

Think, think...



Freedom of Expression Weekly Bulletin

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What happened last week?

*** Ministry of the Interior dismissed Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van Mayors. Governors of the three provinces were assigned as trustee to replace them. *Details below...*

*** As operations of the Damascus regime continue in Idlib after Turkey's observation plots, relations with Moscow started to get tense. Syria performed an airstrike against a Turkish military convoy. Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu indicated that operations of the Syrian army may lead to "a disaster," announcing that Turkey is not intending to withdraw from the region. Russian Foreign Minister announced that Turkey's military presence is not preventing clashes, saying, "*We have warned Turkey that we would take action against such attacks.*"

*** Ministry of National Defense announced that the first stage of the convention on a "Security Zone" with the U.S. Government has started. However, what the stage clearly is unclear. The only conclusion emerging from the phone call between Minister Hulusi Akar with his U.S. correspondent was a plan on military boards to come together in Ankara again, as soon as possible.

*** Bar Associations are protesting the Court Year Opening Ceremony at the Presidential Palace. 42 Bar Associations, including Izmir and Istanbul, announced that they will not attend the ceremony hosted by the executive power with reasons that it is against judicial independence and objectivity.

*** The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) evaluated the application on the ban on Wikipedia in a fastened procedure; giving Turkey time until October 31st to prepare a defense for the access ban.

*** The forest fire in Izmir could only be taken under control after three days. Minister of Agriculture and Forestry Bekir Pakdemirli answered the question on why fire fighting aircraft wasn't used by saying, "the aircraft is damaged." It was later revealed that this reply was not correct. The minister defended that "*the government was politically attacked*" this time.



Trustees against electors' will: Three mayors dismissed

Ministry of the Interior dismissed Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van Mayors. Diyarbakır Metropolitan Mayor Selçuk Mızraklı, Mardin Metropolitan Mayor Ahmet Türk and Van Metropolitan

Mayor Bedia Özgökçe Ertan were replaced with the governors of the three provinces as trustees. The Ministry based this decision on the investigations conducted against the elected mayors. Governor Mehmet Emin Bilmez, who is assigned as trustee for Van Metropolitan Municipality, annulled the municipal assembly and announced that the assembly's duties and authorities will be limited to the municipality selected by himself. On the other hand, an official document was revealed that showed that the preparation to assign trustees on municipalities had already started one day after the local elections on March 31st (April 1st).

In the operations started in 29 provinces, including Diyarbakır, Van and Mardin simultaneous with trustee assignments, 418 people were detained. Those detained include elected local administrators, municipal workers and People's Democratic Party (HDP) executives. Protest demonstrations were prevented in many provinces. Governorates banned protests for 30 days in Mardin and Gaziantep, for 15 days in Diyarbakır, Adana, Muş and Kocaeli and for 10 days in Izmir. Protest bans are ongoing in Van already for longer than 1000 days.

The group attempting to march towards the municipality buildings in Diyarbakır, Van and Mardin were attacked by the police with tear gas and pressurized water. Municipal buildings and party buildings were taken under blockade. Entrances to and exits from the provinces were banned. Protests were intervened in many provinces, especially in Istanbul, Izmir and Muğla. MPs were wounded in police attacks. Protesters were tortured. Hundreds of citizens were detained. Those detained include journalists Ahmet Kanbal, Mehmet Şah Oruç, Rojda Aydın, Nurcan Yalçın and Halime Parlak, who were tracking protests in Mardin. Turkish Journalists Association announced the number of detained journalists exceeded 10. In the protest at Izmir Courthouse, 26 lawyers and one journalist were beaten and detained. Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TIHV) indicated that the violence against citizens, who used their Constitutional rights during the protests against trustee assignments, is of the quality of "torture" and not an "excess authority of use of force." The police attacked those taking shelter at a coffee house during protests in Van, beating one young citizen to near death and detaining him. Van Bar Association described the incident as a "detainment with the intent of homicide." Van Governorate ignored the torture, claiming that the police were attacked by the protesters.

Trustees were allowed to be assigned at municipalities with the Statutory Decree No. 674, issued during the State of Emergency. Trustees started to be assigned in 2016 and continued their work until the local elections in 2019. Diyarbakır was governed by a trustee during this time; Adnan Selçuk Mızraklı was then elected with 62.93% of votes. Ahmet Türk, who was previously dismissed and was replaced with a trustee in Mardin, was re-elected on March 31st with 56.24% of votes. Bedia Özgökçe Ertan was also elected as mayor in Van with 53.83% of votes.

So the electors responded to the trustees at the ballot boxes. However, Erdoğan stated that trustees will be assigned to municipalities once again six months before the elections, announcing that there is no free electors' right in the country. Ignoring people's will, the Ministry assigned trustees to replace elected mayors and the assigned trustees are replacing municipal assemblies. For instance, none of the candidates elected in the local elections on March 31st are on duty now.

Those assigned are not only above those elected in the administrative hierarchy in Turkey, for those elected no longer even exist! Then what was the use of the elections?!

The Initiative for Freedom of Expression



Investigation against Kars Co-Mayors

Kars Co-Mayor Ayhan Bilgen was summoned to testify as the trustee operation of the Interior Ministry is still on agenda. Bilgen testified within the allegation against him of “making illegal organisation propaganda” through his social media posts within the investigation conducted against him by Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office.

On the other hand, the police raided the home of Kars Co-Mayor Şevin Alaca in Istanbul. Alaca expressed that she couldn’t find out what the investigation was about, as there was a “confidentiality” order on the file.



Access ban against news on access ban

An access ban was brought on the news on the access ban brought on the news on a public property being given to Medipol University. Istanbul 11th Criminal Judicature of Peace banned 168 URLs to access, together with the news on Gazete Duvar, T24, Sözcü, Artıgerçek, Yeni Yüzyıl, KRT TV as well as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube posts. The

censored news include the news on our website, “[Criminal Judicatures of Peace continue to ban access: 563 URLs banned to access](#)” that was published on August 9th. We publish our news article once again within the right to information, freedom of expression and press freedom, resisting the ban.



Press not able to leave State of Emergency

Republican People’s Party (CHP)’s former journalist MP Utku Çakırözer announced numbers on violations of press freedom and freedom of expression since June 25, 2018, the day the Presidential system was effective. Çakırözer pointed out that at least 50 journalists were sentenced to longer than

130 years of imprisonment in total in the last year. “130 years of press freedom and freedom of expression was compensated by one year in the Presidential system,” Çakırözler said. 132 journalists, writers and cartoonists continued to be prosecuted during this time; 134 journalists are still in prison.



Warrant against Ferhat Tunç before investigation concludes

Istanbul 37th Assize Court issued a warrant against artist Ferhat Tunç due to “making terrorist organisation propaganda” through his social media posts. Tunç announced that the warrant was issued before the investigation stage was concluded and before being summoned to testify at the Prosecutor’s Office. In the related social media posts, Tunç had reacted against the Afrin

operation and commemorated civilians dying at the operation.



Author Ayşegül Tözeren detained

Evrensel Daily writer and author Ayşegül Tözeren was detained at the police raid against her home. The police has only stated that there was a “denouncement” against her during the detainment. Tözeren’s lawyers were prevented from meeting with their client due to a decree of restriction by the Prosecutor’s Office. Taken to the court after three days, Tözören was released with judicial

measures and travel ban. Her lawyer, Erdal Doğan, announced that the charges against her include two donations of 100 TL for poor families in Silopi as well as the statement in Suruç district of Urfa made together with a group of authors in 2014 to point out victim children and women during the clashes.



Imprisonment against students calling for protest

7 Ankara University students, making calls for protest after the ISIS attack where hundreds were wounded and 103 have lost their lives in Ankara, were sentenced to imprisonment. The students were acquitted of “illegal organisation membership” at Ankara 25th Assize Court and were sentenced to 2 years and

seven months of imprisonment each due to “preventing the act of education.”



Five websites banned to access after Religious Affairs calls them “religiously inappropriate”

Following the request of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, Ankara 3rd Criminal Judicature of Peace brought an access ban on five websites belonging to Mihr Sect leader İskender Evrenesoğlu, publishing paraphrases and translations

of the Quran. According to Religious Affairs Supreme Council of the Directorate of Religious Affairs, the websites were found “inappropriate in terms of the basic qualities of Islam” and were banned with the same reason.



Investigation against students distributing leaflets for their detained friends

Middle East Technical University (METU) Rectorate opened an investigation against the students, who distributed leaflets demanding the release of their detained friends, due to “distributing leaflets without

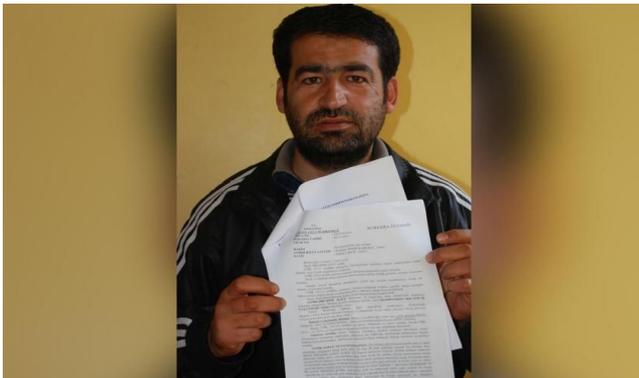
permission.” The friends of the students, whose release was demanded, have been detained due to a “possible protest” against the Rector before their graduation ceremony.



Governorate shield against torturing Presidential guards

Istanbul Governor Ali Yerlikaya didn't give permission for an investigation against Presidential guards, who have beaten lawyer Sertuğ Sürenoğlu. The Governor claimed that Sürenoğlu, who was tortured, has “*self-harmed by hitting his head on rough places in the car as he*

was waiting.” He further claimed that it is “*against the natural flow of life*” that Sürenoğlu was forced to sign a summary that stated that he has “insulted Erdoğan.”



Constitutional Court decree for citizen beaten by Erdoğan's guards

The Constitutional Court (AYM) issued a verdict of right violation against İbrahim Alıcı, who was beaten by guards of the

Prime Ministry due to opening a banner that said, “There is a burglar,” to react against the corruption on the agenda during a rally Erdoğan participated before the local elections in 2014, when Erdoğan was the Prime Minister. The Supreme Court issued 27,500 TL moral compensation to be paid against Alıcı due to the violation of the ban of inhumane treatment that is protected by Article 17 of the Turkish Constitution.



Süleyman Soylu targets LGBTI+s once again

Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, who have previously targeted LGBTI+ individuals with various statements and calling them “*a threat*,” continued his hate speech on Habertürk TV channel on August 20th. “*This is attempted to be legitimised in Turkey, it is being made public... It’s impossible for us to accept*

this according to our traditions and folklore, our religion, our faith... I am in worry that this is becoming widespread and legitimate. That’s it,” Soylu said.