



United States Mission to the OSCE

Government Pressure on Freedom of Expression and the Media in Turkey

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 3, 2016

The United States is deeply concerned about what appears to be an increase in official pressure on independent media outlets in Turkey. This includes the detention on October 31 of Murat Sabuncu, the editor-in-chief of one of Turkey's most respected newspapers, Cumhuriyet; the shuttering of more news outlets over the weekend; and the continued detention of a number of journalists and columnists. We also note the October 31 statement by OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatović, who condemned the arrest of the Cumhuriyet editor-in-chief, and three of the newspaper's columnists, Güray Öz, Aydın Engin, and Kadri Gürsel.

The United States has urged that the Turkish government's response to the coup attempt be conducted in ways that reinforce public confidence in democratic institutions and the rule of law. Moreover, investigations should not curtail civil liberties or weaken legitimate political opposition.

The United States supports the Government of Turkey's efforts to bring to justice those responsible for the July 15 coup attempt, which claimed the lives of over 300 people. We stand by our friend and NATO ally Turkey in the fight against terror in all its forms, including its fight against the PKK.

However, as an ally and friend, we urge the Government of Turkey to respond to the failed coup in ways that reinforce Turkey's traditions of freedom of expression and pluralism, the very principles and institutions that the Turkish people so courageously defended from a violent attempted coup. When standards of evidence are vague or unclear, when press outlets are shuttered and freedom of expression is conditional, the voices of a nation's people are stifled and they lose faith in the institutions of justice.

Democracies become stronger by allowing expressions of diverse views, particularly in difficult times. Suppressing freedoms of expression and opinion is not consistent with Turkey's own democratic values, nor does it support the fight against terrorism – it only encroaches on the fundamental freedoms that ensure democracies remain strong.

If I can add, on a personal note, I want to welcome our new Turkish colleague. And obviously, this is his first Permanent Council -- and I'm sorry that it coincides with delivering this statement -- but I want to underscore both my own personal, deep sense of friendship

with Turkey as well as that of the senior-most levels of our government, and also call attention to a speech made yesterday by our Deputy Secretary of State in which he laid out the areas of cooperation that we have with Turkey. And he made the point that, and I quote, “fundamentally our people share an unwavering commitment to the principles of justice, dignity, and the rule of law. This was especially evident during July’s coup attempt, a deplorable affront to the Turkish people. By taking to the streets, where they faced down tanks and evaded helicopters, ordinary citizens came to the defense of their nation and sent a powerful message to the world. And as allies, we work side-by-side in confronting the serious challenges that face both our nations.”

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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