

TURKEY RIGHTS MONITOR

QUARTERLY REVIEW | JULY-AUGUST-SEPTEMBER 2020

#TurkeyRightsMonitor



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Table of Contents

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND ARREST	4
Human rights defenders.....	4
Journalists, media workers.....	4
Lawyers and members of the judiciary	4
Musicians	4
ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE	5
ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES.....	5
FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY	5
Restrictions imposed by authorities	6
Police brutality against protesters	6
ECtHR ruling in Taş v. Turkey.....	6
FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA.....	6
Censorship.....	7
News reports and websites	7
YouTube	7
Netflix.....	7
Sanctions imposed against media outlets.....	8
Prosecutions.....	9
Politicians.....	9
Comments on the media	9
Social media commentary	9
Prosecutions targeting academics, writers and artists	10
Prosecutions targeting journalists and media workers	10
Attacks against journalists and media workers	11
New regulations on social media platforms	12
FREEDOM OF RELIGION	12
HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS	12
JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE & RULE OF LAW	13
Mass suspension of judges and prosecutors	13
Controversial amendments to the law on lawyers (multiple bar associations law)	13
Questionable moves/rulings by Turkish prosecutors/courts	13
ECtHR head Róbert Spano's controversial visit.....	14
Prosecution of legal professionals	14
Mass detentions in September	14
KURDISH MINORITY	15
Abuses against citizens by authorities	15

Prosecution of Kurdish politicians.....	15
Alleged harassment by intelligence operatives	16
Racist attacks	16
Restrictions on the Kurdish language	16
Restrictions on pro-Kurdish media	17
MILITARY OPERATIONS ABROAD	17
Iraq.....	17
Syria	17
MISTREATMENT OF CITIZENS ABROAD	18
OTHER MINORITIES.....	18
Discrimination and harassment against LGBTI.....	18
Religious groups	19
Ethnic groups	19
PRISON CONDITIONS	19
REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS.....	20
Incidents at the eastern and southeastern borders	20
Pushbacks at the Turkish-Greek border	21
Racist attacks and hate crimes targeting refugees.....	21
Refoulement of foreign nationals living in Turkey	21
TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT.....	21
WOMEN'S RIGHTS	22
The İstanbul Convention debate.....	22
Incidents of femicide and sexual assault.....	22

ARBITRARY DETENTION AND ARREST

Throughout the quarter, the Turkish authorities frequently had recourse to police custody and pre-trial detention against people investigated or put on trial over non-violent activities such as peaceful protests, legitimate speech, journalistic work, political activism or social media comments.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Prominent activists Melek Çetinkaya, Nuriye Gülmen, Acun Karadağ, Nazan Bozkurt and Alev Şahin were arrested during this period. Among them, only Çetinkaya was released, after spending two months in solitary confinement.

Meanwhile, businessman and civil society leader Osman Kavala marked his 1000th day behind bars in July.

JOURNALISTS, MEDIA WORKERS

Fatih Terzioğlu, a 40-year-old TV director who was diagnosed with stomach cancer while behind bars, died in August, a month after his release from prison following an intensive social media campaign. His wife alleged that the authorities displayed negligence and slowness during the process, which caused Terzioğlu's health situation to deteriorate faster.

Similarly, Mevlüt Öztaş, a 49-year-old journalist who was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in prison, died in August two months after he was released. His daughter said that Öztaş survived several surgeries under poor prison conditions.

LAWYERS AND MEMBERS OF THE JUDICIARY

In July, the Constitutional Court [defied](#) a previous European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruling which had found the pre-trial detention of a former judge to be in breach of the Convention. The Constitutional Court in its statement claimed that the domestic courts were better positioned than the ECtHR in interpreting the laws with regard to the imprisonment of members of the judiciary.

In August, the Constitutional Court [rejected](#) a request for the release of imprisoned death fasting lawyers Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal, despite a medical report that found their health condition unfit to stay in prison. Timtik [lost](#) her life on August 27, while Ünsal was finally [released](#) in early September.

In September, Ankara prosecutors [ordered](#) the detention of some 60 lawyers and other legal professionals over their professional activities. Six were [arrested](#) after appearing in court following 12 days in police custody, while others were placed under house arrest.

MUSICIANS

In August, the police [detained](#) six members of the leftist music band Grup Yorum, while they were rehearsing for a concert in Istanbul.

ARBITRARY DEPRIVATION OF LIFE

In July, news [reports](#) said that Fatma Elarslan, a 13-year-old girl, who was found dead in the southeastern province of Şırnak after being missing for 20 days during a local curfew in February-March 2020, was registered by local prosecutors as being “killed in clashes with security forces,” based on anonymous witness testimonies denouncing her as a “member of a terrorist organization.”

In August, news [reports](#) claimed that a 46-year-old civilian named İbrahim Baykara was killed by soldiers in the eastern province of Van. Local authorities denied the allegations.

ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

[Yusuf Bilge Tunç](#), a former public sector worker who was reported missing in August 2019, remained unaccounted for throughout the quarter. Tunç disappeared in broad daylight at a shopping mall in Ankara and authorities did not look into his phone records and CCTV footage despite the requests of family members, dismissing Tunç’s case as a “domestic dispute.” Dozens of other former civil servants purged from the public sector en masse in the aftermath of a failed coup in 2016 have also disappeared under suspicious circumstances, with some of them turning up in police custody several months later. This year, Solidarity with OTHERS published a comprehensive [report](#) on the incidents.

The quarter was marked by several allegations raised by political party members and journalists who claimed that they were briefly abducted by a group of people introducing themselves as police or intelligence officers.

[Burcu Durak](#), a member of the Socialist Party of the Oppressed (ESP), said she was briefly abducted in Ankara by a group of people claiming to be police officers. Durak said that her abductors unlawfully interrogated her about her activism for women’s rights and threatened her, demanding her to leave the capital city within a week.

[Cengiz Anıl Bölükbaş](#), a reporter for the leftist Evrensel newspaper based in the predominantly Kurdish city of Diyarbakır, alleged that he was briefly abducted by three people who introduced themselves as police officers and who tried to coerce him to become an agent for the state.

[Serhat Aktumur](#), [Musa Taştan](#), [Cihan Çitgez](#) and [Özer Yıldırım](#), members of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), claimed that they were briefly detained by groups of people who introduced themselves as members of the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), and that they were unlawfully interrogated by the abductors who tried to coerce them into becoming agents for the state.

FREEDOM OF ASSEMBLY

The period saw serious undue restrictions on the freedom of assembly, with the authorities frequently issuing lengthy blanket bans on outdoor gatherings and the security forces regularly using excessive force against demonstrations, marches and public statements. In addition to the police brutality, the interventions usually ended in some of the protesters being briefly detained.

RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED BY AUTHORITIES

Throughout the quarter, provincial governors' offices issued at least 27 bans, effective for at least 302 days. In the eastern province of Van, the governor's office introduced regular extensions to the ban on all outdoor gatherings that has been in effect since [November 2016](#). Some governors in the predominantly Kurdish southeastern provinces imposed partial or complete curfews, citing anti-terror operations.

Other than national security and public order concerns, the local authorities sometimes referred to the Covid-19 pandemic as grounds for the restrictions.

POLICE BRUTALITY AGAINST PROTESTERS

In July, the police violently blocked the [800th weekly sit-in](#) of the 'Saturday Mothers,' the country's longest-running peaceful protest movement, detaining several members of the group.

Similar scenes took place at women's rights events organized in response to government officials' remarks advocating Turkey's withdrawal from the international Istanbul Convention on combating gender-based violence. In August, the police briefly [detained](#) 25 women protesters at a rally held in the capital city of Ankara. Another women's march organized in İzmir in reaction to the femicide of university student Pinar Gültekin was also violently attacked, resulting in the brief [detention](#) of 12 women.

Demonstrations to draw public attention to the post-coup purge of public sector workers were repeatedly attacked by the police. In August, leading activists Alev Şahin, Acun Karadağ and Nazan Bozkurt were [arrested](#) on terror charges.

Some of the bans on outdoor gatherings were imposed ahead of significant events, such as the [15-day ban](#) issued by the Ankara Governor's Office a day prior to the "Grand Defense Rally" organized by bar associations to protest a government-led bill to allow for multiple bar associations in each city. The following day, the police used [pepper spray](#) against lawyers who gathered at the Ankara courthouse to protest the bill.

ECTHR RULING IN TAŞ V. TURKEY

In July, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) delivered its [judgment](#) about the case of a Turkish citizen named Ramazan Taş, which ruled that the rights of the applicant were violated when he was convicted of terrorism for attending demonstrations.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MEDIA

The quarter was marked by frequent government censorship and penalties on print, broadcast and online media as well as prosecutions of ordinary citizens, activists, politicians, writers, academics, artists, journalists and media workers. The government passed a controversial law stipulating stricter control over social media platforms and online streaming services, which took effect on October 1.

CENSORSHIP

NEWS REPORTS AND WEBSITES

Courts ruled to block access to;

- [Reports](#) about a worker who allegedly concealed the result of his Covid-19 test out of fear that he might be fired from the pasta factory where he is working.
- [Reports](#) about a friend of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's son who allegedly won a public tender worth more than €30 million.
- [Reports](#) about Defense Minister Hulusi Akar's visit to the grave of the founder of an outlawed Islamist group.
- [Reports](#) about the rape of a woman by a national wrestler.
- [Reports](#) about a street vendor who set himself on fire and died after authorities confiscated his vehicle.
- [Reports](#) about an alleged child abuse by a religious preacher.
- [Reports](#) about the seizure of a non-seizable loan received by the opposition-held İstanbul municipality.
- [Reports](#) about a pro-government businessperson being awarded a municipal tender.
- [gabile.com](#), a dating and chat site for the LGBTI community.
- The online edition of [Yeni Yaşam](#), a pro-Kurdish newspaper.
- The online edition of the [Yeni Demokrasi](#) newspaper.
- [Sendika.org](#), a leftist news website.
- [Reports](#) about the alleged suspicious transactions of a Turkish bank, based on leaked documents from the United States Department of the Treasury.

The Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) blocked access to;

- [Jin News](#), a pro-Kurdish news outlet.
- The website of [Özgürüz Radyo](#), led by exiled journalist Can Dündar.
- [Mezopotamya](#), a pro-Kurdish news agency.

YOUTUBE

The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) [banned](#) a YouTube music video by singer Sıla Gencoğlu for "encouraging smoking."

An İstanbul court [blocked](#) access to a YouTube video of the government-critical Halk TV broadcaster.

NETFLIX

Government officials frequently directed criticisms against online streaming service Netflix, which centered around the subjects of homosexuality and family values. The deputy chairman of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) [implied](#) government censorship over a homosexual character

on a Turkish show on Netflix. The head of RTÜK [signaled](#) censorship on an episode of Netflix series The Protector, which featured two women kissing.

Journalist Cüneyt Özdemir [claimed](#) that Netflix halted production in Turkey after talks between the platform and the Turkish government broke down as the two sides were unable to reach an agreement over the censorship of homosexuality. Netflix [denied](#) the reports that it is leaving Turkey while remaining silent on censorship allegations.

RTÜK [demanded](#) Netflix to remove the French-made movie “Cuties” (Mignonnes), at the [request](#) of the Ministry of Family and Social Policies. The authorities claimed that the film contains images of child abuse.

SANCTIONS IMPOSED AGAINST MEDIA OUTLETS

Fines and broadcast bans imposed by RTÜK mostly targeted government-critical TV broadcasters and radios, over comments made by hosts or guests on the shows.

RTÜK fined;

- [KRT TV](#) over a guest’s criticism of the government’s handling of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- [Radyo Harman](#) over a guest’s comments on the government’s Syria policy.
- [TLC TV](#) for “depicting homosexual relationships as normal.”
- [TELE 1 TV](#) for broadcasting the movie “Mr. Brooks,” which RTÜK said “depicted killing as an instrument of pleasure.”
- Pro-government [Akit TV](#) over a commentator’s remarks targeting RTÜK.
- [TV 8](#) for broadcasting “Survivor” at a time of the day when children may be watching.
- [Sözcü TV](#) for “using a wrong logo.”
- [TELE1 TV](#) for allegedly praising terrorism, over an ad for the leftist Evrensel newspaper depicting a girl holding a scarf colored red, yellow and green.
- [TELE1 TV](#) over the remarks of a guest.
- [Fox TV](#) over alleged rude, vulgar and slang language.
- [Meltem TV](#) over the remarks of a presenter about a child abuse incident.

RTÜK imposed broadcast bans;

- Against [Haber Global](#)’s program “Kayıt Altında” (On Air), suspending the broadcast of the show for three episodes over the comments of a guest about the graduates of religious high schools (known as “imam hatip”).
- Against [Meltem TV](#)’s program “Akıl Oyunu” (Mind Game), suspending the broadcast of the show for three episodes over the remarks of a presenter about a child abuse incident.
- Against [TELE 1 TV](#) for a period of five days, over the remarks of a guest critical of Turkey’s state authority for religious affairs (Diyanet). The channel risks losing its broadcast license altogether in case of a repeat of the same kind of penalty.
- Against [Halk TV](#) for a period of five days, over the comments of a journalist on a debate program about the government’s military interventions outside Turkey. The channel risks losing its broadcast license altogether in case of a repeat of the same kind of penalty.

PROSECUTIONS

Throughout the quarter, people from a wide variety of backgrounds became the target of criminal investigations and prosecutions for exercising their right to free speech in private, in public, on tradition media or on social media.

Ordinary people as well as prominent public figures were prosecuted for insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and other government executives, which is defined as a crime under Turkish law.

Dozens of [journalists and media workers](#) spent the quarter behind bars while others stood trial or were detained and arrested during the period.

POLITICIANS

In July, Turkish courts delivered [rulings](#) ordering opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu to pay President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his close circle a total of \$81,000 in damages for raising allegations in 2017 that the group had transferred large sums of money to an offshore company based in the Isle of Man.

In September, Kurdish politician [Sebahat Tuncel](#) was handed down a prison sentence of 11 months for insulting the president, over her remarks calling the president “an enemy of women and Kurds.”

COMMENTS ON THE MEDIA

Melek Çetinkaya, rights activist and the mother of a former military cadet sentenced to life in prison on coup charges, was [arrested](#) in July for allegedly spreading terrorist propaganda, over her comments on a TV show. She was [released](#) in September, after being held in isolation for two months.

In August, the Kırklareli Governor’s Office [announced](#) that it launched an investigation into a family doctor who spoke to the Cumhuriyet newspaper about the Covid-19 cases in the province, alleging widespread cover-up of test results by the private sector to keep their workers at workplace.

SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENTARY

Throughout the quarter, at least 24 people were detained and/or arrested over their social media posts. Of these, at least 13 were targeted for allegedly insulting the president. Other accusations included insulting other government officials, insulting Islam, or provoking hatred and enmity among public.

In August, an Interior Ministry [statement](#) said that between January 1 and August 14, the authorities investigated 6,743 social media users for alleged terrorist propaganda and other charges.

A Switzerland-based news website [reported](#) in August that the Swiss authorities recently faced with an increased number of requests by the Turkish government against social media commentary that Turkey perceives as defamatory or sympathetic to terrorist groups.

PROSECUTIONS TARGETING ACADEMICS, WRITERS AND ARTISTS

In July, academics Şebnem Korur Fincancı and Gençay Gürsoy were [acquitted](#) of terrorism-related charges over a peace petition they signed in 2016 to call for a peaceful solution to the armed conflict in Turkey's predominantly Kurdish southeast and criticizing the Turkish security forces' excessive use of force.

İstanbul prosecutors [indicted](#) veteran actors Metin Akpınar and Müjdat Gezen for allegedly insulting the president over their comments on a TV program in 2018. The indictment seeks up to 4 years, 8 months in prison for each of the actors.

In September, writer [İhsan Eliaçık](#) was sentenced to 1 year, 2 months in prison for "insulting the president," over a comment on Twitter.

İstanbul prosecutors [indicted](#) exiled musician Ferhat Tunç over the artwork of one of his albums, which features three prominent leftist political activists from the 1970s. Tunç, who lives in Germany, is also facing other charges of terrorist propaganda and insulting the president. In September, Germany [rejected](#) Turkey's request for mutual judicial assistance to take Tunç's testimony on the insult case on the ground that the request was against the freedom of speech.

Musicians Hozan Cesim (Cesim Başboğa) and Veysi Ermiş were targeted by the authorities for singing songs in Kurdish. [Hozan Cesim](#) alleged that he was summoned to a gendarmerie command post in Bitlis where he was told by intelligence members not to sing in Kurdish. [Ermiş](#) was briefly detained on September 27 in İstanbul over his social media posts involving a video where he sang songs in Kurdish.

PROSECUTIONS TARGETING JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA WORKERS

Prosecutors launched investigations into;

- Columnist [Nurcan Kaya](#), over her social media posts.

Authorities detained and/or arrested;

- Anchorman [Erkan Akkuş](#), upon a warrant that had been outstanding since 2016.
- Journalist [Özgür Boğatekin](#) whose prison sentence was upheld by the Supreme Court of Appeals (Yargıtay).
- Journalist [Oktay Candemir](#) for criticizing a TV series airing on the state-run TRT channel.
- Journalist [Serdal Işık](#) over his social media posts.
- Journalists [Faruk Bostan](#) and [Bülent Karagöz](#) over a news report about sexual abuse allegations implicating local officials of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in the province of Kocaeli.
- Journalist [Hakkı Boltan](#) over his social media posts and his reporting on the Kurdish political movement.

Prosecutors indicted/charged;

- Journalist [İdris Yayla](#) for reporting the sexual assault allegations about a military officer.
- Journalist [Rawîn Stêrk](#) for working at pro-Kurdish news outlets.
- Journalist [Can Ataklı](#) for allegedly insulting the president.
- Journalists [Barış Terkoğlu](#), [Aydın Keser](#), [Ferhat Çelik](#), [Eren Ekinci](#), [Erk Acarer](#), [Hülya Kılınç](#), [Barış Pehlivan](#) and [Murat Ağirel](#) for allegedly disclosing information related to national security and disclosing documents pertaining to intelligence operations.
- Journalist [İdris Sayılğan](#) for alleged terrorist propaganda over his social media posts.
- Journalists [Müyesser Yıldız](#) and [İsmail Dükel](#) for allegedly “disclosing classified information.”

Courts sentenced;

- Journalist [Deniz Yücel](#) to 2 years, 9 months, 22 days in prison on terror charges.
- Journalist [Mehmet Baransu](#) to 19 years, 6 months in prison on espionage and terror charges.

Authorities released;

- Journalist Rawin Sterk, who was arrested in March 2020, was [released](#) after his first hearing.
- Journalists Barış Pehlivan, Hülya Kılınç and Murat Ağirel, who were arrested over their reporting of an Turkish intelligence officer who was killed in Libya, were [released](#) following a hearing on September 9.
- Journalist [Mümtazer Türköne](#) after four years of imprisonment on terror charges.
- Journalist [Merdan Yanardağ](#) who is standing trial for allegedly defaming the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor in a news report. Yanardağ’s indictment was prepared by the office of the same prosecutor.

In September, a court ordered imprisoned journalist [Müyesser Yıldız](#) to pay TL 20,000 (€ 2,250) in damages for allegedly insulting Defense Minister Hulusi Akar in a report about the July 2016 coup attempt.

A ruling by the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) said that Turkey violated the right to liberty and security as well as freedom of expression of the Sweden-based writer [Ragıp Zarakolu](#). In 2019, the High Court of Sweden rejected Turkey’s request for Zarakolu’s extradition.

The Constitutional Court [ruled](#) in September that journalist and opposition MP Enis Berberoğlu’s rights were violated when he was sentenced to 5 years, 10 months in prison over his reporting of the Turkish intelligence trucks carrying weapons to the Syrian border.

An İstanbul court overseeing the trial of exiled journalist Can Dündar [declared](#) him as a “fugitive,” ruling for a confiscation of all his property in case he fails to appear before court within 15 days. The court [ruled](#) for the confiscation in October.

ATTACKS AGAINST JOURNALISTS AND MEDIA WORKERS

Throughout the quarter, several journalists were attacked while following up on news or under suspicious circumstances implying possible attempts to intimidate them.

- [Şaban Önen](#), a local journalist in Bursa, was reportedly assaulted by a group of people close to the district mayor.

- An armed group attacked the residence of [Yakup Kocabaş](#), a local journalist based in Antalya.
- A vehicle belonging to a local journalists' association in Nevşehir was [set on fire](#).
- Reporters [Murat Başal and Emrah Kızıl](#) were subjected to a knife attack while covering news in Diyarbakır.

In September, Soviet-born US journalist [Andre Vltchek](#) was found dead in a car in İstanbul. The Turkish police recorded the incident as a 'suspicious death' and İstanbul prosecutors launched an investigation into the incident.

NEW REGULATIONS ON SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

In early July, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a speech [asked](#) the parliament to draft a bill aimed at controlling or shutting down social media platforms and streaming services, specifically mentioning YouTube, Twitter and Netflix.

A few weeks later, Erdoğan's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) submitted to parliament draft [legislation](#) aimed at forcing social media companies with more than 1 million daily users in Turkey such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube to establish a formal presence or assign a representative to be accountable to Turkish authorities and to be required to respond within 48 hours to complaints. According to the draft legislation, failure to comply would lead to increasing fines and bandwidth reductions of up to 90 percent.

[Rights groups](#) said the legislation would curtail online freedom of expression and oblige providers to share user data with authorities.

The parliament [passed](#) the law on July 29. Media reports [alleged](#) in August that US tech giant Google was preparing to open a representation in Turkey in compliance with the new regulations. Google however [denied](#) the reports.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION

In July, Turkish authorities reportedly sent [deportation orders](#) to two American Christian workers.

A Turkey-backed armed group in northern Syria reportedly [arrested](#) a Christian Kurdish man whom they accused of apostasy.

HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

In July, an İstanbul court [handed down](#) prison sentences to four human rights defenders including Taner Kılıç, the former Amnesty International Turkey Chair. The rapporteurs of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) issued a joint [statement](#) in reaction to the convictions, urging Turkey to revise its anti-terror laws.

On July 27, businessman and human rights defender Osman Kavala marked his 1000th day in prison. European Union and United States officials [called for](#) Kavala's release. In September, the Council of

Europe's Committee of Ministers [urged](#) Turkey to comply with a previous European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) order to release Kavala.

In August, authorities detained and arrested [seven activists](#) known for their advocacy in favor of the tens of thousands of former public sector workers dismissed from public service in the aftermath of a failed coup in July 2016, including Acun Karadağ, Nazan Bozkurt and Alev Şahin.

JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE & RULE OF LAW

MASS SUSPENSION OF JUDGES AND PROSECUTORS

In July, the Board of Judges and Prosecutors (HSK) [suspended](#) 26 judges and prosecutors over alleged links to the Gülen movement. The HSK disbarred some 4,500 judges and prosecutors following a failed coup in July 2016.

CONTROVERSIAL AMENDMENTS TO THE LAW ON LAWYERS (MULTIPLE BAR ASSOCIATIONS LAW)

In July, the parliament [passed into law](#) a bill amending the law on lawyers and altering the structure of bar association. The law allows for the establishment of multiple bar associations in a city and alters the election procedure of the Turkish Bar Association (TBB) executive board.

The amendments drew reactions from lawyers across the country and rights groups. Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) released a joint [statement](#), warning that the law would divide the legal profession along political lines and diminish the biggest bar associations' role as human rights watchdogs.

QUESTIONABLE MOVES/RULINGS BY TURKISH PROSECUTORS/COURTS

In July, the Constitutional Court [defied](#) a previous European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruling which had found the pre-trial detention of a former judge to be in breach of the Convention. The Constitutional Court in its statement claimed that the domestic courts were better positioned than the ECtHR in interpreting the laws with regard to the imprisonment of members of the judiciary.

The Constitutional Court [rejected](#) an appeal from the main opposition CHP to abrogate an early release law that allowed the early release of some 90,000 inmates amid the Covid-19 pandemic while discriminating against political prisoners. The CHP had brought the law to the top court on the grounds that it violated the constitutional right of equality.

A court in the northeastern province of Giresun [decided](#) for a non-prosecution in a case involving the suspicious death of an 11-year-old, despite strong allegations of a cover up by a senior member of the ruling party.

In August, the Constitutional Court [rejected](#) a request for the release of jailed lawyers Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal who have been on a hunger strike since February to demand fair trial, despite a

medical report which found their health condition unfit to stay in prison. Timtik [lost](#) her life within the month, while Ünsal was finally [released](#) in early September.

In September, the İstanbul Chief Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into the İstanbul Bar Association, a few weeks after the bar association was verbally targeted by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for hanging a banner to commemorate Ebru Timtik. President Erdoğan had [accused](#) the lawyers of “engaging in terrorism,” in a possible reference to the fact that lawyer Timtik was jailed on terror charges.

The Constitutional Court [rejected](#) an application by Murat Arslan, the former Chair of the Association of Judges and Prosecutors (YARSAV) who is serving a 10-year prison sentence on terrorism-related charges, on the grounds that the application was found “inadmissible.”

The trial of the murder of a 12-year-old girl shot dead in October 2015 in Diyarbakır during a curfew was [put on hold](#) after the Interior Ministry refused to grant permission for the prosecution of the police officer allegedly involved in the incident.

ECTHR HEAD RÓBERT SPANO'S CONTROVERSIAL VISIT

In September, European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) President Róbert Ragnar Spano paid a four-day [visit](#) to Turkey which sparked indignation among opposition, and rights groups which were excluded from the visit's schedule. Spano also received an honorary doctorate from the İstanbul University which had purged nearly 200 academics during Turkey's two-year-long state of emergency in the aftermath of the July 2016 coup attempt. Prominent Turkish writer Mehmet Altan addressed an [open letter](#) to Spano, highlighting the purge of Turkish academics.

Leading human rights defender [Şebnem Korur Fincancı](#) said in an interview that Spano should resign for his one-sided visit, which she said resembled a “pro-government puppet show.” Jailed Kurdish leader Selahattin Demirtaş in an [interview](#) said ECtHR's ineptness in preventing the Turkish government from abusing the country's judiciary had left him and thousands languishing in jail.

PROSECUTION OF LEGAL PROFESSIONALS

The quarter was marked by striking examples of lawyers being targeted simply for exercising their profession.

In September, the Supreme Court of Appeal (Yargıtay) [upheld](#) the prison sentences of 14 lawyers from the Progressive Lawyers Association (ÇHD), who were convicted of terrorism-related charges.

MASS DETENTIONS IN SEPTEMBER

In September, more than 50 lawyers were [detained](#) upon warrants issued by Ankara prosecutors who in a written [statement](#) accused them of following up on the cases of defendants affiliated to the Gülen movement and “trying to manipulate the trials under the guise of the practice of law.”

The mass detentions drew reactions from the [İstanbul Bar Association](#), the [International Commission of Jurists](#) (ICJ), [Human Rights Watch](#) (HRW), [Human Rights Association](#) (İHD), [Norsk PEN](#), [Turkish jurists](#), [the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe](#), [the German Bar Association](#) and [the Law Society of England](#).

On September 22, six lawyers out of 39 who appeared in court were [arrested](#) after spending 12 days in police custody.

KURDISH MINORITY

Throughout the quarter, Kurdish politicians and political activists were frequently the target of investigations, detentions, arrests over their speeches, their attendance in political events, or their involvement in pro-Kurdish political organizations, most notably the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP). The party [announced](#) in mid-August said that over 80 percent of the party's municipalities had been seized over the last year.

Several elected HDP officials were ousted by the Interior Ministry which appointed pro-government trustees to replace them, while those who were previously removed from office continued to face prosecution over alleged links to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) or the Democratic Society Congress (DTK).

During the period, citizens of Kurdish origin suffered several attacks that appeared to be racially motivated.

ABUSES AGAINST CITIZENS BY AUTHORITIES

In August, an expert [report](#) that was published regarding the death of Kemal Kurkut, a young Kurdish man who was shot dead by the police in 2017 in Diyarbakır, found Kurkut's killing 'inexcusable' as there was no evidence that Kurkut was a member of a terrorist group and that he was not a threat at the moment of the shooting.

In September, [Ali Boçnak](#), a 76-year-old sick inmate serving a prison sentence for his alleged membership in the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), lost his life behind bars after authorities refused to release him.

The trial regarding the murder of a 12-year-old girl shot dead in 2015 during a curfew in Diyarbakır was [put on hold](#) after the Interior Ministry refused to authorize the prosecution of the police officer allegedly involved in the incident.

Servet Turgut, a 55-year-old Kurdish villager who was allegedly tortured and thrown from a military helicopter, [died](#) after 20 days in intensive care. Van prosecutors [imposed](#) confidentiality order on the file and banned broadcasting or publishing news about the issue.

PROSECUTION OF KURDISH POLITICIANS

Authorities detained and/or arrested at least 117 Kurdish politicians over the three months.

[Sevil Rojbin Çetin](#), a member of the HDP, was reportedly exposed to torture by the police who raided her home to detain her on June 26 in Diyarbakır. After her detention, Çetin was arrested by a court in early July.

The Interior Ministry appointed a trustees to replace the elected mayor of the [Diyadin](#) district of the Ağrı province.

Courts handed down terrorism-related prison sentences to at least three co-mayors, one provincial co-chair and one MP.

In July, an appeals court [upheld](#) the prison sentence of Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı, the former mayor of Diyarbakır who was ousted by the Interior Ministry in August 2019.

Former HDP co-chair Selahattin Demirtaş [filed](#) an appeal with Turkey's Constitutional Court after lower courts refused to implement a European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) decision ordering his release. In September, Demirtaş was also [indicted](#) over his court defense in January 2020 where he criticized the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor. Demirtaş faces up to 3 years in prison.

In September, Diyarbakır prosecutors issued a Red Notice request against former HDP MP and former Diyarbakır Mayor [Osman Baydemir](#). The Chief Prosecutor's Office also asked the Justice Ministry to demand Baydemir's extradition from the United Kingdom where he lives.

On September 25, the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office [ordered](#) the detention of 82 prominent pro-Kurdish politicians over their alleged role in wave of protests in Turkey's Kurdish-majority cities in 2014.

ALLEGED HARASSMENT BY INTELLIGENCE OPERATIVES

HDP members [Serhat Aktumur](#), [Musa Taştan](#), [Cihan Çitgez](#) and [Özer Yıldırım](#) claimed that they were briefly detained by groups of people who introduced themselves as members of the National Intelligence Organization (MİT), and that they were unlawfully interrogated by the abductors who tried to coerce them into becoming agents for the state.

RACIST ATTACKS

In July, a mob in the central province of Yozgat reportedly [attacked](#) a group of Kurdish workers who had come for work from Mardin.

In September, 16 Kurdish seasonal farm workers were [assaulted](#) by a farm owner and a group of villagers in the northwestern province of Sakarya.

An armed [attack](#) against Kurdish workers in the western province of Afyon claimed the life of a man, wounding two others.

Doğan Çetin, a military conscript, [alleged](#) that he was battered by two soldiers from his unit for expressing favorable views for education in Kurdish.

RESTRICTIONS ON THE KURDISH LANGUAGE

In July, the Higher Education Board (YÖK) [banned](#) students studying Kurdish language and literature at Turkish universities from writing their dissertations in Kurdish.

In August, [reports](#) said that two out of Turkey's top three cell phone carriers, Türk Telekom and Vodafone, do not offer services in any Kurdish dialects despite having millions of Kurdish-speaking clients.

The government-appointed trustee to replace the elected mayor of the eastern city of Van reportedly [removed](#) local place name signs in Kurdish, replacing them with signs in Turkish.

In September, a man was briefly detained for distributing the Kurdish-language Xwebûn newspaper in Urfa on the grounds that the newspaper was "banned."

Singer Hozan Cesim (Cesim Başboğa) [alleged](#) that he was summoned to a gendarmerie command post where he was threatened by individuals who introduced themselves as intelligence operatives, not to sing songs in Kurdish. Another musician, Veysi Ermiş, was briefly [detained](#) over his social media posts featuring videos where he sang songs in Kurdish.

RESTRICTIONS ON PRO-KURDISH MEDIA

In September, a Hatay court [ruled](#) to ban access to the pro-Kurdish Yeni Yaşam newspaper's website. The Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) [blocked](#) access to the pro-Kurdish Mesopotamia news agency.

MILITARY OPERATIONS ABROAD

During the quarter, Turkey's military presence in neighboring Syria and Iraq came to prominence with abuses against the civilian population allegedly committed by the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) and/or Turkey-backed militant groups.

In September, a [report](#) released by the Kurdistan Regional Parliament in Iraq said that Turkey's military operations into their region since 1992 have uprooted residents of over 500 Kurdish villages.

IRAQ

- Human Rights Watch (HRW) said that a Turkish [airstrike](#) in the Kurdistan region disregarded civilian lives.
- Another Turkish [airstrike](#) in the Duhok province allegedly killed two civilians.

SYRIA

- A war monitor said Turkish-backed rebel groups [plundered](#) several houses in the Hasakah province.
- A local militia group alleged that [bombing](#) by Turkish-backed forces in Manbij killed six civilians.
- Turkish forces reportedly [cut off](#) the water supply of the Kurdish-held city of Hasakah.

- A Turkey-backed armed group in Afrin [arrested](#) a Christian Kurdish man whom they accused of apostasy.
- A UN [report](#) said that persons detained by Turkey-backed militants, including Syrian nationals, were being transferred to Turkey for detention and trial. Turkey [denied](#) the allegation.

MISTREATMENT OF CITIZENS ABROAD

Throughout the quarter, several reports revealed attempts by the Turkish government to persecute, harass and silence its critics living abroad. Some of these reports alleged that Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MİT) as well as diplomatic and consular services were spying on dissidents living in [Germany](#) and [Austria](#) as well as those who fled to [Greece](#) to escape political persecution.

In September, an operative working for the MİT [admitted](#) to being ordered to kill Kurdish-Austrian politician Berivan Aslan. Government-critical journalist Abdullah Bozkurt was [attacked](#) by three men near his home in Stockholm, Sweden.

The General Prosecutor of Moldova [announced](#) that the country's former intelligence chief Vasile Botnari received a suspended sentence for the forcible rendition to Turkey of a group of Turkish teachers. Botnari was also ordered to pay €125,000 in fines, the amount that Moldova lost in the case of five of the teachers whose lawyers sued the country before the [European Court of Human Rights](#) (ECtHR).

Media reports claimed that Muaz Türkyılmaz, a Turkish citizen with alleged links to the Gülen movement, was [arrested](#) in Panama at Turkey's request. His family and human rights activists in Panama have been campaigning to prevent his extradition to Turkey, where he would likely face torture and be denied access to a fair trial.

A Swiss news website [said](#) that the Swiss authorities were faced with an increased number of requests from the Turkish government against social media posts that Turkey considers as "defamatory" or "sympathetic to terrorist groups."

Diyarbakır prosecutors [prepared](#) a Red Notice request against Osman Baydemir, a former MP for the pro-Kurdish HDP and the former mayor of Diyarbakır. The Chief Prosecutor's Office also asked the Justice Ministry to demand Baydemir's extradition from the UK where he reportedly lives.

OTHER MINORITIES

DISCRIMINATION AND HARASSMENT AGAINST LGBTI

- Deputy chairman of ruling AKP in an interview [implied](#) government censorship over a homosexual character on a Turkish show on Netflix.
- A university student in Ankara [received](#) online death threats after promoting a lecture on LGBTI rights.

- A photography studio in Kocaeli [received](#) threats after shared pictures of a homosexual couple on social media.
- An LGBTI person was verbally [attacked](#) and threatened by a grocery store employee in İstanbul.
- An LGBTI activist in İzmir [alleged](#) that the police specifically targeted him during a protest, using excessive force.
- A group of trans women were reportedly [assaulted](#) in Antalya.
- An on-call doctor in İstanbul allegedly [refused](#) to examine and treat a LGBTI+ patient and insulted him/her.
- An Ankara court [ruled](#) to block access to gabile.com, a dating and chat site for Turkey's LGBTI+ community.

RELIGIOUS GROUPS

- Some graves in an Armenian cemetery in the capital city of Ankara were [desecrated](#).
- Amidst the clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia, a [convoy](#) of cars with Azerbaijan flags was seen touring around the Kumkapı quarter in İstanbul which is home to the Armenian Patriarchate of Constantinople as well as many migrants from Armenia, leading to [fears](#) among the country's Armenian minority.

ETHNIC GROUPS

- Tuna fish brand Dardanel was [accused](#) of discriminating against Roma women in job applications.

PRISON CONDITIONS

The quarter was marked by campaigns by family members of sick inmates not released despite their deteriorating health condition and reports about prisoners being denied necessary treatment. Some prisoners who were released at a late stage of their illness passed away soon afterwards.

Thousands of political prisoners who were excluded from the scope of an [early release law](#) enacted in April 2020 to ease overcrowding in prisons amid the Covid-19 pandemic were faced with a grave risk to their right to life. Media reports often conflicted the figures provided by authorities with regard to Covid-19 outbreaks among prisoners, which prompted suspicions that the officials were trying to conceal the true extend of the situation behind bars.

The Human Rights Association (İHD) [reported](#) in September that 20 people had died in prisons since the beginning of the year. İHD also claimed that there were 1,605 sick prisoners, 604 of which are seriously ill.

A quarterly [report](#) by the Association of Lawyers for Freedom (ÖHD) on the prison conditions in the Marmara region found a surge in rights violations against prisoners including deprivation of nutrition, undue transfers and strip searches, and denial of necessary medical treatment.

- Birsen Yıldırım, the wife of inmate Deniz Yıldırım, [called](#) on the authorities for the release of her husband who was diagnosed with colon cancer and Covid-19 in the Elazığ prison where he is held.
- Media reports said cancer patient prisoner Fatma Özbay was [denied](#) treatment by authorities in the western province of İzmir.
- Fatih Terzioğlu, jailed TV director who has been suffering from stomach cancer behind bars, was [released](#) after an intensive campaign on social media led by his wife. Terzioğlu [lost](#) his life a month after his release.
- Rights activist Melek Çetinkaya who was arrested on July 17 was [denied](#) her medication and telephone rights in prison, according to the [revelations](#) by her daughter Rüveyda Çetinkaya on social media.
- A report [claimed](#) that Turkish police deliberately put a political detainee in a cell with a suspected ISIS suicide bomber in an attempt to coerce the detainee into signing a self-incriminating statement.
- Reports [claimed](#) that a prisoner named Tenzike Acar in İstanbul was prevented from receiving treatment for Hepatitis B because she refused to undergo treatment in handcuffs.
- Jailed journalist Gazel Bulut [revealed](#) in a letter to an MP that she has not been allowed to see her four-year-old daughter for the past six months due to Covid-19 measures related to contact visits in prison.
- Media reports [indicated](#) that sick inmate Semire Direkçi has been denied surgery that she needs.
- Ali Boçnak, a 76-year-old sick inmate, [lost](#) his life behind bars after prosecutors refused to release him.
- İlhan İşbilen, a 74-year-old former politician imprisoned over alleged links to the Gülen movement was [hospitalized](#) after contracting Covid-19 behind bars.
- [Mustafa Kabakçioğlu](#), a former police officer imprisoned over alleged links to the Gülen movement was found dead in a quarantine cell where he was placed after showing symptoms of Covid-19.
- Jailed lawyer Aycaan Çiçek had her finger [broken](#) after a scuffle with prison guards and she was placed in solitary confinement afterwards, instead of being taken to a hospital for treatment.

REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

INCIDENTS AT THE EASTERN AND SOUTHEASTERN BORDERS

In July, Turkish rescue teams [recovered](#) bodies of more than 50 migrants from Lake Van in eastern Turkey after a boat carrying over 100 migrants went missing in late July.

A Syrian migrant family was subjected to [torture](#) upon their arrival to a border post in Ceylanpınar in southeast Turkey.

Twenty migrants were [subjected](#) to torture and ill-treatment for three days at a police station near Turkish-Iranian border.

PUSHBACKS AT THE TURKISH-GREEK BORDER

Greece was accused of pushing migrants back to Turkey at the Turkish-Greek land and sea borders. The collective expulsions sometimes included Turkish political asylum seekers who were immediately arrested by Turkish authorities after being pushed back.

In July, [Human Rights Watch \(HRW\)](#) called on Greece to investigate the allegations, which continued throughout [August](#) and [September](#). Some asylum seekers who gave interviews to the [Associated Press](#) and the Turkish-language [Bold Medya](#) news website alleged that they suffered torture and ill-treatment at the hands of the Greek forces before being pushed back. One Turkish asylum seeker, [Ümit Şakır](#), was reported missing after being left stranded in the Evros River which forms the land border between the two countries.

RACIST ATTACKS AND HATE CRIMES TARGETING REFUGEES

- [Hamza Ajan](#), a 17-year-old Syrian refugee was beaten to death in Bursa.
- Six [Syrian migrant children](#) were battered in Hatay, with two of them being left in critical condition.
- Six Syrian refugees [were](#) subjected to an armed assault in İstanbul and one of them, the 21-year-old Abdulkadir Davud, lost his life after being shot.
- [Eymen Hammami](#), a 16-year-old Syrian refugee child was stabbed to death in Samsun.

REFOULEMENT OF FOREIGN NATIONALS LIVING IN TURKEY

- A report published in the UK [claimed](#) that Turkey is helping China repatriate Uighur dissidents by way of third countries. The allegation was [corroborated](#) by former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.
- Turkey reportedly [handed over](#) an Algerian military officer to his country where he is to face espionage charges.
- Turkish authorities [arrested](#) Maryam Shariatmadari, an Iranian anti-hijab activist, to be deported to Iran, where she could face execution. Shariatmadari was released the next day.

TORTURE AND ILL-TREATMENT

- Journalist Sibel Hürtaş [revealed](#) in a column that she was exposed to torture in police custody.
- [Sevil Rojbin Çetin](#), a member of the HDP, was reportedly exposed to torture by the police during a house raid in Diyarbakır.
- Media reports [indicated](#) that Tacettin Kardaş who was detained in Diyarbakır on June 30 for his social media posts was subjected to torture and ill-treatment during his questioning.
- The daughter of a former judge who has been imprisoned since a failed coup in July 2016 [revealed](#) on social media that her father was subjected to torture and ill-treatment at the hands of prison guards.
- Reports [indicated](#) that three people who were detained in İstanbul for allegedly attacking a police vehicle were subjected to torture and ill-treatment in custody.

- Reports said that 20 migrants were [subjected](#) to torture and ill-treatment for three days at a police station near Turkish-Iranian border.
- In July, Human Rights Watch (HRW) [urged](#) Turkey to investigate allegations of serious abuses committed by police and neighborhood night watchmen against more than a dozen people in İstanbul and the Southeast.
- Hunger striking lawyers Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal were reportedly [taken](#) to a hospital for a “forced intervention,” after a forensic medicine report found that the two were not in a state to stay in prison.
- Two civilians, one of them 15 years old, [were](#) subjected to physical violence by gendarmerie forces in the eastern province of Van.
- A man named Mehmet Çelik was [beaten up](#) by neighborhood guards in Adana after he refused to submit his identification.
- A street vendor named Arif Gülmez was reportedly [assaulted](#) by municipal police in İstanbul.
- Reports indicated that 18 people who were detained while trying to hold a press briefing on the occasion of the UN Day of Peace were [subjected](#) to torture and ill-treatment at the Sancaktepe police department.
- One of the 23 female university students detained for alleged Gülen links [revealed](#) that they were subjected to abusive and repetitive strip searches in custody.
- Reports said that three people who were detained in house raids in Urfa for alleged membership in terrorist groups, were [subjected](#) to torture and ill-treatment while in custody at the Urfa police department.
- Turkish soldiers [tortured](#) two Kurdish villagers they had detained, throwing them from a helicopter after battering them, according to eyewitness claims. A medical report stated one of the villagers suffered injuries consistent with a fall from a height. One of the villagers, Servet Turgut, died after 20 days in intensive care.
- Reports alleged that a Syrian migrant family was subjected to [torture](#), including battering and strip searches, upon their arrival to a border post in Ceylanpınar in southeast Turkey.

WOMEN’S RIGHTS

THE İSTANBUL CONVENTION DEBATE

During the quarter, members of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) repeatedly [hinted at](#) Turkey’s potential withdrawal from the İstanbul Convention, the international convention against gender-based violence which has come under criticism among Turkey’s conservative circles as being “damaging to family values.” The statement prompted protests on the part of women’s rights activists, which were often violently suppressed by the police.

In July, the [murder](#) of a 27-year-old woman by her ex-lover sparked outrage on Turkish social media, leading to calls for implementing the convention.

INCIDENTS OF FEMICIDE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

In July, the Mor Çatı Women's Shelter Foundation [accused](#) public officials of endangering women by disclosing the location of their shelters after a 27-year-old woman was found dead in her hometown of Bingöl a week after her husband forced her to return from a shelter in İstanbul.

Pınar Gültekin, a 27-year-old university student, was [killed](#) by an ex-lover in Muğla. The brutality of the incident prompted a wave of protests held by women's rights groups across the country.

An [18-year-old woman](#) who was repeatedly raped by a sergeant in southeastern Turkey died in a hospital after attempting to commit suicide.

A woman in Bursa [claimed](#) that authorities released a man who allegedly raped her. Her allegations drew widespread social media attention.

A 24-year-old Yazidi woman was [rescued](#) by her family from her captivity at the hands of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in the Turkish capital of Ankara.

The family of a 12-year-old rape survivor [received](#) threats after they reported the leader of a religious cult for sexual assault against their daughter.