



EUROPEAN UNION

**OSCE Permanent Council No. 1218
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**EU Statement on Latest Developments on Human Rights in
Turkey**

The European Union is deeply concerned about the indictment announced on February 20 against Osman Kavala, Chairman of Anadolu Kültür as well as against 15 other activists, as it raises questions as to the adherence of the Turkish judiciary to international and European standards.

Using the 2013 Gezi Park protests to seek life sentences lacks credibility, creates a climate of fear and discourages peaceful assembly. It is yet another example of continued widespread pressure on civil society representatives.

Systematic delays, detentions with insufficient evidence, and criminal prosecution of people exercising their fundamental right to freedom of expression and right of assembly cast serious doubts as to whether the judicial process in Turkey respects the principle of the presumption of innocence and right to a fair trial. We urge again the Turkish authorities to ensure every person's right to a fair trial, and to uphold the principle of the presumption of innocence, as agreed in the Copenhagen Document of 1990.

The European Union is also deeply concerned about a recent court decision by an İstanbul Court of Appeals to uphold the severe sentences against fourteen journalists and other staff of Turkish newspaper Cumhuriyet. Former editor-in-chief Murat Sabuncu and journalists Ahmet Şık, Aydın Engin, Hikmet Çetinkaya, and foundation executives Orhan Erinç and Akın Atalay await the judgement of the Court of Cassation for their prison sentences ranging from six years and three months to seven years and six months. The other eight defendants' prison sentences of less than five years have now become final. Hence seven of these journalists/lawyers will have to return to prison while having served some time in pre-trial detention;

including the newspaper's lawyers Bülent Utku, Mustafa Kemal Güngör and caricaturist Musa Kart.

Referring to the Cumhuriyet trial convictions as “a terrible setback and detrimental to Turkey’s commitments to free speech and independent media”, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media has called on Turkey to promptly review the legislative framework and to respect freedom of the media. The EU echoes his call. We further reiterate the expectation that Turkey uphold the European Convention on Human Rights and respect the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.

Unfortunately, the Cumhuriyet case is all too symptomatic of the massive challenges faced by the independent press in today’s Turkey. With around 150 journalists currently in detention and pre-trial detention and more than 150 media outlets closed since 2016, the environment for critical journalism has drastically deteriorated. The EU has repeatedly expressed its concerns regarding the Cumhuriyet trial and the situation for freedom of expression in Turkey at large. It is unacceptable that journalists and other media actors are sentenced to prison for expressing dissenting views or reporting on issues of public interest.

We recall that all OSCE participating States, including Turkey, vowed in Milan 2018 to fully implement all OSCE commitments and their international obligations related to freedom of expression and media freedom.

The Candidate Countries NORTH MACEDONIA*, MONTENEGRO* and ALBANIA*, the Country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and Potential Candidate BOSNIA and HERZEGOVINA, and the EFTA countries ICELAND and NORWAY, members of the European Economic Area, as well as ARMENIA, ANDORRA and SAN MARINO align themselves with this statement.

* North Macedonia, Montenegro and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.