

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/turkey-journalists-targeted-by-virulent-23-08-2012,43270.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Turkey

Dangerous talk

## Journalists targeted by virulent smear campaign

23 August 2012

Reporters Without Borders is very disturbed by the aggressive smear campaign that the Islamist and nationalist daily *Yeni Akit* (New Agreement) and its website, [Habervaktim.com](http://Habervaktim.com), have been waging in recent days against four leading journalists – **Ali Bayramoglu, Cengiz Candar, Hasan Cemal** and **Yasemin Congar** – because of their views on Turkey's Kurdish issue. Politicians are also being attacked.

"By targeting people committed to tolerance and peace, this campaign is trying to block any evolution in Turkish society," Reporters Without Borders said. "Experience has shown the degree to which this kind of prejudiced, xenophobic and paranoid discourse is not just harmful but also dangerous. Words have meaning and the accusations levelled against these journalists expose them to real peril. This virulent hate campaign must stop at once and everything possible must be done to protect its targets."

*Yeni Akit* has been attacking the well-known columnist Ali Bayramoglu for several weeks, accusing him of being an Armenian who "defends Armenian ideas with a racist basis." A defender of minority rights and friend of [Hrant Dink, the Turkish-Armenian newspaper editor murdered in 2007](#), Bayramoglu has been branded by *Yeni Akit* as a "despicable enemy of the Turks" and as one who "even hides the fact that he is Armenian from his friends."

Alluding to the armed separatist Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), the newspaper said Bayramoglu's "support for the terrorist organization" had been demonstrated by his participation in a conference in London entitled "In search of solutions to the Kurdish issue."

The 10 August issue of *Yeni Akit* described Cengiz Candar and Hasan Cemal as enthusiastic PKK propagandists and supporters of the Kurdish separatist cause. An article headlined "Sakik's bombs," supposedly based on a letter from Semdin Sakik, a jailed former PKK leader who has renounced his previous loyalties, said the PKK regarded them as "very valuable" assets.

"As [Cemal] was not allowed to visit Imrali [the prison where PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan is being held], he went to Qandil [the area just inside northern Iraq that is a PKK base]," the article said, adding that he has "glorified the Öcalan-Karayilan duo." *Yeni Akit* went on to claim that Candar "surpasses PKK fanatics in heaping praise on the organization and its leaders."

Such allegations evoke painful memories within the media. Candar and two other journalists, **Nazli Ilıcak** and **Mehmet Ali Birand**, were fired in February 1997, during the last [military intervention in Turkish politics](#), after "statements" by Sakik appeared in several secularist newspapers.

It subsequently turned out that these "revelations" were orchestrated by the armed forces high command, most of whose members are now charged in the investigation into alleged attempts to destabilize the current civilian government.

A petition entitled "We demand justice" has been launched by a number of intellectuals and journalists including well-known conservatives such as Hilal Kaplan, Mehmet Bekaroglu, Ömer Faruk Gergerligolu and Emine Uçak Erdogan. It criticizes *Yeni Akit's* "irresponsible attitude," demands an end to the intimidation campaign and urges the media to respect professional ethics.

The journalists' union [TGC](#) and the human rights group [IHD](#) have asked the police to protect the journalists concerned. Candar and Bayramoglu have announced their intention to sue Yeni Akit.

The demands of Turkey's Kurdish minority continue to be one of the most sensitive issues for the Turkish media to cover. The crackdown on peaceful Kurdish activists and Kurdish media [has intensified](#) in recent months and the trial of [44 pro-Kurdish journalists, of whom 36 are in preventive detention](#), is due to open on 10 September.

Tension has increased since mid-July, when the PKK launched a major offensive in Turkey after Kurds took control of several towns in northern Syria.

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