (TURKUAZ) exists to deal with the distribution of newspapers and magazines as of end-November. 324 people working at YAYSAT have become unemployed.
- The monopolization of distribution has increased the concerns that the cost of newspapers will rise, that they cannot be distributed at all or in a limited way.



**CONCLUSION:  
THERE IS NO SOLUTION,  
BUT SUPPRESSION AND  
THREATS PREVAIL**

Unemployment, suppression, threats, censorship, access bars, investigations, arrests, lawsuits and growing economic pressures have marked the year 2018 for newspapers and journalists.

The closure of newspapers, television and radio channels, the heavy imprisonment penalties and compensation fines imposed on journalists, long-lasting, unjust and unlawful arrests, investigation and prosecutions initiated against the acts of journalism have been causing concerns among journalists and organs of press, preventing news reporting in a free environment and causing auto-censor.

The One-man Administration, which is among the major parties responsible for the bulk of problems experienced by the press and journalists, has not included any single measure to address the problems of press neither in the first 100-Day Action Plan nor in the second 100-Day Action Plan.

On the contrary, journalists and newspapers have been clearly threatened and targeted by the President, who is the head of state, as we have witnessed in the cases of *Sözcü*, *FOX TV* and *Halk TV*.

While the profession of journalism has been disgraced, embargos have been imposed on official and private advertisements to be published in critical newspapers, and their sales have been obstructed by prohibiting their purchase by public institutions.

All these pressures and threats on journalists and newspapers both violates the rights of citizens to be informed about the truths and facts, and suppresses pluralism and polyvocality which are the most important wealth of democracy, allowing everyone to express his / her views .



# **SUGGESTIONS**

- ☑ Journalism can under no condition be denoted as a crime. To address this issue, we need a significant change of mentality in both the ruling party and the judiciary, rather than new laws. In particular, during the local election process, the judiciary must function impartially and independently, as free from political influence.
- ☑ As long as he/she does not encourage terrorism and violence, does not fuel up hatred, nobody must be investigated or prosecuted, let alone conviction, solely because of his/her thoughts, articles or criticisms.
- ☑ Although our Constitution and the international convention to which Turkey is a part assure freedom of press, the judiciary has been taking political decisions under pressure. The judiciary organ of this country, which is supposed to be independent, must issue judgments that safeguard individual rights and freedoms, based on the rule of law, rather than political judgments.
- ☑ The Constitutional Court must quickly review the individual applications filed by arrested journalists on the grounds of the infringement of their rights, and issue judgments quickly in the light of precedent judgments. Local courts must recognize the binding nature of the judgments of Constitutional Court.
- ☑ Internet ban or access blocking decisions must not be applied without a court judgment issued for that purpose.
- ☑ Press cards must be issued by professional organizations and labor unions of journalists, rather than the government, within the framework of common principles.
- ☑ Paper supply must be handled as a state policy, and paper production must be included among the sectors with strategic priority. Comprehensive infrastructure investments must be developed in the field of paper production.
- ☑ Exchange rates must be fixed for the newspapers and publication sector. The VAT payable for paper imports must be reduced from

- 8 percent to 1 percent, the VAT for printing materials from 198 percent to 8 percent. the 17 percent income tax and 18 percent VAT levied on authors and translators must be abolished.
- ☺ The outstanding VAT credits of printing houses, which have exceeded 2 billion TL, must be paid as soon as possible so that they continue operation.
  - ☺ Incentives must be offered to ease the access to finance by small and medium sized enterprises.
  - ☺ In order to percent redundancies by newspapers in a sector where unemployment rate is already high, tax and insurance contribution payments must be postponed until a certain date.
  - ☺ The government must provide subsidies for paper, taxes and insurance contributions in order to support the viability of media and publishing sector.
  - ☺ Press Advertisement Authority must increase official advertisement fees at a rate that will help newspapers survive.
  - ☺ Press Advertisement Authority must arrange interest-free loan facilities for the local press in Anatolia.
  - ☺ Steps must be taken so that local television channels can also benefit from the facilities offered by Press Advertisement Authority, in addition to printed media.
  - ☺ In order to prevent monopolization in distribution and create a competitive environment, supportive and incentivizing discounts and practices may be introduced to safeguard newspapers and magazines. A preferably autonomous or public oversight mechanism must be established so that the organs of press are not negatively affected from this monopolization.
  - ☺ Ministry of Treasury and Finance must immediately implement measures to help newspapers survive, and the financial burdens on newspapers must be alleviated this year as well.

## **HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST YEAR FOR JOURNALISTS**

### **JANUARY 5**

Journalist Ayşenur Arslan was sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year and 2 months on the grounds of ‘insulting the President’.

A suit has been initiated against Ahmet Şık, *Cumhuriyet* Correspondent, for one of his tweets, on being reported by Anatolian News Agency correspondent with a note that reads ‘Investigate him for God’s sake’.

### **JANUARY 8**

A suit has been initiated against Alican Uludağ, Ankara Correspondent of *Cumhuriyet*, on the grounds of violating the confidentiality of investigation through his news report titled “Public Prosecutor urging for ‘Yes’ votes in the referendum attends FETÖ meeting”. As a result of the one-year trial process, Uludağ has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 10 months.

### **JANUARY 11**

The Constitutional Court ruled that the rights of columnists Mehmet Altan and Şahin Alpay, who have been under arrest, and previously released Turhan Günay have been violated. However, the local court did not release Mehmet Altan and Şahin Alpay despite the decision of the Constitutional Court. Altan and Alpay could only be released months later. Alpay was subjected to home confinement after release.

### **JANUARY 15**

A compensation suit of 1.5 million has been filed against Çiğdem Toker, *Cumhuriyet* columnist, due to her article titled “Tomato Exports to Russia from ‘Bayburt’”.

### **JANUARY 16**

European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) decided on the application filed by the daily *Yeni Evrensel*, the operation of which has been suspended, and sentenced Turkey on the grounds infringing the freedom of expression.



In the suit initiated against journalists who supported the “Editors on Duty” movement in collaboration with the daily *Özgür Gündem*; Hüseyin Aykol has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 3 years and 9 months, Hüseyin Bektaş,

Mehmet Ali Çelebi, Ayşe Düzkan and Ragıp Duran have been sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year and 6 months each. Ayşe Düzkan went into the prison at the beginning of 2019 after her penalty became final.

### **JANUARY 25**

It has been reported that the dailies Cumhuriyet, BirGün, Evrensel and Özgürlükçü Demokrasi are not distributed to prisoners at Menemen Prison.

### **JANUARY 26**

Turkey urged Facebook, Twitter and Youtube to remove the postings against Afrin operation.

### **JANUARY 30**

An investigation has been initiated against journalist Şerife Oruç, who resisted to naked body search while being transferred from Mardin Type E Prison to Elazığ Type T Prison.

### **JANUARY 31**

RTÜK imposed a fine of more than 1 million TL on TV8 due to the phrase “God Father” in the lyrics of the song “7 Kocalı Hürmüz” performed in the program ‘Yetenek Sizsiniz’ (*Turkish version of Got Talent*).

### **FEBRUARY 2**

Ümit Kartal, Editor-in-Chief of the daily İZ, was detained in a police raid to the İzmir office of the daily.

### **FEBRUARY 12**

Ahmet Altan, Mehmet Altan and Nazlı Ilıcak were sentenced to heavy life imprisonment.

### **FEBRUARY 13**

The 25-year imprisonment penalty imposed on CHP Istanbul Deputy Enis Berberoğlu on the grounds of the allegation that he has provided

the images of MİT trucks to *Cumhuriyet* has been reversed. The Court of Appeals decided that Enis Berberoğlu must be sentenced to imprisonment of 5 years and 10 months. The court decided that the arrest of Enis Berberoğlu must continue.

### **FEBRUARY 15**

RTÜK imposed a fine of approximately 1 million TL on Show TV on the grounds that the ‘beeped’ swearwords in the TV series “Çukur” can be figured out from lip movements, compared with the ‘un-beeped’ internet version.

### **FEBRUARY 20**

Journalist and author Nurcan Baysal was sentenced to an imprisonment of 10 months because of an article she wrote about the period of prohibition in Cizre.

### **FEBRUARY 21**

Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, one of the founders of Mazlum-Der and columnist for *Artı Gerçek*, was sentenced to an imprisonment of 2.5 years on the grounds of a message he posted in social media on September 1, International Day of Peace.

### **MARCH 7**

An investigation has been initiated against Alican Uludağ, *Cumhuriyet* correspondent, because of the news article titled “Prosecutor: Man Island documents real”, after the Public Prosecutor’s Office took a decision of non-prosecution although the Man Island documents disclosed by CHP Chairman Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu were admitted to be real.

### **MARCH 9**

In the suit involving the columnists and managers of *Cumhuriyet*, Murat Sabuncu, the Editor-in-Chief, and journalist Ahmet Şık have been released after 495 days and 434 days under arrest, respectively.

### **MARCH 13**

Access to some articles of Yeniçağ columnist Ahmet Takan has been blocked.

### **MARCH 14**

The building of local television channel TV52, which has been broadcasting for more than 25 years has been sealed on the grounds that the building had incomplete documents with regard to permits. It has been alleged that the television channel's building was sealed since the channel covered some of the incidents of corruption in the government offices in the province.

### **MARCH 15**

Kubilay Çelik, the Responsible Editor-in-Chief of the magazine *Antropolog* has been arrested due to his social media postings.

### **MARCH 16**

Constitutional Court issued a judgment confirming the violation of the rights of arrested journalist Şahin Alpay for the second time.

### **MARCH 17**

Ankara insert of Habertürk daily owned by Ciner Media Group was shut down due to its costs and 7 journalists were dismissed.

### **MARCH 20**

ECHR decided on the applications for Şahin Alpay and Mehmet Altan. The Court ruled that the freedom and security rights of both journalists had been violated.

### **MARCH 21**

Doğan Media Group involving dailies such as *Hürriyet*, *Posta* and *Fanatik* and television channels such as *Kanal D* and *CNN Türk* was sold to Demirören Holding.

Draft Law allowing the Supreme Radio and Television Council (RTÜK) to intervene in digital broadcast platforms was adopted and passed by the Parliament.

### **MARCH 28**

The building of Özgürlükçü *Demokrasi* daily in Beyoğlu and Gün Printing House where the newspaper is printed was raided by police at night. Managers of the newspaper were detained. A trustee was appointed to the management of the newspaper.

### **MARCH 29**

Vural Nasuhbeyođlu, former Responsible Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Evrensel*, and Mehmet Arif Kořar, former Proprietor of the daily, were sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year each for “insulting the President”.

### **APRIL 3**

Hasan Cemal, columnist at T24, who has faced trial again for his series of articles titled “Withdrawal Diary”, was sentenced to an imprisonment of 3 months and 22 days for “propagandizing terrorist organization”.

### **APRIL 5**

Yeliz Koray, columnist at the daily *Kocaeli Koz*, was sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year and 3 months in the suit with charges of “publicly encouraging people for hatred and hostility”.

### **APRIL 11**

A suit has been initiated against ađrı Sarı, former Responsible Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Evrensel*, due to his news reports on ‘Paradise Papers’, with charges of “insult” and “slander”, following the complaints filed by Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Berat Albayrak and his brother Serhat Albayrak.

### **APRIL 15**

An investigation has been initiated against Cansu Piřkin, a reporter of *Evrensel*, after she covered the investigation as a result of which Bođaziđi University students were arrested.

### **APRIL 17**

Author İhsan Eliaçık was sentenced to an imprisonment of 6 years and 3 months because of a speech he delivered in a conference, but he was released through a judicial control decision.

### **APRIL 19**

Koray alıřkan, columnist and academician, was sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year 6 months and 22 days. His penalty has been deferred.

**APRIL 24**

FOX TV presenter İsmail Küçükkaya was sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year 4 months and 20 days in total in two suits.

**APRIL 25**

In *Cumhuriyet* case, managers and columnists of the newspaper were sentenced to imprisonment between 3 years and 7 years.

**APRIL 26**

Barış Erkaya, Editor-in-Chief of the website of Habertürk, was fired after publishing a news coverage on the visit paid by Presidency Spokesman İbrahim Kalın and Chief of General Staff Huklusi Akar to Abdullah Gül in order to convince him not run as Presidential candidate.

**MAY 9**

Kemal Sancılı, proprietor of the daily *Özgür Gündem* was arrested.

**MAY 15**

A prosecution was started against Sibel Hürtaş, Ankara representative of Artı TV, and journalist Hayri Demir, due to the news coverage during “Afrin Operation”, with a plea for imprisonment of 10.5 years.

**MAY 22**

Bülent Şık, a Chemical Engineer, faced an investigation for a series of articles published in the daily *Cumhuriyet* with the title “Government conceals the products that caused cancer in Turkey, but we unveil them! Here is the list of toxins!”.

**MAY 24**

The number of redundancies at Doğan Media Group that was sold to Demirören Holding exceeded 50.

**MAY 25**

A compensation suit of 1.5 million has been filed against Çiğdem Toker, *Cumhuriyet* columnist, due to her article on “Şenbay Mining Company”.

**MAY 29**

Hayri Demir, former DİHA correspondent, was sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year 6 months 22 days for commemorating the journalists killed during the ‘90s in his Facebook account.

### **MAY 31**

Çağdaş Kaplan, former editor of *Gazete Karınca* and Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Yeni Yaşam*, was sentenced to an imprisonment of 6 years and 3 months for “being a member of terrorist organization”.

### **JUNE 6**

An investigation has been initiated against FOX TV newscaster Fatih Portakal and Responsible Manager İbrahim Onur Kumbaracıbaşı because of their news coverage on Mersin City Hospital.

The suit filed against *Cumhuriyet* correspondent Canan Coşkun with charges of “targeting individuals involved in the combat against terrorism”, after her news report on the arrest of attorneys, has started.

### **JUNE 8**

Journalist Ece Sevim Öztürk, the Editor-in-Chief of *Çağdaş Ses*, was arrested in Istanbul. She was sentenced to an imprisonment of 3 years 1 month 15 days, and then released.

### **JUNE 21**

A compensation suit of 500,000 TL has been filed against *Cumhuriyet* by former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and his sons, because of the ‘Paradise Papers’ news coverage.

### **JUNE 26**

MHP Chairman Devlet Bahçeli targeted certain journalists, authors and newspapers in a newspaper advertisements he published after the June 24 elections.

### **JUNE 27**

The police raided the office of Sendika.org website in Şişli, İstanbul at night hours.

### **JUNE 28**

Alaattin Çakıcı, leader of organized criminal organization, threatened the managers and columnists of the daily *Karar* from the prison where he is kept as a convicted.

## **JUNE 29**

Eren Erdem, member of CHP Party Assembly was arrested due to the news reports he published when he was Editor-in-Chief of *Karşı* newspaper when it was operational in 2014.

## **JULY 5**

Printed version of Habertürk Newspaper has been shut down and many journalists have been dismissed.

## **JULY 6**

Decision has been taken in the suit involving the managers and Zaman Newspaper. Şahin Alpay, Ali Bulaç and Ahmet Turan Alkan were sentenced to an imprisonment of 8 years and 9 months. The 10 year 6 month imprisonment sentence for Mümtazer Türköne and Mustafa Ünal continue to be enforced. İhsan Duran Dağı, Lalezar Sarı- ibrahimoğlu, Mehmet Özdemir, Nuriye Ural and Orhan Kemal Cengiz were acquitted from all charged.

## **JULY 7**

Implying the printed version of Habertürk Newspaper, Binali Yıldırım said” We have shut down one of them, and only one is left now”.

## **JULY 8**

The dailies *Halkın Nabzı*, *Özgürlükçü Demokrasi* and *Welat* were shut down by Decree-Law.

A broadcast ban has been introduced regarding the train accident that occurred in Çorlu, killing 25 people.

## **JULY 9**

Şerife Oruç, the correspondent of Dicle News Agency (DİHA), was arrested again as soon as she was released at Elazığ Type T Prison.

## **JULY 10**

Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak, who filed a suit against Pelin Ünker, correspondent of *Cumhuriyet*, for reporting the Panama Papers leaks, had an access blocking decision issued for the twitter accounts of Turkish Union of Journalists and Reporters Without Borders who called for solidarity before the suit.

## **JULY 12**

An investigation has been issued against the daily *BirGün*, regarding the news report on ISIS attack in Ortaköy, Istanbul on 1 January 2017.

## **JULY 16**

Erdem Gül, Ankara Representative of *Cumhuriyet*, appeared before the judge again after the Supreme Court of Appeals reversed the 5 year imprisonment sentence issued by the “MIT Trucks” suit involving the newspaper’s Editor-in-Chief Can Dündar as well. Erdem Gül was acquitted.

## **JULY 18**

The book “4 idam 1 tanık (*4 Death Sentences, 1 Witness*)” of Akın Bodur, *Cumhuriyet correspondent*, published on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of Cumhuriyet has been collected from bookstores.

## **JULY 19**

Canan Coşkun, *Cumhuriyet* correspondent, was detained and then sentenced to imprisonment of 2 years and 3 months due to her news report on the interrogation of detained attorneys at the Public Prosecutor’s Office.

## **JULY 20**

Journalist Zeynep Kuray was detained while following up the commemoration organized in Kadıköy on the occasion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of Suruç Massacre.

## **JULY 24**

Through a Presidential Decree, introduced by the new Presidential Government system, the Press Publication and Information Directorate General and TRT have been attached to the Presidential Communication Department. RTÜK has been affiliated with the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

## **AUGUST 1**

Journalist Oğuz Güven has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 6 months due to a caricature posted on the website of *Cumhuriyet*.



## **AUGUST 7**

Yazgülu Aldoğan, columnist of the daily *Posta*, was fired after she shared in her social media account messages that the privates who joined the Failed Coup Attempt of July 15 upon the orders of their commanders are unjustly detained.

## **AUGUST 11**

Journalist Sedat Bozkurt, who has been serving as the Ankara representative of FOX TV since 2007, was dismissed.

## **AUGUST 15**

The weekend inserts of the daily *Sözcü* were shut down, 10 members of press became unemployed.

## **AUGUST 21**

The daily *Aydınlık* declared that they would not publish the newspaper for three days, stating “we have to suspend our publication for three days due to paper constraints”.

## **AUGUST 25**

The 700<sup>th</sup> week demonstration of Saturday Mothers who convene at Galatasaray Square has been banned, while many people have been detained including Faruk Eren, Journalist and Chairman of DİSK Press Labor Union, Osman Akın, Editor-in-Chief of *Yeni Yaşam* Newspaper, and Hasan Akbaba, an employee of the newspaper.

## **SEPTEMBER 2**

Seven local newspapers published in İzmir decided to stop publication on Sundays because of the increase in paper prices.

## **SEPTEMBER 4**

Kemal Yavuzel, news coordinator of *Dokuz8HABER*, was sentenced to an imprisonment of 10 months for publishing the voice recordings unveiled during the December 17-25 corruption operations.

## **SEPTEMBER 5**

Journalist Şirin Payzın has been fired from CNN Türk, after Doğan Group was sold to Demirören Media Group.

## **SEPTEMBER 6**

In Aydın, the local daily *Özgür Ses* decided to publish the newspaper only once a week due to increased paper prices.

## **SEPTEMBER 7**

Fatih Polat, Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Evrensel*, has been sentenced to a fine of 10,000 TL for the news article titled “High school student detained in the class”.

## **SEPTEMBER 12**

In Ankara, Austrian journalist Max Zirngast, has been detained and then arrested for “membership of terrorist organization”.

## **SEPTEMBER 13**

Vural Nasuhbeyođlu, former Responsible Editor-in-Chief of *Evrensel*, and Arif Koşar, former Proprietor of the Newspaper, were sentenced to fines of 7,000 TL in the suit for “insulting the President”.

## **SEPTEMBER 13**

An investigation has been initiated against FOX TV newscaster Fatih Portakal, with an accusation of insulting the President, after his social media posting about Barış Atay’s play titled ‘Sadece Diktatör (*Just Dictator*)’.

## **SEPTEMBER 14**

Turkey’s economic daily *Dünya*, which reduced the number of pages of the newspaper following the increase in paper prices, dismissed 40 employees.

## **SEPTEMBER 15**

Bülent Kılıç, photojournalist of international news agency AFP, was detailed while following up a demonstration in Kadıköy, Istanbul.

## **SEPTEMBER 16**

“The Regulation on Official Announcements and Advertisements and the Periodicals to Publish Them”, of Press Advertisement Authority (BİK) has been amended. Accordingly, the number of correspondents required to be published by common newspapers has been reduced from 7 to 6.

## **SEPTEMBER 17**

The daily *Vatan* attached to Demirören Holding declared that its weekend inserts had been suspended due to the increase in paper prices.

## **SEPTEMBER 19**

Mustafa Kara, İsmail Gökhan Bayram and Gökhan Çetin, the managers of television channel Hayatın Sesi TV, which has been shut down by Decree-Law have been sentenced to an imprisonment of 11 years and 3 months in total.

## **SEPTEMBER 20**

The 16<sup>th</sup> Criminal Department of Supreme Court of Appeals, approved the 5 years and 10 month imprisonment penalty imposed on CHP Istanbul Deputy Enis Berberoğlu, for the offense of disclosing confidential information, in the suit initiated with the allegation that he shared the images of the MİT Trucks with Can DüNDAR, former Editor-in-Chief of Cumhuriyet. It has been decided to stop the enforcement of his penalty until the end of his term as deputy and to release him

## **SEPTEMBER 21**

The correspondents who went to the scene of a collapse at an illegally operated coal mine in Zonguldak were attacked, and İHA correspondent Barış Doğan was injured.

## **SEPTEMBER 22**

An investigation has been initiated against Alican Uludağ, Cumhuriyet correspondent, and Duygu Güvenç, former *Cumhuriyet* correspondent, about their news article titled “Judicial analysis of a release: Is it the judiciary or state that detains and releases him?” on US Pastor Brunson who was kept under home confinement in İzmir..

## **SEPTEMBER 24**

Ergün Demir, Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Astakos Haber* in Kocaeli, was detained for a news report about İsmail Devrim who committed suicide because who could not afford to buy schools pants for his son.

## **SEPTEMBER 28**

Journalist Abdulkadir Turay, who has been under arrest for more than 2 years, has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 9 years for because of the information notes he received from his source.

## **OCTOBER 2**

Fadıl Öztürk, a columnist of Artı Gerçek, has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year and 10 months but the sentence has been deferred.

RTÜK imposed a fine on FOX TV on the grounds that the news report about Mersin City Hospital violated the principle that “a news report cannot be broadcast before confirming its truth”.

A lawsuit for mental anguish, valued at 1 million TL, has been filed against Odatv for a news story about the operations on the *Sarals* group.

Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi was killed at the Consulate of Saudi Arabia in Istanbul, where he went together with his fiancé to obtain the documents required for marriage, on October 2.

## **OCTOBER 3**

The Appellate Court approved the judgment of heavy life imprisonment issued for six journalists and media workers, including Ahmet Altan, Mehmet Altan and Nazlı Ilıcak.

## **OCTOBER 5**

Correspondents of *Cumhuriyet* have not been accredited for the camp of AKP organized in Kızılcahamam.

## **OCTOBER 10**

FOX TV correspondent has been prevented from asking a question to Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Bekir Pakdemirli about the allegations that tenders were held ex-post, for the meat imported by Turkey. Pakdemirli later responded to FOX TV correspondent, saying “You are trying to damage the prestige of state by unimportant things. What you do is not journalism but foolery”.

Seda Taşkın, correspondent of Mesopotamia News Agency, has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 7 years and 6 months.

## **OCTOBER 12**

A lawsuit has been initiated against Alican Uludağ and Duygu Güvenç, *Cumhuriyet* correspondents, on the grounds that “they have publisly

humiliated the judicial organs of state”, because of their news reports about Pastor Brunson who was tried under arrest for two years in Turkey.

### **OCTOBER 25**

FOX TV news team, who had raised the allegations that 300-truck full of meat had been imported to Turkey without any tender and had been prevented from asking this question to the Minister, was taken out of the conference hall they went to follow up the press conference of Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Bekir Pakdemirli.

Hüseyin Aykol, Editor-in-Chief of *Özgür Gündem*, and İnan Kızılkaya, Editor of *Özgür Gündem*, were sentenced to a fine of 1 year 10 months and 26 days each for insulting President Tayyip Erdoğan. *Evrensel* columnist İhsan Çaralan was also sentenced to an imprisonment of 11 months and 20 days.

### **OCTOBER 30**

Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu threatened *Cumhuriyet* newspaper from his social media account, because of the daily’s news report titled “Commander declared during live broadcast: New cold weather clothes were sent last week”.

### **NOVEMBER 1**

The daily *Vatan*, which was established in 2002, has been shut down.

### **NOVEMBER 5**

The 46-year old ANKA News Agency has been shut down due to economic difficulties.

### **NOVEMBER 6**

An investigation has been initiated against Nurcan Gökdemir, from the daily *BirGün*, for insulting the President in the news story titled ‘He goes wherever Albayrak goes’.

*Hürriyet* columnist Ayşe Baykal declared that she recently faced a censorship she could not understand, and that she stopped writing articles for *Hürriyet*.

## **NOVEMBER 8**

Evrensel has been sentenced to pay 10,000 TL in damages for mental anguish, because of the caricature illustrating Binali Yıldırım and his son Erkan Yıldırım, in relation to Paradise Papers.

Journalist Hüsni Mahalli has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 2 years 5 months and 5 days for “insulting the President” in the visual and printed media, and to an imprisonment of 1 year 8 months and 25 days for “insulting public officials working in a board”.

## **NOVEMBER 9**

Sedat Sur, correspondent of Özgürüz, has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 11 months and 20 days for his news story titles “Profiteering by the Trustee” about Mardin metropolitan Municipality where a trustee has been appointed as mayor.

## **NOVEMBER 12**

In a declaration posted on its website, Karar Newspaper stated that they were exposed to an embargo of advertisements.

## **NOVEMBER 20**

A lawsuit has been initiated against Alican Uludağ, *Cumhuriyet* correspondent, for his news story about a notice of warning served on BİM supermarkets for unfairly using the Apple brand iPhone 6 model mobile phone accessories.

## **NOVEMBER 22**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Criminal Court of First Instance of Istanbul sentenced İbrahim Aydın, the Proprietor of BirGün Newspaper, to a deferred imprisonment of 11 months and 20 days for insulting the President on the grounds of publishing the allegations that “the government supported jihadist forces in Syria”.

Journalist Murat Aksoy, who had remained under arrest for many months due to his articles Aksoy, had to go back to prison again as his penalty of 2 years and 1 month imprisonment has been approved.

## **NOVEMBER 24**

A lawsuit has been initiated against Fatih Polat, the Editor-in-Chief of the daily *Evrensel*, for insulting the President in an article titled “What do counterparts say about these allegations on Erdoğan family?”.

## **NOVEMBER 27**

A group of 150 people including AKP Istanbul Deputy Abdurrahim Boynukalın attacked the building of Hurriyet on 6 September 2015 after the daily published a news story on President Erdoğan’s remarks “*These would not have occurred if we had been granted 400 Deputies*” referring to the general elections held on 7 June 2015. Hurriyet building was attacked a second time 2 days later. While the 5<sup>th</sup> Criminal Court of First Instance of Bakırköy acquitted 25 out of 26 people who performed the attack, one suspect was sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year and 8 months for “violating workplace immunity at nighttime” and a fine of 2,000 TL for “damaging properties”. Penalties have been deferred for 5 years.

## **NOVEMBER 29**

The request for release filed by photojournalist İsmınaz Temel, who had been tried under arrest for 13 months, has been turned down on the grounds of the risk of absconding and tampering with evidence.

Yazgülü Aldoğan, *Cumhuriyet* columnist, has been sentenced to an administrative fine of 1,740 TL for “insulting statesmen” in an article who wrote in 2017 where she alleged that President Tayyip Erdoğan propagandized the terrorist organization. The fine has been deferred.

## **NOVEMBER 30**

The sentence of 9 years and 9 months imprisonment imposed on five journalists (Hüseyin Aykol, Ayşe Düzkan, Mehmet Ali Çelebi, Hüseyin Bektaş, Ragıp Duran) who have participated in the “Editor on Duty” campaign organized for solidarity with the daily *Özgür Gündem* which has been shut down, has become final.

## **DECEMBER 3**

Minister of Interior Süleyman Soylu threatened Cumhuriyet on his twitter account for the daily’s headline ‘Pro-Berat, Pro-Soylu, Pro-Bilal Groups’.

## **DECEMBER 4**

the Constitutional Court ruled that the “freedom of expression and press” had been violated through the restriction of access judgment issued for the news story titled “It’s harassment, not warm business relations!”, which was published on the website bianet.org 12 years ago.

## **DECEMBER 6**

Access to the website Sendika.org has been blocked by the Information Technologies and Communication Authority for the 62<sup>nd</sup> time.

Hasan Cemal, T24 columnist, gave a statement within the framework of the investigation initiated upon an anonymous complaint filed in relation to his article titles “Authoritarianism and Dictator”.

## **DECEMBER 7**

Berivan Bila, final grade student at the Journalism department of the Communication faculty of Karadeniz Technical University Karadeniz Teknik was arrested for insulting the President in an article she wrote in 2017, titled “Department of Journalism -Lesson 1: Journalism is not a crime”.

## **DECEMBER 10**

A lawsuit has been initiated against 5 people including *Sözcü* columnists Emin Çölaşan and Necati Doğru and the daily’s Editor-in-Chief Metin Yılmaz with a plea for imprisonment of 7.5 years to 15 years, on the grounds of the charge of “intentionally assisting the FETÖ armed terrorist organization although they are not included in the organization’s hierarchical structure”.

## **DECEMBER 11**

An article written by Melis Gönenç about Ruhi Su has been removed from the culture and arts page of pro-Government daily *Star*. In addition, Gönenç was fired without being paid any compensation on the grounds of the provision ‘violating the rules of morality and good will’ in the Labor Law.



### **DECEMBER 17**

President and AKP Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdoğan targeted journalist Fatih Portakal with his remarks “(referring to the surname of *Fatih Portakal*, which means orange in Turkish) Somebody, I do not know if he is orange, mandarin or citrus, calls people to streets. Know your place. If you do not know your place, this nation will hit you in the back of your neck. Nobody can play games with my nation’s honor. Just because you have found a place on the screen, you cannot call people to streets. It would have a very heavy cost.”

### **DECEMBER 18**

Cumhuriyet columnist Yazgülu Aldoğan has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 10 months because of her social media postings dated 15 September 2016. The penalty has been deferred.

### **DECEMBER 19**

In response to the motion for interrogation raised by CHP Izmir Deputy Atila Sertel, Vice President Fuat Oktay stated that 1,954 press cards had been cancelled during the past three years.

### **DECEMBER 20**

Cumhuriyet columnist Işıl Özgentürk has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 5 months because of her articles titled “In the darkness of chador” dated 13 August 2017 and “Religion and Socialists” dated 27 August 2017. The penalty has been deferred.

An investigation has been initiated against Cumhuriyet correspondent Seyhan Aşar due to her news story titled “He would live 300 days, don’t worry”.

Twenty-two journalists have been dismissed by [yenisafak.com.tr](http://yenisafak.com.tr) and [gzt.com](http://gzt.com), and eight journalists by the daily *Yeni Şafak*, which are all affiliated with Albayrak Media Group.

### **DECEMBER 21**

Journalist Murat Güreş, member of editorial board at the news websites *Gaziantep Yurt Haberler* and *Dev Haber*, has been sentenced to an imprisonment of 1 year 2 months and 17 days on the grounds that

he insulted policy through social media. In addition, Güreş has been deprived of he parental custody rights for his two children until the penalty is executed.

### **DECEMBER 23**

After the remarks of President and AKP Chairman Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, an investigation has been initiated against Metin Akpınar and Müjdat Gezen. Akpınar and Gezen were brought to the Justice Court , under police escort, to give their statement.

### **DECEMBER 26**

RTÜK imposed fines and penalties on HALK TV and FOX TV for “provoking the society for hatred and hostility, and setting of feelings of hatred in the society”. According to the fines and penalties applied at the upper limit, FOX Prime News has been subjected to suspension of broadcasts for three times and almost 1 million TL fine, while the program “Halk Arenası” on HALK TV has been subjected to suspension of broadcasts for three times and a fine of 80,000 TL Lawyers note that these are the heaviest penalties imposed on a media institution, and they their licenses could be cancelled if they are repeated.

### **DECEMBER 28**

An investigation has been initiated against FOX TV Prime News Anchorman Fatih Portakal by Bakırköy Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office for alleged “provocation for committing a crime” upon complaints filed in relation to his comments on Yellow Vest Protests in France on 10 December 2018.

### **DECEMBER 30**

Ahmet Altıok, Mufti of Siirt, threatened the staff of Odatv news website, reminding the Charlie Hebdo massacre perpetrated by ISIS in France, during an interview with İLKHA agency affiliated with Hüda- Par, which is known to have close relations with Hizbullah.



**LOCAL PRESS IN  
TURKEY**

Local press, which assumed a critical role during the years of national struggle for liberalization, was defined by Atatürk as “islands of virtue”. During the national struggle for liberalization, local press acted as a perfect means of communication, and played a critical role in the battlefield and behind the battlefield, contributing significantly to the success of war of independence. There is a strong link between local press and democracy. Local press acts as an instrument that strengthens democratic life and provides democracy with the space to breathe more healthily.

During the years of war of liberalization, local press has been very instrumental in fortifying and informing Turkish people, ensuring the organization of national struggle and creating a public support for resistance to occupation forces.

In the fight of Atatürk and his fellow friends for national independence, the success in political and military aspects has ensured the foundation of Republic of Turkey, while the victory of pro-national struggle press in the fight between the pro-national struggle press and the armistice press in the field of journalism has laid a strong brick in the foundations of the new Republic of Turkey.

The first newspapers which have pioneered local press in Turkey were the “province newspapers” published during the Ottoman period. Local press was later referred to as “Anatolian press” as well.

## **DEFINITION OF LOCAL PRESS**

Local press plays a very key role in voicing the problems of local people, highlighting local features and creating a public opinion. these are also the expectations of readers from local press. However, local press organs have been experiencing various difficulties in meeting the expectations of their readers because of the pressures exerted by local administrations in particular.

The mission of press in criticizing the administration and conveying the problems originating from the administration to readers has resulted in various prohibitions and restrictions applied by groups holding political

power on the press. Governments could not internalize democracy and blamed the press for the social unrests that have arisen in Turkish society, instead of questioning themselves.

In general terms, local press consists of means of mass communication intended to inform, educate, entertain the local community and thus contribute to the formation of a free public opinion within a narrow and defined local area. Local press is defined as newspapers published and read only in a specific area and covering local news and issues as different from national press". They get their strength from their ability to report the problems of the cities where they are circulated, and to act as the eyes, ears and voice of the local residents.

With regard to democracy and pluralism, particularly where laws fall short in meeting the needs, local press is the strongest force that can cover this gap. In countries where discussions over democratic life are very intensive, like Turkey, this fact becomes even more highlighted. Local press is key to democratic life and education, but can it meet these expectations in Turkey?

The current outlook demonstrates that local press is losing increasingly more ground. It is quite meaningful that local press is remembered particularly during terms of local elections and the number of newspapers and magazines increases particularly during local elections. On the other hand, it is another noteworthy fact that local press is more widespread and strong in regions which are industrially and economically strong.

## **LOCAL ADMINISTRATIONS AND LOCAL PRESS**

In general, free and independent press is recognized as an indispensable prerequisite of democracies. This is because democracies essentially require polyvocality, freedom of expression of thoughts and supervision of administrations by the community. Such an environment can only be secured through free communication. Today, media and communication provide the forum where this can be achieved. The press performs the function of supervision of legislation, administration and judiciary on behalf of the public and is named the fourth pillar of democracy.



The ultimate areas where democracy become functional are neighborhoods, villages, counties, districts and provinces. Thus, one of the paths leading to democracy passes from local units. An awareness of democracy that is rooted at local units vivifies democracy in a nation.

From the perspective of press, we see that the functions and missions of local press are vital for democracies. It is the local press that connects the administrators with the public in cities. democracy can soundly function if local press can fully perform the function of press, i.e. polyvocality and supervision of administration.

In local units, the administrators, the public and local press interact with each other almost every day in a narrower framework. They are fully engaged with problems. In this sense, the presence of free and independent press must be viewed as a chance by the administrations since the local press would held them better learn about the views, requests and criticisms of the local community, and help them provide better services to the community.

If the press accurately reflects the developments taking place in its locality, in the country and in the world, and correctly and honestly informs people, i.e. publicizes the success, failures, problems and corrupt practices

of administrations, then local people can have reliable information about administrations. Citizens equipped with reliable and objective information will be able to use such news and information when making their political choices during elections. Thus, democracy will have the chance to function soundly and properly.

If the press hides facts from the people, or reports news in a misleading, incomplete or exaggerated manner, i.e. misinforms the public, people will not be able to make soundly and properly informed political choices, which would ultimately obstruct the sound and proper functioning of democracy. For this reason, local press has vital role to play in democracies.

## **WEAKNESSES OF LOCAL PRESS**

Local press and broadcast institutions feature some positive and negative aspects within themselves. While being local and small brings about certain advantages, they also offer various advantages in many respects. One of the most important shortcomings of local press is their efforts to have full command of, and report, the city's agenda with few staff. Almost all of the local press institutions operate with number of staff required by the Press Advertisement Authority. In addition, vast majorities of these employees are paid very low wages. The insufficiency of staff, and the low-paid and low-qualified profile of the existing staff result in a weak content of the local newspapers. The financial dissatisfaction of local press institutions also results in the resignations.

On the other hand, the financial difficulties experienced by local press has recently facilitated the leakage of irresponsible capital into the press. This has attracted business people whose primary line of business is not journalism into then press sector. This trend is observed not only in mainstream media but also in local press. Particularly in regions with high average income level some business people invest capital into press for their simple personal interests and increasingly exploit the force of press as an instrument to solve their personal problems. Thus, in many regions, local press has gone under the control of certain people rather than serving public good as a reliable institution.

Today, local newspapers lack an extensive distribution network for sales. Many local newspapers are distributed by mail, which negatively affects the costs of newspapers. There are still newspapers printed through the old-fashioned typo-system in an age of rapid technological advancements.

Local newspapers have been late in catching up with technology. Technical insufficiencies lead to various negative consequences ranging from the page layout of newspapers, to printing and distribution. Since official advertisement revenues are insufficient, a vast majority of newspapers use their printing machines to print the brochures, leaflets and other minor printing works of various companies. The newspaper is financed by part of the extra income generated from these activities. Financial constraints and the associated insufficiencies of professional staff lower the quality of contents and page setting.

Because of the low levels of reading habit in the society, the demand for local press has not reached desired levels in Anatolia. the demand for local press is unfortunately very insufficient in Anatolian provinces other than Bursa, Eskişehir and Kocaeli. As a matter of fact, the local newspapers which cannot generate sufficient financial income from newspaper ads and official announcements, cannot also reach a satisfactory number of readers and thus lack any contribution from sales.

Under these circumstances, it is very difficult for local press institutions to offer their readers the level of quality offered by extensive press institutions. Thus, the local press in Turkey is literally struggling to survive.

In this case, local press has to sustain operations under the same conditions with extensive press in order to remain viable. Strong press institutions with increased efficiency will play a key role in helping the public hear different voices, which would contribute to strengthening and sustaining democracy.

## **CURRENT STATE OF LOCAL PRESS**

According to the printed media statistics of Turkish Statistics Agency; the number of newspapers and magazines decreased by 2.3 percent between



2016 and 2017, and fell to 3,124, of which 59.6 percent consists of magazines.

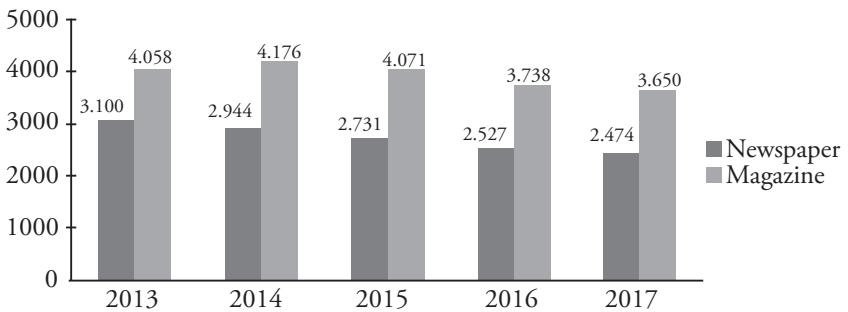
The circulation of newspapers and magazines decreased by 2.6 percent in 2017 relative to 2016. The total annual circulation of newspapers and magazines public in the country in 2017 amounted to 1,661,102,580, of which 93.9 percent consisted of newspapers.

90.8 percent of the newspapers published in Turkey in 2017 had local a coverage, 7.1 percent had a national and 2.1 percent had a regional coverage. 61.2 percent of magazines had extensive (national) coverage, 33.7 percent local and 5.1 percent regional coverage.

Of the newspapers, 30.4 percent were published weekly, 26 percent were published two to six days a week and 15.7 percent were published monthly. For magazines, 24.8 percent were published monthly, 22.1 percent quarterly and 16.2 percent biannually. Inserts were provided by 11.8 percent of newspapers and 8.4 percent of magazines.

88.3 percent of newspapers addressed politics/news/actual issues, 2 percent addressed sectoral/professional subjects while 1.9 percent of them dealt with local administrations. 18.4 percent of magazines had sectoral / professional contents, 13.7 percent academic contents and 7.2 percent dealt with education and exams.

Number of newspapers and magazines across years, 2013-2017



## **PRESS LOSING POWER**

Journalism and printing sector has been undergoing a tough process in Turkey. Due to organs of press shut down (by the government or by themselves) unemployment rate has reached 30 percent and the number of journalists who have become unemployed has exceeded 10,000 during the past 10 years. According to the data of Turkish Statistics Agency, newspaper circulations have been declining since 2014.

In response to the Parliamentary question of Republican People's Party Izmir Deputy Atila Sertel, Vice President Fuat Oktay has provided the following information: "The number of members of press with press card is 15,206. There are 581 applications pending evaluation at the Press Card Commission. The procedures for cancellation of press cards are carried out within the framework of Article 29 of the Regulation on Press Cards.

1,954 press cards were cancelled between 1 January 2016 and 29 November 2018. Following the treacherous coup attempt on July 15, the press cards of 705 people working at the media institutions shut down on the grounds that they are owned by or have links with the organizations that threat national security, and who have been removed from office or dismissed for the same reasons, have been cancelled."

One of the reasons why journalists have been losing their power in Turkey is the continued deterioration of freedom of press in the country. According to Internet Freedom 2018 report of US-based think-tank Freedom House, Turkey has been downgraded to the category of "countries with no freedom" from the category of "countries with partial freedom". However, the economic reflections of this loss of power are controversial.

On the one hand, newspapers lose readers, circulation and advertisement revenues as their oppositional identity is eroded. On the other hand, there is a major role played by the government in the distribution of advertisements. While pro-government newspapers are supported by advertisements and announcements, gradually decreasing number of opposition newspapers revenue no advertisements. The extent by which pro-government newspapers can survive if they lack this support is contested.

## **STATE OF EMERGENCY**

The state of emergency, which was first declared on 21 July 2016 after the failed coup attempt of July 15 and extended by quarterly periods for seven times, ended on July 17, 2018 as it was not extended any more after two years of implementation. During this process, many newspapers, magazines, news agencies and television channels have been shut down due to their affiliations with FETÖ.

A total of 178 media institutions were shut down during the state of emergency, and the decision for shutdown was reversed for only 9 of them. During the state of emergency, 15 News Agencies, 70 newspapers, 20 magazines and 29 printing houses were shut down.

In 2016 and 2017, pursuant to Decree-Laws 668, 677 and 688, and the decision of the Commission established by Decree-Law no. 668, a total of 37 radio and 33 television channels (70 in total) were shut down as they were found to be linked to, affiliated with or supportive of organizations or groups found to be threatening national security or terrorist organizations. Pursuant to decree-Laws 675 and 693 and the decision of the subject Commission, the broadcast rights of 4 radio and 4 television channels belonging to 7 institutions were restituted.

## **NEW MEDIA ORDER!**

While this gloomy picture of the media in Turkey has developed slowly and gradually during the single-party rules of AKP, following the last two elections held in recent years, the combat of darkness with enlightenment has transformed into the race of darkness with darkness. The political and social structure of Turkey that used to be based on the division of powers came to an end following the Referendum for Constitutional Amendment of 16 April 2017 and the Elections of 24 June 2018, with all powers delegated to a single person who is at the same time the leader of a political party.

Following the Presidential Elections of 24 June 2018, Presidential decrees have started to be used to totally reorganize the state structure. The impact of this transformation on the media has been two-pronged. The press

related institutions included directly within the government system, such as the Press Publication and Information Directorate General have been attached to Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who is both the leader of AKP and the President, i.e. to the Court, under the Presidential Communication Department.

## **IMPACTS OF THE CRISIS**

Turkish economy was driven into regression in the second half of 2018. Press sector has been the first sector hit by the economic crisis. During the first half of the year when the impacts of crisis had not yet started reflecting to the data, newspapers were faced with financial distress because of paper crisis.

In addition to the global increase in paper prices, the depreciation of Turkish Lira has resulted in an astronomic surges in costs. The rise in exchange rates has increase the price of paper from EUR 750 to EUR 900 per ton, and the price of newspaper paper from USD 450 to USD 800 per ton since last year. Around 300 local newspapers and printing houses were shut down as they did not have sufficient budgets to afford paper. In addition, around 11 publishing houses ceased operation.

The crisis has also shot down some nationally circulated newspapers in the mainstream media, such as Habertürk and Vatan. ANKA news agency has shot down. Printed version of Official Gazette has been abolished. Many newspapers have reduced their number of pages. Some newspapers had to increase newspaper prices relying on their readers. many newspapers resorted to redundancies. Inserts were removed. *Aydınlık* suspended printed publication for three days. Debates over shifting to digital publication have started.

There are close to 3,000 newspapers, of which 1,150 are eligible to publish officials advertisements. As we lack the domestic and local paper production capacity, the import-dependent sector could not have sufficient access to paper, the most important input item of the sector. Although this step is not satisfactory, the Press Advertisement Authority increase advertisement prices in its general assembly dated 28 November, which gave the printed media a short breathe while it was about to die.

While some prestigious newspapers chose to increase newspaper prices in an effort to weather this paper crisis, seven local newspapers in İzmir decided not to publish printed copies on Sundays. The increases in paper prices and printing costs have caused the dailies Yeni Bakış, Ege Telgraf, Dokuz Eylül, Haber Ekspres, İlkse, Ticaret and Yenigün to decide not to publish printed copies in Sundays in İzmir. Newspaper managements decided to issue printed copies for only four days a month in response to the growing costs.

While local newspapers face significant problems all around the country, they have discussed they options of shutdown, reducing the number of days of publication and redundancies. Turkey only produces high-grade paper, which accounts for only 3 percent of the market. Newspaper and book papers are almost entirely imported. Unless measures are taken urgently, many extensive and local newspapers will shot down, and the number of unemployed journalists will increase. The crisis facing printing houses will further deteriorate eventually making it impossible to print books.

## **AMENDMENTS TO REGULATIONS**

Press Advertisement Authority has amended the Regulation on Official Announcements and Advertisements and the Periodicals to Publish Them. For the extensive newspapers and newspapers published in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir, the requirement to employ at least 7 journalists for eligibility to publish advertisements has been reduced to 6 correspondents. Thus, the total minimum staff cadre consisting of chief editor, visual director, page secretary, intelligence chief, correspondents and columnists has decreased to 11.

For newspapers in other provinces, the minimum correspondent requirement has been reduced to 3 from 4; and the minimum staff cadre requirement has been reduced to 6 for these newspapers. While this amendment was not welcomed by press organizations as it would lead to redundancies, they argued that 1,200 people would become unemployed.

Press Advertisement Authority introduced one more amendment to the conditions for publication of official advertisements in newspapers in

September 2018. According to the Regulation Amending the Regulation on Official Announcements and Advertisement, the minimum surface area rates and sales amounts of newspapers have been reduced.

Local press which has been struggling with economic problems and can hardly survive received another hit from the Press Advertisement Authority. The Authority which is actually tasked with maintaining and enhancing local press wants “debt clearance certificates” from newspapers. Accordingly, if a newspaper and magazine which has a credit of more than 2,000 from the Press Advertisement Authority has debts to the government, then such debts shall be withheld by the Press Advertisement Authority and transferred to the related agencies and institutions.

Following the new Government system, the Press Publication and Information Directorate General has been shut down and the Presidential Communication Department has been established. The amendment to the regulation governing credit cards, which has been one of the first actions of the Communication Department, has attracted negative reactions from journalists and their professional organizations.

The regulation concerning press cards was published in the official Gazette in December 2018. Through the addition of the provision “not have committed or adopted as a habit the crimes against national security and public order”, in the section of the regulation concerning cancellations. This provision has further eased the cancellation of press cards.

The new Regulation has also changed the composition of the commission that issues the cards. While all members of labor unions organized in the press sector could take part in the commission before the amendment, the new Regulation calls for only one representative of labor union who will be nominated by the Department.

## **LOCAL TELEVISION CHANNELS**

There are total of 1,792 television and radio channels in our country. Local press has no chance to compete with extensive newspapers and television channels. Be it an extensive channel with budget of millions of Lira or a self-reliant television channel in an Anatolian province, both pay the same fees to RTÜK and TÜRKSAT.



Apart from the initial cost of establishing a television channel, personnel and other expenditures, a license fee in the amount of 25,000 TL must be paid to RTÜK every year. In addition, fees starting from 13,500 USD/month beginning have to be paid to TÜRKSAT. A television channel needs a bandwidth of minimum 3 megabit to maintain a healthy and moderate quality broadcast via TÜRKSAT. This rate must be even higher in the case of digital and HD quality broadcast.

The lease fee for each 1 megabit bandwidth is 5,500 USD + KDV. A television channel that leases a bandwidth of 3 megabit must pay 16,500 USD+VAT every month. In addition, they pay a monthly uplink fee of 2,500 USD + VAT. Therefore, a local television channel that leases a bandwidth of 3 megabit pays 19,000 USD + VAT only to TÜRKSAT every month.

As these fees are already high and denominated in USD, the television channels which used to pay the fees at the USD exchange rate of 3,75 until recently now have to pay it at the exchange rate of 5,25 because of the surge in exchange rates. This corresponds to a fee between 75,500 TL and 11,250 TL in local currency.

Another unfair and inequal practice here is that a television channel broadcasting to the whole country and a television channel broadcasting only to a small Anatolian province pay the same fees.

## **PROBLEMS, REQUESTS, SUGGESTIONS FOR SOLUTION**

The problems faced local press primarily include the recent paper crisis. With paper prices doubling following the exchange rate volatilities, the difficulties ahead of the press sector have peaked. Hit by the volatility in paper prices, many newspapers in Anatolian provinces in particular have shut down, and many more are about to shut down.

The economic crisis affecting newspapers also triggers an unemployment problem. The problems of local press, their requests and suggestions for solution can be outlined as follows:

### **PRESS IS THE GUARANTEE OF DEMOCRACY**

It is clear that the only way to achieve success in this challenging process of our country is to exercise contemporary democracy perfectly. And the democracy can be guaranteed by individual freedoms. In particular, it is not acceptable to deprive journalists of their freedoms. The number of journalists and media workers under arrest has been recorded as 138 as of January 2019. Journalists must be allowed to work at press institutions. This is what the conscience of democracy requires. The steps taken on this issue must be sustained and supported.

### **MEDIA MUST PAY ATTENTION TO ITS LANGUAGE**

The language used by media is very important especially for a healthy social order. Media institutions and journalists must adopt a language of peace that does not encourage violence, terror and any other type of conflict; that does not discriminate or exclude people; and that respects universal humanitarian values regardless of what their religion, language or race is.

In this context, the importance of freedom of press must be emphasized once again, and it must be upgraded to the level of contemporary world standards together with freedom of thought and expression.



## **THE USE OF POWER OF ATTORNEY IN THE ELECTIONS OF PRESS ADVERTISEMENT AUTHORITY MUST BE ABOLISHED**

The elections held to elect the Representatives of Anatolian Newspaper Owners at the Press Advertisement Authority every two years under the initiative of Press Publication and Information Directorate General which has been shut down and transferred to Presidential Communication Department, are very important for Anatolian press. These elections are overshadowed by partial and implicit approaches.

The election method used by the annulled Press Publication and Information Directorate General for these elections, involving the use of power of attorney, must be totally given up, and newspaper owners must be required to cast their votes themselves. These elections held to elect the representatives of Anatolian newspaper owners at the general assembly of Press Advertisement Authority must be executed in a democratic and fair manner and must never be politicized. In addition, Anatolian media must be represented in the general assembly of Press Advertisement Authority with more members.

## **LOCAL MEDIA MUST BE SUPPORTED**

Measures must be taken urgently to support the local radio and television channels, printed and internet media which struggle to survive under very challenging conditions and heavy economic pressures. The distribution problems of local newspapers must be resolved, local newspaper stands must be placed at newspaper vendors, and legal arrangements must be introduced so that they are not sanctioned by municipalities.

Necessary structure must be put in place so that local printed media can benefit from the advertisements of private companies. A digital broadcast platform like Digiturk and D-Smart must be established exclusively for local television and radio broadcasts. This will provide a significant platform for advertisers and the advertisements revenues can be equally shared.

## **RTÜK HAS TURNED INTO AN INSTRUMENT OF POLITICAL CONTROL**

RTÜK, which was originally established to ensure self-control among radio and television broadcasters, has transformed into an instrument

of political control. RTÜK has started imposing heavy fines to passivate opposition broadcasters, while safeguarding and protecting certain other media groups.

While RTÜK imposes fines on television channels on the grounds that they have insulted foreign statesmen, it overlooks the disrespect, insults and slanders on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of our Republic, the leaders and deputies of opposition parties who are indispensable components of our democracy.

Authorization of RTÜK for supervising internet broadcasts leads to double censorship. There is a clear need for self-control. Although RTÜK is supposed to lead this effort, it disregards the “self” part and focuses only on “control” to serve the interests of political power.

Another function of RTÜK is to secure the freedom of expression and right to information. However, instead of taking steps to achieve this function, it has become the witness of univocal broadcasting. RTÜK does not give guarantee the voice of social groups primarily including political parties, but encourages univocal broadcasting.



It is imperative that RTÜK support the television and radio stations operating in Anatolia. The surplus revenues of RTÜK must be used to support the television and radio stations operating in Anatolia instead of being transferred back to the budget.

Television license fees and annual frequency utilization fees must immediately be reduced for the Anatolian press. the satellite lease fees of TÜRKSAT must be reduced to reasonable levels for local and regional broadcasts.

## **UNIONIZATION MUST BE FACILITATED**

In Turkey, media sector has the lowest level of unionization and the highest rate of unemployment with 30 percent. This low level of unionization is due primarily to the patronage structure introduced in 1990s and special policies pursued against unions.

The ruling party has also been pursuing policies aimed at breaking up unionization with this unions established by itself and eliminating solidarity among journalists. The sovereign politicians have been intervening in media ownership since 2003 and has captured the control of 98 percent of the sector today. This undermines both the right of people to get information and unionization.

Likewise, the local media staff who have been put under pressure through the Press Advertisement Authority are also prevented from taking part in labor unions. In addition, the profession of journalism loses prestige as the rights provided by the Press Labor Law are not enforced and the representatives of ruling and opposition parties keep on targeting journalists.

The low levels of unionization in media sector undermines the freedom of press while it negatively affects the solidarity among journalists. Journalists under arrest in prisons and journalists on exile lead to censorship auto-censorship in the sector.

Both the broadcast and administrative policies of TRT, which has the primary function of broadcasting for public service must be relieved from

the pressures of politics. Organization under unions have to be upgraded to improve the freedom of press, people's right to access information, working conditions and employment rights.

## **THE ISSUE OF COPYRIGHTS MUST BE SOLVED**

In order to solve the issue of copyright fees which radio and television broadcasters have to pay to professional music associations, a pricing system based on the extent of use must be introduced. To this effect, professional music associations must be gathered under a single roof and they must claim their rights under this roof.

The copyright fees paid by local and regional radio and television channels must not exceed the monthly 1.5 share charged by RTÜK or must be capped at the annual frequency fee charged by RTÜK. The official advertisement right offered to local newspapers by Press Advertisement Authority must be offered to radio and television channels as well. Furthermore, radio and television channels must be paid for the public spots broadcast on radio and television channels.

RTÜK Law has to be amended in order to remove the pressure on radio and television channels. The broadcast licenses used by local and regional broadcasters which have been hardly maintaining their operations for the last 25 years must be allocated top these broadcaster as such licenses have become acquired rights. Terrestrial broadcasters must be allowed to broadcast on satellite as well; local radio and television channels must be supported by the government in order to sustain local culture and values, similar to what is done in Europe.

## **INTERNET JOURNALISM MUST BE LEGALLY RECOGNIZED**

The staff of internet newspapers cannot benefit from their professional rights since they are not covered by the Press Labor Law, particularly including YELLOW PRESS CARD, although they are subject to the same liabilities with their colleagues.

For this reason, the Press Labor Law has top be amended urgently, and internet journalism must also be included in the scope of the Law.



## **MERGER OF NEWSPAPERS**

The policy pursued by Press Advertisement Authority (BİK) to merge the local newspapers in Anatolia must never exert force, pressure or imposition. Press Advertisement Authority must review its relevant activities, and the merger of local newspapers must not be allowed to violate the principle of polyvocality of press in democracies.

Furthermore, harmonization time is allowed to eliminate the shortcomings in provinces where the branches of Press Advertisement Authority are established, however during the inspections, deductions are applied retrospectively, which puts press institutions in a difficult position.

## **DEPENDENCE ON IMPORTS OF PAPER MUST BE ADDRESSED**

A mobilization must be initiated for domestic paper production so that around 3,000 newspapers, including 1,1150 newspaper eligible to publish official advertisements, can survive without any interruption.

Journalism and publishing activity must be seen as a public service, and must be supported to enrich cultural life. Mobilization must be started for domestic production of newspaper paper, domestic producers must be supported and newspapers must be relieved from import dependency.

A government owned enterprise like SEKA must be introduced again or the private firms engaged in paper production must be incentivized by including the production of paper for newspapers and books among strategic sectors. These firms must be offered investment and raw material advantages and super-incentives for their production. the foreign exchange hegemony in paper sector must definitely be terminated through a widely participated consortium to be established under the leadership of state, in which press institutions can also hold shares.

A public agency to be appointed (perhaps Press Advertisement Authority) could import newspaper paper and sell it to newspaper companies at affordable prices, such that the losses to be incurred will be covered from the budget.

## **VAT LEVIED ON NEWSPAPER PAPER MUST BE REMOVED**

The VAT rate applied to imported newspaper paper is 8%. This 8% VAST applied to newspaper paper must be removed. The exchange rate losses incurred after a specific date (e.g. 1 January 2018) due to the surge in exchange rates must be subsidized.

This can only be achieved through establishment of an Exchange Equalization Fund. The distributors and merchants supplying imported paper to the domestic market must be strictly audited to prevent any opportunism.

## **RESTRUCTURING DEADLINE MUST BE EXTENDED**

All debts of newspaper companies, including their restructured tax and social security debts, must be postponed until 31 December 2020. In line with this, the practice of debt clearance certificate required by Press Advertisement Authority must also be postponed at least until 31 December 2020.

## **SOCIAL SECURITY CONTRIBUTIONS MUST BE REDUCED**

The social security contributions payable by press institutions must be reduced at least by 50 percent, and the VAT rates applied to the most important inputs items including paper, block and ink must be minimized.

## **OFFICIAL ADVERTISEMENT TARIFF MUST BE UPDATED**

In order to compensate for the losses caused by the price increases due to exchange rates and production curtailments, the by Press Advertisement Authority must increase the official advertisement tariffs. The Official Advertisement price tariff was not increased in 2017. A price increase of 15 percent relative to 2016 prices could only be applied on 1 June 2018.

Considering that the USD exchange rate was 4.60 TL as of its effectiveness date, the tariffs must be updated on the basis of the existing USD and

EUR exchange rates. Thus, Press Advertisement Authority must update and increase the official advertisement tariffs.

The 15 percent commission rate applied by the Press Advertisement Authority must be reduced to 8 percent at most.

### **LOANS MUST BE EXTENDED TO ANATOLIAN PRESS**

The lending facilities offered by Press Advertisement Authority to the newspaper companies in Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir must be offered to the Anatolian press as well. Press Advertisement Authority, which provides interest-free loans to newspaper employees, must launch such loans for newspapers as well.

### **PUBLIC BANKS MUST OFFER LOANS TO NEWSPAPERS**

Public banks must be supported to extend low-interest loans to newspapers. Shared-ownership newspapers face difficulties in obtaining loans. Lending to newspapers must be facilitated so that the difficulties they face can be resolved. Public advertisements and announcements must be equally and fairly without discriminating among the media institutions. The public banks which financially support football clubs must particularly support local press.

### **ANATOLIAN NEWS AGENCY MUST REDUCE SUBSCRIPTION PRICES**

Anatolian News Agency, which is a public entity, must reduce its subscription prices. Such a discount will be very important particularly in supporting the local press in Anatolia.

### **MUNICIPAL ASSEMBLY DECISIONS MUST BE INCLUDED IN THE SCOPE OF OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The agenda and minutes of municipal assembly meetings as well as decisions taken must be published in local newspapers through the Press Advertisement Authority at official advertisement tariffs.



## **PURCHASE AND SALE TENDERS MUST BE INCLUDED UNDER THE MANDATE OF PRESS ADVERTISEMENT AUTHORITY**

The purchase and sale tenders of Rural Service Provision Associations must also be included in the scope of Press Advertisement Authority's tariff. The provision "*Such tenders shall not be subject to Procurement Law*" in the Regulation prepared for such associations must immediately be cancelled.

## **NEWSPAPERS MUST BE SUPPORTED WITH SUBSCRIPTIONS**

In order to support newspapers, all government offices, agencies and universities must be allowed to subscribe to local newspapers and engage in collective purchases. The book budgets of local administrations must be increased, and they must support sales of newspapers and books.

## **PUBLICATION OF EXECUTION ANNOUNCEMENTS IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS MUST BE MADE MANDATORY**

The Execution and Bankruptcy Law must be amended to add the provision "Its is mandatory that execution announcements be published in local newspapers".

## **KOSGEB ADVANTAGES MUST BE OFFERED TO LOCAL PRESS**

Local newspapers must be allowed to practically benefit from KOSGEB loans; part of such finance must be provided as grant and the rest as loans with very low interest rates and long maturities.

## **EARLY RETIREMENT RIGHT MUST BE GRANTED BACK**

The acquired rights with regard to early retirement must be granted back; the early retirement period which has been reduced to 3 years in recent years must be increased back to 5 years. Likewise, the practice applicable to only yellow press card holders must be available to all press workers.

**Footnote:** *\*Some of the terms and concepts used in the report have been taken from the book "Local Press in Turkey – 2007" published by İstanbul University Faculty of Communication.*

