

Systemic Siege of

Independent Journalism

in Türkiye

Legal pressure, economic precarity,

and the narrowing future

JOINT INTERNATIONAL PRESS FREEDOM
MISSION TO TÜRKIYE

(NOVEMBER 24 – 26, 2025)

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- » International Press Institute (IPI)
- » Amnesty International
- » ARTICLE 19 Europe
- » Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)
- » European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) as part of Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR)
- » Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT) as part of Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR)
- » Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
- » South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO)

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Introduction

The Mission

A coalition of eight international press freedom, free expression and human rights organisations participated in a mission to Türkiye from November 24 to 26, 2025, in Ankara. In discussions with a range of Turkish institutions and stakeholders, the mission delegation raised a wide variety of issues that have contributed to a further decline in press freedom in Türkiye since our last mission in November 2024. The situation over the past year has been marked by a sharp escalation in political pressure, judicial harassment and censorship targeting the press, contributing to a climate extremely hostile to independent journalism.

The mission was convened by the International Press Institute (IPI), and comprised representatives from the following organisations: Amnesty International, ARTICLE 19 Europe, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (ECPMF) and Osservatorio Balcani Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT) as part of Media Freedom Rapid Response (MFRR), Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the South East Europe Media Organisation (SEEMO). It is the seventh mission to Türkiye since 2019, reflecting sustained international engagement on press freedom concerns.



The delegation held meetings with the following institutions and stakeholders:

- » Turkish Constitutional Court (AYM)
- » Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK)
- » Delegation of the European Union to Türkiye
- » Foreign diplomatic missions in Türkiye
- » Representatives of Türkiye's political landscape, including MPs from the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party (DEM).
- » Association of Journalists, Ankara, and members of the journalism community.

Requests for meetings with the following stakeholders, however, went unanswered or were declined:

- » Ministry of Justice's Human Rights Department
- » Interior Ministry: Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya
- » Presidency's Director of Communications: Burhanettin Duran
- » Chair of the Radio and Television High Council: Mehmet Daniş
- » Chair of the Parliamentary Commission on Digital Platforms: Nazım Elmas
- » Speaker of the Grand National Assembly: Numan Kurtulmuş
- » Chair of the Parliamentary Human Rights Investigation Commission: Derya Yanık
- » Several representatives of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and Nationalist Movement Party (MHP).

Overview of key developments in 2025

In 2025, press and media freedom in Türkiye continued to deteriorate amid growing financial strain on independent journalism and an intensifying system of repression combining legal pressure, regulatory intervention, digital restrictions, and physical violence. The increasingly restrictive environment was reflected in Türkiye's drop to 159th out of 180 countries in RSF's [2025 World Press Freedom Index](#).

The decline in press freedom came amid a broader democratic backslide in Türkiye as high-profile detentions of opposition political figures marked a new phase of repression in the country. The government's crackdown on widespread protests following the detention of İstanbul mayor and opposition presidential candidate Ekrem İmamoğlu in March 2025 served as a catalyst for a surge in press freedom violations. Critical reporting was routinely framed as a criminal or security concern, reinforcing a pervasive chilling effect across the media ecosystem.

Türkiye [remained](#) among the countries with the highest number of press freedom alerts on international monitoring platforms. In 2025, it ranked second on the Council of Europe's [Safety of Journalists Platform](#) and was among the countries with the most incidents [documented](#) by the Mapping Media Freedom (MapMF) database, which recorded at least 137 press freedom violations in Türkiye affecting 259 journalists, media workers and media organisations.

Lawfare continued to represent one of the most significant threats to journalists. Authorities continued to instrumentalise broadly framed legal provisions, including terrorism- and disinformation-related offences, to open criminal investigations or prosecutions of journalists for their work. Prolonged pretrial detention and the [widespread](#) abuse of judicial control measures such as house arrest and travel bans functioned as ongoing constraints on journalistic activity, deepening fear and self-censorship within the profession.

Safety risks reached alarming levels amid a persistent culture of impunity. Journalists covering protests, particularly during the March 2025 demonstrations, were subjected to arbitrary detention and excessive use of police force. More broadly, physical attacks against journalists, including fatal and near-fatal assaults, underscored the failure of authorities to ensure effective protection and accountability. This included the case of journalist and documentary filmmaker [Hakan Tosun](#), whose death following an assault raised serious concerns over transparency during the investigation and lack of an effective inquiry. Hostile rhetoric and public targeting of media outlets further translated into tangible security threats.

Beyond individual targeting, repression extended to media organisations through regulatory and economic pressure. Broadcast sanctions, fines, and temporary bans targeted critical outlets, while confiscations and administrative interventions severely disrupted newsroom operations and media archives. In parallel, [digital repression](#) intensified through access blocking, account restrictions, and expanded regulatory control over online platforms.

Structural pressures compounded these restrictions. Algorithmic changes on major digital platforms sharply reduced the visibility and revenue of independent media, while the withdrawal of international funding further undermined financial sustainability. These combined pressures contributed to the closure of established outlets and heightened precarity for journalists, particularly those early in their careers.

The restrictive environment also affected international media, with foreign journalists facing opaque accreditation procedures, visa delays, and complex residence permit requirements that limited their ability to work independently and sustainably in Türkiye.

Taken together, these developments pointed to a continued contraction of freedom of expression and media pluralism in Türkiye in 2025. Reversing this trajectory will require urgent legislative reforms to decriminalise journalism, restore legal safeguards, and ensure genuine, inclusive, multi-stakeholder engagement on media freedom.

Key Issues

Justice Denied: Judicial Pressure on the Press

The pan-European press and media freedom violations monitoring database Mapping Media Freedom recorded a total of **100 incidents** of judicial harassment or lawfare impacting at least 248 journalists and media workers between November 2024 and October 2025. These cases constituted the largest share of press freedom violations reported in Türkiye. Of these incidents, **69 alerts** related to detention, arrest, and imprisonment, affecting 176 journalists and media workers. During the reporting period, courts handed down convictions to **22 journalists in these cases**. Taken together, this data pointed to a judiciary that was increasingly weaponised against the media, generating a chilling effect on journalism.

Since the previous media freedom mission in 2024, courts in Türkiye increasingly imposed judicial control measures such as **house arrest** and **travel bans** on journalists. These measures deterred investigative reporting and contributed to widespread self-censorship across the media sector. Journalists' homes and digital devices were frequently targeted through **house raids** and **criminal investigations**, often in the absence of clear or compelling evidence to justify them. Turkish authorities continued a pattern of instrumentalising vague legal provisions to investigate journalists for their legitimate public-interest work: Convictions **recorded** during this period were largely based on Türkiye's anti-terrorism law or on disinformation-related charges, both of which have been the focus of sustained criticism for the ease with which they can be used to target journalists and government critics.

Among the legislation most frequently used to restrict press and media freedom in Türkiye was the Anti-Terrorism Law (Law No. 3713). Its broadly framed provisions on “disclosing or publishing the identity of public officials on **anti-terrorism** duties or identifying them as targets” (Article 6/1) and on “terrorism **propaganda**” (Article 7/2) were repeatedly applied against journalists for their reporting. The vagueness of these provisions enabled expansive interpretation by courts, allowing routine journalistic activities to be criminalised.

A similar pattern emerged under the Turkish Penal Code. As experts had warned prior to its entry into force in 2022, the broad wording of the offence criminalising “disseminating disinformation” (Article 217/A) **facilitated** its use as a tool to deter critical reporting. Likewise, the offences of “provoking the public to hatred and hostility” (Article 216), “insulting the president” (Article 299) and “insulting a public official due to the performance of their duty” (Article 125/3) were **deployed** in ways that constrained legitimate expression, further narrowing the space for pluralistic debate and investigative journalism.

Legislative developments during the period introduced additional risks for media freedom. The Cybersecurity Law (Law No. 7545) **included** a provision criminalising making or disseminating content alleging data leaks while knowing that no such leak has occurred with the aim of causing anxiety, panic and fear among the public or of targeting institutions or individuals (Article 16/5), creating new grounds for the prosecution of journalists covering digital security, governance, and accountability. At the same time, existing regulatory frameworks, notably the Internet Law (Law No. 5651) and the broadcasting law governing the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK), Türkiye's broadcast regulator, (Law No. 6112), continued to be instrumentalised to restrict access to information and to impose punitive measures on critical media outlets. Together, these legal tools formed an interlocking framework that enabled sustained pressure on independent journalism.

Several emblematic cases illustrated the scale and severity of judicial pressure. Journalist **Fatih Altaylı** was detained for **191 days** and convicted of committing a “physical attack against the president” for discussing historical examples of assassinations of Ottoman emperors on his YouTube channel, a ruling widely **criticised** by legal experts as a blatant misinterpretation of the Penal Code. Journalist Tolga Şardan was **subjected to** judicial control, including a travel ban preventing him from leaving the country based on his reporting on a data leak in the state electronic signature system. Journalist Merdan Yanardağ was indicted with “political or military espionage”, after he was **detained** in October and Tele 1, the broadcasting channel he is the founder and editor-in-chief of, was confiscated by the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF) despite not being his property, before Yanardağ was taken to the prosecutor for his statement. Journalist **Furkan Karabay** was detained and subjected to solitary confinement due to his reporting on the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality investigations. Journalist Ercüment Akdeniz was **released** under a travel ban in October, after spending 247 days in detention on charges of “membership in a terrorist organisation”. Journalist İsmail Saymaz **spent** two months under house arrest between March and May 2025.

A significant portion of cases brought against journalists are based on the same few criminal provisions formulated in vague and overly broad terms, and the legislature continues to enact provisions of a similarly expansive nature, perpetuating legal uncertainty. Rather than serving as exceptional measures, **pre-trial detention** and judicial control increasingly function as punitive tools, reinforcing perceptions of judicial arbitrariness and undermining trust in legal safeguards. Taken together, these practices demonstrate that restrictions on press freedom are not isolated incidents, but elements of a broader environment where the law is routinely mobilised against the media, contributing to a growing perception that the judiciary is no longer independent in Türkiye.

Safety of Journalists: Violence, Impunity, and Hostile Rhetoric

Journalists in Türkiye continued to face physical violence, arbitrary detention, and excessive use of force, amid a broader climate of impunity and hostile rhetoric targeting the media. These risks were **particularly acute** during periods of political tension and public protests, when journalists reporting on demonstrations were frequently treated as participants rather than the press.

Between 19 and 26 March 2025, largely peaceful mass protests took place across Türkiye following the detention of Ekrem İmamoğlu, the mayor of İstanbul and presidential candidate of the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP), along with 91 individuals connected to the İstanbul Metropolitan Municipality. Tens of thousands of people participated in demonstrations nationwide. Journalists covering these protests were **repeatedly** subjected to arbitrary detention, police violence, and other forms of **ill-treatment**.

In İstanbul, seven journalists covering the protests in Saraçhane Square were **detained** during home raids on 24 March. All of them were later indicted under the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations (Law No. 2911), despite their role as journalists covering events of public interest. On the same day, three journalists covering protests in İzmir were also detained and later released on 27 March.

Journalists reporting from the protests were also subjected to physical violence and the unlawful use of force by **law enforcement**. In one incident in İstanbul, a journalist filming a police intervention was **beaten** by multiple riot police officers, with the assault ending only after he was able to show his press card. In another case, a photojournalist in İzmir was **kicked** by police while photographing a protest, later arbitrarily detained from his home, and questioned on terrorism-related charges before being released without being brought before a judge. As of the time of reporting, no prosecution had been initiated in relation to this case.

The unnecessary use of force against journalists also included the deployment of tear gas and pepper spray at close range. In footage **shared** on 23 March, journalists recording a whirling dervish performance during what appeared to be a peaceful protest were seen being sprayed with tear gas alongside protesters, despite posing no apparent threat to public order. Such incidents underscored the routine failure of law enforcement to distinguish between journalists and demonstrators, exposing the press to heightened risk while performing their professional duties.

Beyond protest-related violence, journalists in Türkiye continued to face physical attacks by members of the public, with investigations frequently failing to establish accountability or examine possible professional motives. In October 2025, journalist and documentary filmmaker Hakan Tosun, who mostly focused on environmental issues, was [physically assaulted](#) in the streets of İstanbul and later died in hospital. While the reasons behind the attack remain unconfirmed, the serious [irregularities](#) in the investigation, as highlighted by the [Tosun family's lawyers](#), have raised significant questions regarding the thoroughness and independence of the inquiry, regardless of the perpetrators' identity.

In another case in October, *Sözcü* daily reporter Enver Demirdağ was [beaten](#) by unknown assailants. Although the attackers were quickly arrested, they claimed to have acted under the influence of alcohol and denied knowing the journalist. Authorities charged them with simple assault and released them pending trial, without investigating whether the attack was linked to Demirdağ's journalistic work or whether anyone was behind it. This case reflected a broader pattern [observed](#) in recent years, in which [assaults](#) against [journalists](#) were not thoroughly investigated and perpetrators, even when [convicted](#), received [minimal penalties](#). The lack of accountability is part of a decades-long history of unsolved crimes against the press, ranging from the 1993 car bombing that killed investigative journalist Uğur Mumcu to the 2007 shooting of Hrant Dink, and many other cases that have never been fully solved.

Hostile rhetoric and threats against media outlets also translated into physical danger. In July 2025, following allegations that the Islamic Prophet Muhammad had been [depicted](#) in a caricature published by the satirical weekly *LeMan*, which the magazine stated was intended as a criticism of Israel's ongoing attacks on Gaza, angry protesters [surrounded](#) the publication's offices in İstanbul. The police failed to disperse [the crowd](#) for several hours, who intended to enter the *LeMan* offices, while instead detaining five *LeMan* staff members. The incident highlighted the uneven protection afforded to journalists and media organisations facing threats, and the tendency of authorities to prioritise restrictive measures against media workers rather than ensuring their safety.

These incidents illustrated a persistent pattern of violence against journalists in Türkiye, compounded by a culture of impunity within the justice system. The failure to conduct effective investigations, identify the masterminds behind attacks on journalists, and impose proportionate sanctions not only denied justice to victims but also emboldened future attacks. This environment of physical risk and inadequate protection further undermined journalists' ability to report freely, reinforcing fear, self-censorship, and the erosion of press and media freedom.

Control Mechanisms: Social Media Restrictions and Broadcast Sanctions

Throughout 2025, authorities in Türkiye relied on an increasingly dense web of regulatory, and technical control mechanisms to restrict digital expression and suppress critical journalism. These measures included [access blocking](#), content removal orders, financial sanctions, broadcast bans, and algorithmic manipulation, collectively targeting both online platforms and traditional broadcasters with a strong digital presence.

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net 2025](#), Türkiye continued to be classified as “not free” in terms of internet freedom, with digital rights conditions described as extremely severe. Hundreds of thousands of [news articles](#) remained blocked, with [new access restrictions](#) imposed each year. Content removal orders increasingly targeted independent media outlets, further limiting the public's access to critical reporting. While MapMF data did not fully capture the scale of digital interference, it nonetheless indicated that [more than 10 percent](#) of all documented press and media freedom violations in the country related to online restrictions, access blocking, or content removal.

Digital platforms operating in Türkiye were subjected to rapid takedown and access-blocking orders under the Internet Law (Law No. 5651), often without adequate judicial oversight. At the same time, the media regulator RTÜK [continued](#) to impose broadcast bans and financial penalties on critical television channels such as Halk TV and Tele 1. In 2025 alone, these administrative fines [exceeded](#) nearly €2 million (92 million Turkish lira), disproportionately targeting remaining several independent national television networks. These sanctions significantly curtailed editorial independence and narrowed the space for pluralistic broadcasting.

Structural changes in the digital ecosystem further undermined independent media. Following shifts in 2024 and 2025 in the [algorithms of major global online platforms](#) such as Google, pro-government content became more prominent in timelines and search results, while critical media outlets experienced a dramatic loss of visibility. Many independent outlets reported losing between 70 and 90 percent of their audience reach, leading to an immediate and severe decline in advertising revenue. In March 2025, one such outlet, Gazete Duvar, was [forced to shut down](#) after becoming financially unsustainable under these conditions.

Exiled journalists continued to face digital repression, even while operating from abroad. Journalists such as Metin Cihan [received](#) repeated account-blocking orders restricting access for users in Türkiye, while platforms such as Can Dündar's Özgürüz, although operational in Germany, remained inaccessible domestically. At the same time, [bandwidth throttling](#) was used to severely limit access to social media and news platforms during periods of political tension or protest, including following the arrest of İstanbul's mayor and presidential candidate of the main opposition party in March 2025. Moreover, access to major virtual private network (VPN) providers have already been [blocked](#) for several years.



Domestic journalists and media outlets were also subjected to access blocking and account closures. In connection with reporting on the murder of Rojin Kabaiş, a 21-year old university student, five journalists and four news outlets **faced** account closures and access bans without due process, significantly disrupting news circulation and public scrutiny of the case.

The adoption of the Cybersecurity Law in 2025 **introduced** additional constraints on digital journalism. The law expanded state surveillance powers and criminalised reporting on alleged data leaks unless such breaches were officially confirmed by government authorities. As a result, journalists covering issues of data protection, cybersecurity, and public accountability faced heightened legal risk, even when reporting on matters of clear public interest affecting users both within and outside Türkiye.

Individual cases further illustrated how these legal tools were applied. Journalist Tolga Şardan **remained** under judicial control measures under the Disinformation Law following his reporting on a National Intelligence Service (MİT) report, underscoring how digital content regulations were used in tandem with criminal justice measures to deter investigative journalism.

RTÜK also expanded its reach over online and streaming platforms. In several instances, the regulator's then-chair publicly **announced** sanctions on social media before formal board decisions were taken, undermining due process. Online channels were **threatened** with licence revocation, reinforcing a climate of uncertainty and self-censorship among digital broadcasters.

State intervention in the media sector further deepened these pressures. During the arrest of Tele 1's chief editor, Merdan Yanardağ, the channel was **taken over** by the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund (TMSF). As a consequence of multiple media confiscations in 2025, TMSF also became the country's largest media employer, raising serious concerns about media pluralism and concentration of ownership.

These digital and broadcast control mechanisms demonstrated how regulatory, economic, and technological tools were systematically combined to restrict media freedom in Türkiye. Reversing this trajectory would require comprehensive legislative reform, including the repeal or substantial amendment of restrictive laws. Reform processes inspired by the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) and the Digital Services Act (DSA), grounded in a genuine multi-stakeholder approach involving journalists' associations, civil society, academia, and media professionals, could constitute a critical first step toward restoring a free and pluralistic digital media environment.

Restricting International Access: Visas, Press Cards, and Administrative Barriers

In 2025, foreign journalists seeking to work in Türkiye encountered an increasingly restrictive and discouraging system governing entry, accreditation, and residence. While formal regulatory requirements for foreign press had existed for years, 2025 saw a further tightening in practice, with procedures becoming more prolonged, more costly, and more discretionary, effectively transforming administrative regulation into a barrier to independent international reporting.

Foreign journalists were required to navigate a multi-step process involving a press visa, official accreditation, and a press-related residence permit, overseen primarily by the Directorate of Communications (DoC) under the president's office. The process generally began outside Türkiye, with a mandatory press visa application submitted at a Turkish consular post in the journalist's country of legal residence. Approval from the DoC was a prerequisite for this visa, which in turn was required to apply for a press card and residence permit after entry into the country.

Different procedures applied to short-term and long-term assignments. Since January 2023, even short-term reporting assignments of up to three months required prior approval by the DoC and the issuance of a press visa and temporary accreditation. Permanent correspondents were subject to a more extensive process, typically resulting in a press card valid for one year. In practice, however, these procedures proved increasingly misaligned with the realities of journalistic work. Press visa issuance alone frequently took six to eight weeks, while the full process for permanent accreditation and residence regularly extended to four or five months.

Once in Türkiye, journalists were required to apply immediately for a press card through the DoC's online system, submitting extensive documentation, including assignment letters from their media organisation and letters of introduction from their home country's embassy or consulate. Only after obtaining a press card could journalists apply for a press-related residence permit through the migration authorities. Both press cards and residence permits were typically issued for a maximum of one year and required annual renewal, exposing journalists to recurring legal and administrative uncertainty. Delays or refusals at any stage effectively prevented journalists from working legally, even when they were already present in the country.

Compared to previous years, financial and administrative barriers became significantly more pronounced in 2025. Visa applications, renewals, accreditation fees, and related documentation imposed substantial costs, which were particularly burdensome for freelance journalists and smaller media outlets. These costs were exacerbated by Türkiye's ongoing economic crisis and a deteriorating environment for labour rights and fair remuneration, making sustained foreign correspondence increasingly unviable without institutional backing.

Work authorisation presented a further obstacle. Although foreign journalists were formally exempt from standard work permit requirements, this exemption had become increasingly expensive and administratively complex in practice. For freelancers in particular, the cumulative costs associated with maintaining legal work status were often prohibitive, effectively excluding them from access to the country unless supported by large international media organisations with significant legal and financial resources.

Access to official information and public institutions was similarly constrained. Accreditation for governmental events and official spaces was managed through a highly centralised system controlled by the Directorate of Communications, which exercised broad discretionary power over access decisions. The absence of transparent criteria or effective appeal mechanisms left journalists uncertain as to why applications were delayed, rejected, or ignored. Over time, this opacity fostered dependency and self-censorship, as access to press briefings and official sources became contingent on compliance with undefined expectations rather than professional standards.

Trapped in Uncertainty: Future Anxiety and Economic Strangulation

Independent journalism in Türkiye [faced](#) deepening economic precarity and mounting uncertainty throughout 2025, with financial fragility increasingly threatening both the sustainability of media outlets and the professional security of journalists. The [closure](#) of the independent news website Gazete Duvar in March 2025, after nine years of continuous publication, starkly illustrated these pressures. The outlet ceased operations following a sharp loss of revenue linked to changes in [Google's algorithms](#), highlighting how external, unregulated digital factors could abruptly destabilise already vulnerable media organisations.

The shutdown of Gazete Duvar reflected broader structural challenges confronting independent media in Türkiye. Independent and critical media outlets had limited access to public loans, struggled to develop reader or subscriber-based revenue models, and were heavily affected by the decline in international funding in 2025. As a result, several organisations were forced to [lay off](#) journalists and staff, intensifying professional insecurity and contributing to widespread anxiety across the sector.

This economic fragility was compounded by ongoing legislative uncertainty. This includes the so-called “agent of influence” bill, which was introduced amid a wider global trend of “foreign agent” laws and which contained provisions that could criminalise journalistic work and/or expose journalists to imprisonment based on funding sources. While parliament withdrew the bill for a second time in October 2024 following sustained criticism, even the prospect that the bill could be re-introduced creates a chilling effect as journalists and media organisations are forced to weigh the future risks of accepting funding from abroad.

At the same time, the regulatory framework governing media in the digital age remained weak and fragmented. Türkiye lacks comprehensive standards adapted to contemporary conditions shaped by digital platforms, social media, and emerging technologies such as [artificial intelligence](#). This gap was acknowledged by a broad range of actors, including members of RTÜK, opposition members of parliament, journalists' associations, and trade unions, during meetings with representatives of international missions. Despite this recognition, concrete steps to modernise media regulation in line with digital realities remained absent.

In contrast, at the European Union level, recent years have seen the adoption of initiatives aimed at strengthening media freedom and accountability in the digital environment, including the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), the Digital Services Act (DSA), and the [Artificial Intelligence Act](#). No comparable legislative or policy framework exists in Türkiye to support independent journalism, promote transparency, or mitigate the impact of algorithmic and platform-driven pressures on news production and distribution.

Journalists from Türkiye living in exile continued to face persistent challenges across three interconnected areas: economic insecurity, professional isolation, and security risks. While exile may offer relative physical safety, these difficulties often remained a constant in their lives. Observations shared during the mission and through long-standing support initiatives, including the European Centre for Press and Media Freedom's [Journalists-in-Exile programme](#), highlighted how newsroom structures frequently collapsed into one-person operations, while access to stable funding, equipment, and basic working spaces remained uncertain. The psychological cost of exile was equally significant, with journalists experiencing loneliness, trauma, and deep uncertainty after relocation. In the absence of realistic prospects for a safe return without political change in Türkiye, exiled journalists emphasised the need for sustained international solidarity, stronger coordination, and longer-term support beyond short-term assistance.

The Way Forward: Conclusion and Recommendations

The 2025 mission revealed that Türkiye remains caught in a systematic decline in press freedom, which has continued now for more than a decade. Extreme levels of judicial harassment and lawfare, a deteriorating safety environment, growing digital censorship, and financial crises combined with growing political repression and judicial capture have created a perfect storm for media freedom and independence in Türkiye, which formally remains a candidate country for EU membership.

The primary objective of the mission meetings is to bring key issues affecting media freedom and journalism to the agenda of government institutions, exchange ideas with international organisations, and establish a basis for dialogue to facilitate change. In this light, we regret that government institutions and stakeholders have once again declined to meet with our delegation or respond to our meeting requests, indicating an alarming disinterest in these issues.

Only the Constitutional Court and individual members of RTÜK agreed to meet with our delegation. While we welcome the Constitutional Court's openness to dialogue and attentiveness to international treaties on press freedom, and the openness of certain RTÜK members to suggestions for a better-functioning mechanism, these unfortunately do not suffice on their own. The mission will continue to seek ways to engage with governmental institutions and push for further opportunities in the coming year.

As this report shows, the deterioration of press and media freedom in Türkiye in 2025 was the result of systemic, sustained and interlocking set of legal, institutional, economic, and political pressures, rather than of any isolated factor or incident.

Reversing this trajectory requires a shift away from punitive and discretionary approaches to media governance and toward a framework grounded in the protection of journalistic activity as a public good. We recommend the following:

- » **Initiate reforms to the laws that are routinely abused to criminalise journalism.** Those should be repealed or substantially amended in line with international human rights standards. Judicial practices that normalise prolonged pretrial detention, house arrest, and travel bans must stop, and attacks against journalists must be investigated promptly, independently, and effectively to break the entrenched culture of impunity.

- » **Reform regulatory and administrative institutions that influence the media.** Effective steps must be taken to end the instrumentalisation and weaponisation of media regulatory bodies as a tool of political control. Oversight and regulatory institutions must be structurally independent, transparent in their decision-making, and subject to effective judicial review. Administrative processes governing accreditation, access to information, and the operation of both domestic and international media should be streamlined, depoliticised, and aligned with the practical realities of journalistic work, rather than functioning as gatekeeping tools.
- » **Prioritize financial sustainability of media as a core pillar of media freedom.** Independent journalism cannot survive under conditions of chronic financial insecurity combined with regulatory pressure. Policies should aim to enable diverse revenue models, protect media outlets from discriminatory financial sanctions, and address the disproportionate impact of digital platform practices on independent news distribution. Legislative initiatives that criminalise international funding for journalism risk further marginalising independent voices and should be abandoned in favour of measures that support transparency and editorial independence.
- » **Strengthen tech and AI governance to support access to independent news and information and media freedom.** Comprehensive reforms are needed to ensure that digital governance, including platform regulation, algorithmic transparency, and the use of artificial intelligence, strengthens rather than undermines journalism. Drawing on European standards and best practices, including those developed under the European Media Freedom Act and the Digital Services Act, could provide a roadmap for safeguarding editorial independence, promoting trust, and protecting the public interest in the digital sphere.
- » **Ensure media reforms are conducted in full consultation with a wide range of stakeholders that include media practitioners and civil society.** Durable progress cannot be achieved through top-down measures alone. Journalists' associations, trade unions, independent media organisations, civil society, and academic experts must be meaningfully involved in shaping policies that affect the media sector. Only through a genuine, pluralistic, and multi-stakeholder approach can Türkiye begin to restore trust in its media environment and reaffirm press freedom as a cornerstone of free, democratic society.
- » **The international and diplomatic communities should prioritize their support for these reforms.** The mission encourages the European Union, diplomatic missions, and international organisations to intensify trial monitoring, maintain sustained engagement with Turkish authorities, and continue providing financial and institutional support to independent media and journalists. Facilitating visa procedures and mobility for journalists working on or from Türkiye would further strengthen cross-border reporting and support Turkish journalists' access to international networks and professional exchange and solidarity, which remain essential to media freedom and democratic accountability.

