



Dear President Tusk, dear President Juncker,

We would like to express grave concern regarding the deterioration of the human rights context and of the rule of law in Turkey, and to write to you ahead of the EU-Turkey leaders' meeting in Varna, Bulgaria on 26 March 2018. We urge you to ensure human rights are discussed as a matter of priority, and call upon you to press President Erdogan to put an end to repression in the country and release individuals detained without evidence of wrongdoing.

As Turkey is under a state of emergency imposed after a failed coup in July 2016, President Erdoğan has headed the cabinet and ruled the country by decree, with weakened parliamentary and judicial oversight. Since July 2016, independent media has been silenced, with over 160 media outlets and publishing houses closed down, and scores of journalists and media workers jailed without any evidence of their participation in illegal activities. Turkey is the country with the highest number of journalists in detention anywhere in the world. Many are held in pretrial detention, face terrorism-related charges and could face sentences of life imprisonment. Scores of individuals are imprisoned for undertaking their legitimate work as journalists - without ever advocating violence.

The European Parliament has repeatedly condemned the arbitrary imprisonment of many journalists in Turkey and has called for their immediate release, issuing the [European Parliament resolution of 27 October 2016 on the situation of journalists in Turkey](#), the [European Parliament resolution of 6 July 2017 on the 2016 Commission Report on Turkey](#) and the [European Parliament resolution of 8 February 2018 on the current human rights situation in Turkey](#).

Several of us have committed to personally take up individual cases of jailed journalists unjustly imprisoned and to repeatedly call for their immediate release. These include **Şahin Alpay**, a 74-year-old political scientist and former columnist for the shuttered newspaper **Zaman (released on 16 March, but under judicial control and confinement to his house while his trial continues)**; **Ahmet Şık**, investigative writer and reporter for the opposition daily **Cumhuriyet (released on 9 March, pending conclusion of trial)**; **Akın Atalay**, chief executive officer of **Cumhuriyet**; **Abdullah Kılıç**, former columnist for the shuttered daily newspaper **Meydan**; and **Zehra Dogan**, artist and journalist for the feminist Kurdish news site **JINHA**. **İnan Kızılkaya**, former news editor of the pro-Kurdish daily **Özgür Gündem**, is currently outside of detention, yet still faces charges and therefore risks re-imprisonment.

These are just a few examples amongst so many. According to recent accounts, there are still more than 150 journalists imprisoned in Turkey.

Others, including human rights defenders including Osman Kavala and Taner Kılıç, academics, lawyers and elected members of the parliament and local politicians, remain behind bars.

We have been deeply shocked by the recent collapse of the independence and effectiveness of Turkey's judiciary. On 12 January, a local court crushed a Constitutional Court's ruling that journalists Şahin Alpay and Mehmet Altan should be released. On February 1, a decision by a Turkish court to keep Taner Kılıç, human rights defender and chair of the board of Amnesty International's Turkey section, in pretrial detention less than 24 hours after ordering his provisional release shows the increasingly politicized and arbitrary nature of Turkey's judicial system. We welcomed the 2 February joint statement by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commissioner on European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations on those cases and urge you to make robust calls for their release during your Summit with President Erdogan.

Both EU leaders and elected representatives of the European people have a duty to demonstrate full solidarity with every individual detained in Turkey for exercising their free expression. It is time for

the European Union, its institutions and its Member States to make an immediate and strong criticism of the massive crackdown in the country. The Turkish people depend on our support.

Pending discussions on Turkey's accession to the EU, on a renewed customs union, as well as the EU's support to key extractive infrastructures like the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline and other forms of economic and political cooperation are important for the EU and Turkey. However, we urge you to be unequivocal with President Erdogan: closer relations between the European Union and Turkey can only be conditioned on the lifting of the state of emergency, returning to rule of law, releasing detained journalists, human rights defenders and elected politicians, and ensuring accountability for torture and ill-treatment committed in police custody.

We would be glad to hear back from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

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