

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi
06560, Beştepe
Ankara
Turkey

Oslo, 22nd February 2018

On Friday 15th February, brothers and journalists Mehmet Altan (65), Ahmet Altan (67) and Nazli Ilıcak (73) were sentenced to life imprisonment after being found guilty of participating in the coup attempt in 2016.

Ahmet Altan is the former editor of the Taraf newspaper, which was closed when President Erdoğan introduced the state of emergency after the coup attempt.

These are the first sentences against journalists in trials related to the failed coup attempt and send dangerous signals ahead of the trials against all the other journalists accused of similar allegations. The European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) affirms that the sentences indicate an escalation of the oppression of freedom of expression.

Three other accused has received similar verdicts: Zaman [Media group] marketing manager Yakup Şimşek, police academy instructor Şükrü Tuğrul Özşengül and Zaman's designer Fevzi Yazıcı.

At the same time, 18 journalists and staff in Cumhuriyet are charged with supporting terrorism through their work as critical writers and journalists. Three journalists – Ahmet Şık, Murat Sabuncu and Akin Atalay – have been in custody for over a year while the trial is in progress. On Friday 9th March, there will be a new hearing that will revolve around if these three will be released while the case is in progress.

Norwegian PEN, Association of Norwegian Editors and the Norwegian Union of Journalists repudiate such attempts at criminalising journalism. We are deeply concerned about the authorities' willingness to use power to gag free debate and information, which leads to a weakened confidence in the Turkish democracy.

On Friday 9th March, a new round of trials will begin with the prosecution of journalists and the administrative staff in Cumhuriyet. They are accused of supporting terrorism through their critical journalism. Four court hearings have so far shown that the prosecutor's office has no evidence of the case and that this is a purely political case against critical journalists.

With reference to the European Parliament's resolution of February 2018, where the EU accuses the Turkish authorities of using the state of emergency after the coup attempt in July 2016 to muzzle all opposition, and demanding the immediate release of all the arrested for performing their legitimate work, using their freedom of expression or is imprisoned without evidence, Norwegian PEN, Association of Norwegian Editors and the Norwegian Union of Journalists ask Turkish authorities to:

- release the three Cumhuriyet journalists. We believe that the trial is a political process against critical and independent journalists and has no concrete relations with terrorist charges or coup attempts;



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- release all the other journalists, editors, academics and others who are imprisoned due to false charges of participation in the coup attempt;
- stop the attacks on independent media, journalists, academics and other groups and people using their legitimate democratic rights.

Yours sincerely,

William Nygaard
Norwegian PEN

Thomas Spence
Norwegian PEN's
Media Committee

Arne Jensen
Association of
Norwegian Editors

Hege Iren Frantzen
Norwegian Union of
Journalists

Copy:

Minister of Justice Abdülhamit Gül
Minister of Interior Affairs Süleyman Soylu
Ambassador Esat Safak Göktürk