

# Reporters Without Borders

<http://www.rsf.org/turkey-how-far-will-censorship-go-as-17-02-2014,45875.html>

Europe/Ex-USSR - Turkey

Reporting ban

## How far will censorship go as political crisis deepens?

17 February 2014

Reporters Without Borders condemns a court-ordered ban on media references to investigations into alleged arms convoys to Syria that may have been organized by Turkey's National Intelligence Organization (MIT).

Vehicles suspected of carrying arms [were stopped twice by police](#) in Hatay and Adana, two provinces near the Syrian border, in January but were allowed to continue after provincial officials intervened. The police officers responsible for the searches were sanctioned.

The incidents have fuelled press speculation about the power struggle between the AKP government and the many police and judicial officials suspected of being members of an influential movement led by Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish theologian based in the United States.

The in-fighting between the AKP and the Gülen movement [has dominated Turkish news coverage since last December](#), when a series of government corruption scandals exposed the existence of the split between the two former allies.

Describing the investigations into the alleged armed convoys as "state secrets," an Adana court issued an order on 13 February banning the media from publishing any information about the investigations before they are concluded. Posted [on the website of the Supreme Council for Broadcasting \(RTÜK\)](#), the ban applies to all media and websites.

"This blatant act of censorship's violates the Turkish population's right to be informed about a matter of public interest," said Johann Bühr, the head of the Reporters Without Borders Eastern Europe and Central Asia desk.

"Using national security as a pretext, the authorities are yet again trying to suppress a legitimate debate about Turkish foreign policy and the use of state institutions in the war that Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government is waging against the Gülen movement."

Bühr added: "We call on the justice system to immediately rescind this disproportionate ban and to allow the media to do their job. At a time of such polarization, all sides must respect the right of journalists to work independently, observing professional ethics and eschewing any political agenda."

## Deep concern about media freedom

Reminiscent of [the censorship of coverage of the car bombs in Reyhanli](#) last May, the ban has come amid a series of damaging blows to media freedom in Turkey. Hundreds of journalists [demonstrated in Istanbul](#) yesterday in protest against [cyber-censorship](#) and government meddling in the editorial policies of leading media.

Just days after the emergence of recordings proved such government meddling, the prime minister recognized on 11 February that he called a *HaberTürk* TV executive to request the withdrawal of a text strip on the screen announcing a statement by the head of the opposition nationalist MHP party.

Revelations of this kind have increased public awareness of government pressure on the mainstream media. The incestuous relations between the government and certain media companies were also highlighted by [the scale of media self-censorship of the "Gezi Park" anti-government protests](#) in the summer of 2013.

**Mahir Zeynalov**, an Azerbaijani journalist who is married to a Turkish citizen and who had

lived in Turkey for four years, was expelled on 7 February as a result of criminal charges of “insulting the prime minister” in critical comments posted on Twitter.

A reporter for *Today's Zaman*, an English-language daily that supports the Gülen movement, Zeynalov is the first foreign journalist to be expelled since 1995. He was deported two days after [parliament approved a law drastically increasing Internet censorship](#).

[No fewer than 28 journalists and media workers are currently detained](#) in connection with their work in Turkey, which is ranked 154th out of 180 countries in the [2014 Reporters Without Borders press freedom index](#).

*(Photo: Ozan Kose / AFP)*

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