

Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/turkey-dutch-journalist-should-never-have-09-04-2015,47770.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Turkey

Intimidation

Dutch journalist should never have been put on trial

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Reporters Without Borders travelled to the southeastern city of Diyarbakir for the start of Dutch journalist **Frederike Geerdink's** trial today on a charge of propaganda in support for the outlawed Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). She is among the first foreign journalists to be tried in Turkey since 1995.

Geerdink is the only western reporter known to be based in Diyarbakir, where she has lived since 2006. She has written a book and many articles about Kurdish issues, especially on the website *Diken* and her blog, called "[Kurdish Matters](#)."

She was charged with "propaganda in support of a terrorist organization" under article 7.2 of Turkey's terrorism law – a charge that carries a possible five-year jail sentence – after anti-terrorism police searched her home and questioned her for several hours on 6 January.

Johann Bihr, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk, and Erol Önderoğlu, the organization's Turkey representative, attended the opening of the trial along with Amnesty International, the European Federation of Journalists (EFJ) and Dutch embassy representatives and many local and international reporters.

At the end of today's hearing, the prosecutor requested Geerdink's acquittal, saying her articles were journalistic in nature and did not defend the use of violence. In the senior judge's absence, the verdict was postponed until 13 April.

"We are relieved that the prosecutor requested Geerdink's acquittal and we very much hope that the court will adopt his recommendation," Bihr said. *"This trial should never have taken place. It is part of a campaign to intimidate foreign journalists based in Turkey."*

The "fourth judicial reform package" that was adopted in April 2013 against a backdrop of peace talks between the government and PKK rebels has begun to restrict use of the terrorism law by introducing the charge of inciting or defending violence. Its long-awaited adoption was seen as a way of limiting misuse of terrorism legislation to persecute writers, journalists and bloggers.

The charge of "membership of a terrorist organization" is nonetheless still widely used in an arbitrary manner against journalists critical of the authorities. Some 40 journalists are currently [being prosecuted](#) on this charge as alleged members of a media committee run by the KCK, a PKK-affiliated group.

Leading TV presenter **Sedef Kabaş** is due to stand trial soon for criticizing a prosecutor on Twitter. She is charged with exposing a public official to the possibility of being targeted by a terrorist organization.

"Geerdink's trial simultaneously illustrates the progress made in the recent judicial reforms and their limitations," Önderoğlu said.

"The legislation has evolved but the judicial culture is still permeated by paranoid security attitudes. If the authorities really want to guarantee media freedom, they must completely overhaul the terrorism law and ensure that it is interpreted in a restricted manner."

Reporters Without Borders will remain in Diyarbakir one more day to investigate the Kurdish issue's impact on media freedom.
