

Turkey: IPI and partner organisations condemn escalating use of “disinformation law” against journalists and call for its repeal

The undersigned press freedom, freedom of expression, journalists’ and human rights organisations strongly condemn the intensifying use of Article 217/A of the Turkish Penal Code — widely known as the “disinformation law” — to arrest, detain, and prosecute journalists, and call on the government to repeal the provision immediately and release all journalists imprisoned under it.

Since the law entered into force in October 2022, at least 83 journalists have been charged 114 times over disinformation according to news reports. The scale of Article 217/A’s use against journalists has been [starkly illustrated](#) in a recent article. The two journalists most frequently charged under the law are BirGün’s İsmail Arı, who faced the charge six times, and DW Turkish’s Alican Uludağ, who faced it four times. Both journalists are currently imprisoned.

In recent months, authorities have escalated and accelerated use of the law to arrest and sentence journalists under the disinformation law’s vague prohibitions, as part of a wider pattern of the weaponisation of legislation to criminalise legitimate journalism and silence reporting in Turkey.

On February 19, judicial reporter and DW Turkish correspondent **Alican Uludağ** was [taken into custody](#) in Ankara and transferred to Istanbul on charges of “insulting the president” under Article 299 and disinformation under Article 217/A. Uludağ was ultimately arrested on the former charge and remains in prison pending trial, and still faces the disinformation charge.

On March 15, journalist **Bilal Özcan** was taken into custody after reporting that the death of an influencer may have been a homicide rather than a suicide. Özcan was [arrested](#) in Istanbul on disinformation charges and has since remained in pretrial detention.

On March 22, BirGün reporter **İsmail Arı** was [detained](#) in Tokat while visiting his family and transported to Ankara on disinformation charges stemming from a report about the financial mismanagement of public foundations. Arı denied any wrongdoing, stating that the information in his reporting had long been in the public domain. He was nevertheless imprisoned pending trial on disinformation charges and has since been held at Sincan Prison in Ankara.

On April 14, an Istanbul court [sentenced](#) journalists **Murat Ağirel** and **Barış Pehlivan** to one year and three months in prison each under Article 217/A for their commentary on a Halk TV broadcast about trade between Turkey and Israel. While the sentences have been handed down, Ağirel and Pehlivan have not yet been imprisoned, as the verdicts are subject to appeal.

Also on April 14, a separate Istanbul court [convicted](#) journalist **Zafer Arapkirli** under the disinformation law and sentenced him to two years and six months in prison. Arapkirli had been charged in connection with a social media post from December 2024, in which he condemned attacks by jihadist groups on Alawite settlements in Syria.

On April 17, **Turgay Kılıç**, a journalist at NEO TV in İzmir, was [detained](#) at his workplace and referred to court on disinformation charges over a social media post. Kılıç had shared screenshots of threats and calls to violence circulating on Telegram targeting schools in İzmir, following two separate attacks on schools in Turkey. In his statement to police, Kılıç said he had acted in his capacity as a journalist and that the images were drawn from publicly accessible Telegram groups. Kılıç was formally arrested following the detention. He was subsequently [released](#) under judicial supervision, but still faces prosecution.

On April 18, **Mehmet Yetim**, editorial director of Kulis TV, was [detained](#) in Urfa. Yetim was charged under the disinformation law, with authorities citing a social media post as the basis for the investigation. His family disputed the arrest, noting that the journalist had no criminal intent. The court nonetheless ordered his pretrial detention, ruling that supervisory measures short of imprisonment would be insufficient.

This documented pattern of abuse of the “disinformation law” against journalists and media positions Turkey as a regional and even global outlier in the misuse of regressive fake news and disinformation legislation to stifle media freedom and freedom of expression, and further weakens an already hostile climate for free and independent journalism in the country.

Turkey’s disinformation law is structurally incompatible with international press freedom standards. Its language fails to define clearly what constitutes “untrue information” or to specify what content poses a threat to national security or public order. As one journalist prosecuted under the law [underlines](#): any information not sourced from the government is liable to be deemed false. Such deficiencies leave courts with unchecked power to determine criminality, enabling them to influence prosecutions of critical journalism.

The undersigned organisations reiterate that a free and independent press is itself the most durable safeguard against the spread of false information. Criminalising journalism is neither a lawful nor an effective response to it.

We call on Turkish authorities to immediately and unconditionally:

- Release all journalists arrested under Article 217/A,
- Drop all pending charges against journalists arising from their reporting or commentary,
- Repeal Article 217/A in its entirety, and
- Bring all legislation regulating freedom of expression into conformity with Turkey’s international obligations.

Signed by:

International Press Institute (IPI)

Articolo 21

Association of European Journalists (AEJ)

Coalition For Women In Journalism (CFWIJ)

Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)

Civil Rights Defenders (CRD)

European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF)

European Federation of Journalists (EFJ)

Foreign Media Association (FMA) Turkey

International Federation of Journalists (IFJ)

IFEX

IPS Communication Foundation (bianet)

Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA)

Norwegian Helsinki Committee

Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT)

South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)

PEN America

PEN Denmark

PEN International

PEN Norway

PEN Sweden

Progressive Journalists Association (PJA)

P24 Platform for Independent Journalism

Reporters Without Borders (RSF)

The Journalists' Union of Turkey (TGS)