

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/turkey-authorities-asked-to-stop-10-09-2012,43358.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Turkey

Mass trial

## Authorities asked to stop criminalizing journalism as trial of 36 detained pro-Kurdish journalists gets under way

10 September 2012

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The trial of 36 journalists with pro-Kurdish media who [have been held since 20 December 2011](#) opens today in Istanbul. Reporters Without Borders, whose Turkish correspondent is attending the trial, calls for the release of all journalists detained in connection with their work and urges the judicial authorities to give them a fair trial.

"This mass trial recalls darker times that we had hoped were a thing of the past," Reporters Without Borders said. "Despite all the promises and some marginal improvements, the judicial system is persisting with [the serious abuses that we have been condemning for years](#) – criminalization of critical and activist journalism, articles treated as acts of terrorism and systematic abuses of the anti-terrorism law and pre-trial detention.

"This repressive approach to the media and civil society not only threatens freedom of information and violates Turkey's international obligations but also makes it more unlikely that a peaceful solution will be found to the Kurdish problem in the near future and undermines the credibility of Turkey's attempts to play the role of a regional model."

A total of 44 journalists with pro-Kurdish media such the newspaper *Özgür Gündem* and the news agency *DIHA* go on trial today – the 36 who have been held ever since their arrest last December and eight others who have since been released.

They are above all accused of taking orders from the KCK – the urban wing of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), an armed separatist group that is outlawed – and of forming "media committees" at the KCK's behest. Most of them are charged with membership of an illegal organization or with being one of its leaders.

In support of these charges, the 800-page indictment refers above all to published articles and to the journalists' contacts and conversations. As in [the trial of journalists working for Oda TV](#), much is being read into their supposed reasons for covering certain events or talking to certain sources.

As far as the prosecution is concerned, contacting or interviewing pro-Kurdish activists, including members of the legal BDP party, is clearly a crime, and coverage of mistreatment of detainees, violent crackdowns on demonstrations or a deadly mistake by the Turkish air force must have been carried out on the KCK's orders in order to discredit the authorities. Part of the prosecution case file is being kept secret in violation of the rights of defence.

Although the trial's scale is unprecedented in recent years in Turkey, the trial is far from being isolated. Journalists are being tried every week, in most cases under the anti-terrorism law. The [trial of 204 people, including Nobel Peace Prize nominee Ragıp Zarakolu and three other journalists, under a separate section of the KCK case](#) will resume on 1 October ([LINK](#)).

A court in the southeastern city of Diyarbakir is to rule on 13 September on a request for the conditional release of *Hawar* journalist **Bedri Adanir**, who has been held since January 2010. The trial of **Murat Aydın**, a *DIHA* journalist who has been held since October 2011 on a charge of "PKK propaganda through the media," is to begin in the eastern city of Van on 18 September.

The [trial of Ahmet Sik, Nedim Sener and the Oda TV journalists](#) will meanwhile resume in Istanbul on 14 September.

- Read Reporters Without Borders' recommendations in the report: "[A book is not a bomb! Media and justice in Turkey – mistrust and repression](#)" (June 2011)
- Read our [previous statements on Turkey](#)
- Read FIDH / OMCT fact-finding mission report "[Human rights defenders, guilty until proven innocent](#)" (June 2012)

*(Picture: Bülent Kilic / AFP)*

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