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RSF – Reporters Sans Frontières

## Business reporting on trial on Turkey

Reporters Without Borders (RSF) calls for the immediate acquittal of six journalists and 32 Internet users who are facing up to five years in prison for covering last year's financial crisis (<https://rsf.org/en/news/new-witch-hunt-against-journalists-feared-turkey>) in Turkey. RSF, which attended the opening of their trial in Istanbul today, urges the Turkish authorities to stop criminalizing business reporting.

*Bloomberg News* journalists **Kerim Karakaya** and **Fercan Yalınkılıç** are charged with trying to “destabilize the Turkish economy” in an August 2018 dispatch, while four other journalists – **Mustafa Sönmez**, **Merdan Yanardağ**, **Sedef Kabaş** and **Orhan Kalkan** – and 32 Internet users are being tried with them on the same charge for their tweets about the dispatch.

“This absurd trial testifies to the criminalization of business journalism in Turkey and sends a disastrous signal to investors,” RSF Turkey representative Erol Önderoğlu said after observing the start of the trial, which is due to resume on 17 January. “No problem was ever solved by shooting the messenger. Instead of designating scapegoats, economic recovery would be better served by restoring the rule of law.”

The offending *Bloomberg* dispatch reported a banking panic about the collapse of the Turkish lira in August 2018. Its authors and those who tweeted about it are being tried under Turkey's financial markets law – an unusual procedure that illustrates the growing harassment of business reporters in Turkey.

Other victims of this trend have included **Cem Şimşek**, the editor of the left-wing daily *Evrensel*, who was prosecuted over a story about the government's “anti-worker” measures during the financial crisis. Charged with “insulting” finance minister Berat Albayrak, President Erdoğan's son-in-law, he was finally acquitted on 12 September but his newspaper has been fined 41,660 lira (6,700 euros) for “distorting” the headline of the minister's response in the newspaper.

On 4 July, business reporter **Cengiz Erdinç** was given a suspended ten-month prison sentence and fined 16,660 lira (2,600 euros) for “defaming” the state-owned bank Ziraat in a March 2018 column in the daily *Yurt*, in which he reported (<https://rsf.org/en/news/business-reporters-now-being-harassed-turkey>) that Ziraat's New York branch had been forced to stop providing banking services to individuals as a result an investigation by the US financial authorities.

As the rule of law is dismantled in Turkey, the situation of its media has become increasingly critical, especially since a coup attempt (<https://rsf.org/en/news/abortive-coup-turkish-journalists-brink-abyss>) in July 2016. Turkey is ranked 157th out of 180 countries in RSF's 2019 World Press Freedom Index (<https://rsf.org/en/news/business-reporters-now-being-harassed-turkey>).

### ecoi.net summary:

6 journalists and 32 Internet users face up to 5 years in prison on charges of trying to "destabilize the Turkish economy" in connection with coverage of country's financial crisis in August 2018



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Turkey

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