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A Freedom House Special Report

Democracy in Crisis: Corruption, Media, and Power in Turkey

Photo Credit: MUSTAFA OZER/AFP/Getty Images

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Executive Summary

In November 2013, a Freedom House delegation traveled to Turkey to meet with journalists, NGOs, business leaders, and senior government officials about the deteriorating state of media freedom in the country. The delegation's objective was to investigate reports of government efforts to pressure and intimidate journalists and of overly close relationships between media owners and government, which, along with bad laws and overly aggressive prosecutors, have muzzled objective reporting in Turkey.

Since November, events in Turkey have taken a severe turn for the worse. The police raids that revealed a corruption scandal on December 17, and the allegations of massive bidrigging and money laundering by people at the highest levels of the government, have sparked a frantic crackdown by the ruling Justice and Development (AK) Party. More journalists have been fired for speaking out. Thousands of police officers and prosecutors have been fired or relocated across the country. Amendments to the Internet regulation law proposed by the government would make it possible for officials to block websites without court orders. The government is also threatening the separation of powers by putting the judiciary, including criminal investigations, under direct control of the Ministry of Justice. The crisis of democracy in Turkey is not a future problem—it is right here, right now.

This report on the media recognizes that what is happening in Turkey is bigger than one institution and part of a long history that continues to shape current events. The media in Turkey have always been close to the state; as recently as 1997, large media organizations were co-opted by the military to subvert a democratically elected government. The AK Party was formed in the wake of those events. But even as it has tamed the military, the AKP has been unable to resist the temptations of authoritarianism embedded in the state. Over the past seven years, the government has increasingly employed a variety of strong-arm tactics to suppress the media's proper role as a check on power. Some of the most disturbing efforts include the following:

- **Intimidation:** Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan frequently attacks journalists by name after they write critical commentary. In several well-known cases, like those of Hasan Cemal and Nuray Mert, journalists have lost their jobs after these public attacks. Sympathetic courts hand out convictions in defamation cases for criticism.

- **Mass firings:** At least 59 journalists were fired or forced out in retaliation for their coverage of

last summer's Gezi Park protests. The December corruption scandal has produced another string of firings of prominent columnists.

- **Buying off or forcing out media moguls:** Holding companies sympathetic to the government receive billions of dollars in government contracts, often through government bodies housed in the prime minister's office. Companies with media outlets critical of the government have been targets of tax investigations, forced to pay large fines, and likely disadvantaged in public tenders.

- **Wiretapping:** The National Security Organization has wiretapped journalists covering national security stories, using false names on the warrants in order to avoid judicial scrutiny.

- **Imprisonment:** Dozens of journalists remain imprisoned under broadly defined antiterrorism laws. A majority of those in prison are Kurds, and some analysts believe the government is using them as bargaining chips in negotiations with the Kurdish PKK.

These tactics are unacceptable in a democracy. They deny Turkish citizens full access to information and constrain a healthy political debate. Journalists and government officials alike acknowledge that reporters and news organizations have practiced self-censorship to avoid angering the government, and especially Prime Minister Erdoğan.

The intentional weakening of Turkey's democratic institutions, including attempts to bully and censor Turkey's media, should and must be a matter of deep concern for the United States and the European Union. As the AK Party's internal coalition has grown more fragile, Erdoğan has used his leverage over the media to push issues of public morality and religion and to squelch public debate of the accountability of his government. The result is an increasingly polarized political arena and society.

Freedom House calls on the government of Turkey to recognize that in a democracy, a free press and other independent institutions play a very important role. There are clear and concrete steps the Turkish government must take to end the intimidation and corruption of Turkey's media. Chief among these are the following:

- Cease threats against journalists.

- Repeal the criminal defamation law and overly broad antiterrorism and "criminal organization" laws that have been used to jail dozens of journalists.

- Comply with European and international standards in procurement practices in order to reduce the incentive for media owners to curry favor by distorting the news. Turkish media owners themselves must make a commitment to support changes in procurement practices if they are to win back the trust of Turkey's citizens.

Although building a resilient democracy is fundamentally up to Turkish citizens, the international community cannot afford to be bystanders. The European Union and the OSCE have raised strong concerns about government pressure on Turkey's media, and the EU's warnings against governmental overreach have been pointed. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the United States. The Obama administration has been far too slow to realize the seriousness of the threat to Turkey's democracy. U.S. criticism of the Turkish government's recent actions has come from the State Department spokesperson and White House press secretary, not from the high-ranking officials who need to be engaged in responding to a crisis of this scale. Where European governments and institutions have been specifically and publicly engaged with the government over the crisis, the Obama administration has avoided the difficult issues. It is time to speak frankly and with seriousness about the growing threat to democracy in Turkey, and to place freedom of expression and democracy at the center of the policy relationship.

Introduction

Turkey's democracy is in crisis. Three and a half million people across the country took part in the Gezi Park protests last summer. Yet the AKP-led government's response, first to the protests and now to the December 17 corruption scandal, has been to crack down even harder on its critics, fanning even wider public alienation. At least 59 journalists were fired during the Gezi protests for criticism of the government, and more have lost their jobs in recent weeks for criticizing the government over corruption. As this report is being written, Prime Minister Erdoğan is advocating the reversal of important democratic reforms his own party championed just a few years ago.

This report focuses on one element of the crisis in Turkey's democracy: the government's increasing pressure on the media over the last seven years. While acknowledging that Turkey's current crisis is bigger and more systemic, Freedom House believes it is important to analyze in depth the government's efforts to marginalize and suppress independent voices and reporting in Turkey's media. A free press is a vital actor in any democracy, providing accountability and encouraging a healthy public debate. In Turkey, with a weak opposition and judiciary, an unfettered press is essential. The muzzling of the press in the last seven years has contributed to the wide disjuncture between citizens and their government. It is both a symptom and a cause of the current crisis.

The problem of media freedom—and the eager collaboration by media owners with the government—did not start with the AK Party. During nearly five decades of military "guardianship" (punctuated by coups in 1960, 1971, and 1980), the Turkish military and their bureaucratic allies enforced a set of red lines restraining discussion of ethnic identity, religion, and history outside the narrow bounds of secular nationalism. In 1997, leading media outlets supported the military's efforts to undermine the coalition led by the Islamist Welfare Party, which eventually led to the collapse of the democratically elected government in what is often called the "post-modern coup."

Formed after the banning of the Welfare Party and its successor, the Virtue Party, the AK Party was a victim of these harsh restrictions on free speech. Then-mayor of Istanbul Recep Tayyip Erdoğan served jail time after he gave an Islamic-nationalist speech in 1997, and was still banned from serving in office when his AKP won general elections in 2002. Although the party arguably won on the public's mistrust of a political establishment that had driven it into economic crisis in 2001, the AKP's commitment to inclusive, democratic governance also appealed to Turkey's voters and clearly distinguished it from the Welfare Party.

Many in Turkey, including liberals and members of minority groups interviewed for this report, agree that there was progress under the AK Party in some important areas of free expression. Long-standing taboos against discussion of minority rights, including the rights of Kurds and Alevis, headscarves for women, and the Armenian genocide have all been lifted, even if laws that could punish such discussion remain on the books. Given the severe restrictions under military tutelage, these accomplishments are not insignificant.

Yet credit for such gains cannot offset the atmosphere of intimidation that deepened as the AKP consolidated its power. Kurdish journalists have been arrested

along with Kurdish activists and held as bargaining chips in peace negotiations with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Editors and reporters from across Turkey's media told Freedom House about angry phone calls from the prime minister's office after critical stories run, and—long before Gezi—of media owners being told to fire specific reporters. In a growing number of cases, editors and owners are firing reporters preemptively to avoid a confrontation with government officials. Reporters who still hold their jobs admit to censoring their own coverage to ensure they remain employed. When they cover politics, media employees are forced to be more concerned about their jobs than about the story.

At the heart of the problem are politicians and a prime minister who came to power vowing to create a more liberal government but have become increasingly intolerant of criticism and dissent. Even as late as 2010, the AK Party successfully campaigned to pass a referendum allowing the parliament to amend aspects of the 1982 constitution, adopted while Turkey was under martial law. The referendum included numerous changes to increase the independence of the judiciary, to improve separation of powers, and to protect the rights of individuals. Following its victory in 2011, the AKP pledged to work with other parties to rewrite the constitution altogether, a project that has now collapsed.

Yet despite winning the referendum and holding a parliamentary majority, the AKP has not rejected the arbitrary powers the state still retains, or built a strong system of democratic checks and balances. Among the changes proposed by the party after the corruption scandal broke this December has been a repeal of the democratic reforms to the judiciary it fought for in 2010. Limited improvements in media laws have been trumped by the government's continued use of broad antiterrorism and criminal defamation laws that allow the government wide leeway in punishing dissent. The government has also not hesitated to use an intrusive state security apparatus to illegally spy on and harass journalists.

The government's greatest leverage over the media, however, is economic. The prime minister's office controls the allocation of billions of dollars in privatized assets, housing contracts, and a public procurement process that allows rewarding favored companies, including those with media arms. As the AK Party has consolidated power, it has used the government agency responsible for sales of defaulting companies to transfer control of some of the country's most important media outlets to supporters. Tax investigations have been used to punish media outlets that dare to challenge the government. The once-dominant Doğan Media Group was assessed enormous fines and forced to sell off several media properties, including one of the country's leading papers, *Milliyet*, after its reporting on AKP corruption infuriated the government.

Now, as the December 17 corruption scandal unfolds, the retreat from the early years of the AKP-led liberalization is in full force. The government has even floated the possibility of mending its bridges with the military, claiming that it was the same over-zealous prosecutors from the Gülen religious community who initiated the coup-conspiracy trials that broke the military's influence. All of this has led to a profound crisis of confidence in the Erdoğan government and, chillingly, the future of Turkey's democracy.

There are positive signs that with the government suddenly weakened, some of Turkey's media are beginning to remember their long-suppressed role, breaking stories and covering the corruption scandal in depth. Outlets associated with the Gülen movement like *Zaman*, *Today's Zaman*, and *Bugün*; Doğan-owned *Radikal* and *Hürriyet*; *T24*, an independent Internet news site;[1] and even formerly pro-government media like *Habertürk* are finding their voices after years of harassment and pressure. There is no way of knowing how long or even whether this will last. At the same time, yet more prominent columnists are losing their jobs, such as Nazlı Ilıcak from *Sabah* and Murat Aksoy from *Yeni Şafak*.

As reflected in Freedom House's annual ratings, including *Freedom in the World*, Turkey is not a dictatorship. It is a country where different views are expressed and heard, with a vibrant and diverse civil society. But it remains a country where criticizing the government means risking your livelihood, your reputation, and sometimes, your freedom. And at the present moment, it is a country where the government is behaving more, rather than less, authoritarian.

The European Union and the United States must be fully engaged in the defense of Turkey's democracy. While the EU has spoken out forcefully in recent months as Turkey has moved further away from its democratic commitments, the U.S. has refrained from high-level criticism or engagement. It is past the time for a real change in U.S. policy to one based on hardheaded analysis.

There are long-term steps that the U.S. should support to encourage reform in Turkey, including negotiating a free-trade pact to parallel the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership between the U.S. and EU. Such an agreement must require that Turkey commit to transparent procurement practices. In addition to strong rhetorical defenses of a free Turkish press, the United States and Europe should also marshal investment and development funds to support the growth of independent Turkish media. Most important, with Turkey's government proposing new steps every day that would reverse democratic gains, the U.S. should elevate Turkey's democratic crisis to a matter of bilateral importance and engagement. The crisis is real and Turkey is too important in its own right, and in its relations with other countries, for more denial or deliberate inattention.

The Media Sector in Turkey

Even with the constraints placed on a free press, Turkey has a rapidly growing media and entertainment sector—the result of the increasing education and wealth of a population with a deep hunger for information about their country and the world. In 2013, PricewaterhouseCoopers projected the sector's value at $11.6 billion, with estimated 11.4 percent annual growth between 2013 and 2017, more than double the global average.[3] Among European countries, Turkey has a relatively low newspaper circulation of 96 newspapers bought daily per 1,000 population.[2] Spurred by the growth in the Turkish economy, advertising revenue reached $2.5 billion in 2011, the bulk of which accrued to television, which includes popular serials, sports, and daytime talk shows, as well as news coverage.[3] A small number of wealthy holding companies own nearly all of the country's most important outlets in both television and print. Many companies are dependent on government favor, and even those with limited direct dealings with the government would find it hard to operate in the face of active hostility.

National newspapers based in Istanbul and Ankara account for 80.6 percent of the country's annual circulation,[4] and at most a dozen of those dominate the national conversation on domestic politics and international affairs.[5] Most media outlets have well-known and clear-cut political allegiances. *Sözcü* (360,000 circulation) is Kemalist, *BirGün* (11,000) is leftist, *Yeni Şafak* (127,000) is Islamist, *Zaman* (1,161,000) is associated with the Gülen movement, and so on.[6] The ideological profiles of the papers can mask the depth of the harassment and restrictions on Turkey's media. In interviews for this report, high-ranking officials repeatedly pointed to the polemical antigovernment tone of *Sözcü*, for instance, as proof of freedom of speech. But despite being among the country's highest-circulating dailies, *Sözcü* only reaches the substantial minority already predisposed to its secularist Kemalist views, which would never vote for the AK Party. It is not a government target.

There is also a group of newspapers considered "mainstream," meaning that despite their political legacies they can reach an audience beyond the true believers of one ideological group. These papers include *Hürriyet* (409,000), *Milliyet* (168,000), Sabah (319,000), and *Akşam* (103,000). A key aspect of the government's efforts to control the media has been to focus most of its attention and pressure on these "mainstream" outlets. The government-backed sales of *Sabah* and *Akşam* to pro-government business groups and the forced sale of *Milliyet* to a pro-government business group to pay off the Doğan Media Group's tax penalties reduced these papers' independence. *Milliyet* has laid off important critical columnists like Hasan Cemal and Can Dündar. In the most flagrant cases of *Sabah* and *Akşam*, the papers have become mouthpieces for the government, what some call "Erdoğanist" media.

Historical Development

The events of the last 12 years, including the AKP-led government's intensifying crackdown on media freedom, cannot be understood without the context of decades of military "guardianship" and the overly close relationship between the military and the media. While ownership has shifted, in many cases the desire to curry favor with the government has remained the same. Following the coup of 1980 and the development of liberal economic policies under then-Prime Minister Turgut Özal, family ownership in the media market was replaced by corporate holding companies (albeit still with a strong family component) that benefited hugely from their close relationships with the government.

1 Disclosure: The owner of *T24* Doğan Akın is a founding member of P24, a non-profit organization that promotes press independence, of which report co-author Andrew Finkel is also a founding member.

In nearly all cases, these holding companies earn only a small fraction of their revenue from their media outlets, with the bulk of profits coming from other interests, such as construction, mining, finance, or energy (see Table 1). In Turkey's still state-centered economy, privatization of government assets and government contracts are a huge source of the holding companies' income. This has created a situation in which media outlets are used to promote the ownership group's financial interests. Members of the media and the government alike describe newspapers' Ankara bureau chiefs as "lobbyists" for their companies.[7]

Holding company owners who rely on the state for business have shown little commitment to real debate, and even less sense of responsibility for providing a check on government power. In 1997, when the military forced the collapse of a coalition led by the Islamist Welfare Party, large media outlets supported the military with sensationalized and baseless stories about the Islamist threat to democracy.[8]

The AK Party and the current government were forged by that history. Prime Minister Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül were both members of the banned Welfare Party. When Erdoğan served four months in prison in 1997, and was subsequently barred from holding public office, the secularist media applauded.[9]

Even as Erdoğan and Gül distanced themselves from the more aggressive Islamism of the Welfare Party, they still carried a profound sense of vulnerability and victimhood.

When the AK Party came to power in 2002, it bore the scars of those experiences. Erdoğan, now leader of the AKP, was only allowed to assume the premiership after a constitutional amendment in 2003. Five years later, the AKP faced another serious challenge to its existence when the Constitutional Court came only one vote short of ruling that the party should be closed for violating the constitution's commitment to secularism.

From its inception, the AK Party presented a very different image to that of its more Islamic predecessor. It committed to a greater openness for religion in public life in the context of its program to make Turkey more fully democratic. It actively embraced the free market, rejected anti-Western rhetoric, and pledged to implement an IMF standby agreement that required difficult economic reforms.

The AK Party's decision to pursue European Union accession required additional reforms and won new support from the international community, originally wary of the party's Islamic roots. The aftereffects of the currency devaluation in 2001 and the IMF's backing helped attract foreign investment, and the new macroeconomic stability created a windfall of lower interest rates and a decline in Turkey's chronically high rate of inflation. This allowed the AKP to direct resources to its constituents in neglected cities across the country and to provide opportunities for the new business class. The EU's strict demands for institutional reform provided an additional mandate for decreasing the involvement of the military in public life and gave an opportunity to install new (and, in some cases, more professional) cadres in the civil service, police, and judiciary.

In its fight against the old guard, the AK Party also created a wider space for ideas and discussion. Yet as the AKP strengthened its political position, it began to assert more control over the media sector, and the old red lines were replaced with new ones. An important step came in 2007 when the country's second-largest media group, Sabah-ATV, was sold to Çalık Holding. Prime Minister Erdoğan's son-in-law Berat Albayrak was the company's CEO, and Albayrak's brother led the media unit.[10] In an unusual move, two state banks stepped in with financing worth $750 million of the $1.1 billion purchase.[11] *Sabah*'s editorial line rapidly shifted from center-left to ardently pro-government.[12]

That same year, the government took aim at the largest media owner in the country, Doğan Media Group, which had long been associated with the secularist elite and had backed the 1997 "post-modern coup." Doğan had enraged PM Erdoğan when its flagship papers, *Hürriyet* and *Milliyet*, gave extensive front-page coverage of a German court case, accusing several prominent Turkish citizens with ties to the top of the AKP of embezzling tens of millions of dollars from a Turkish charity.

Erdoğan responded by calling for a boycott of the entire media group.[13] In February 2009, Doğan Media Group was hit with a $500 million tax fine, raised in September of the same year to $2.5 billion, four-fifths of the market capitalization of the entire company.[14] The fine eventually forced Doğan to reduce its commanding position in the Turkish press, including by selling *Milliyet* and *Vatan* to another holding company with strong ties to the government.

The AKP also took on the military in 2007. In April, the army issued a statement pledging to be an "absolute defender of secularism" in a veiled threat reminiscent of 1997.[15] In June, police launched the raids that would lead to accusations against ten army generals and hundreds of other officers, as well as various journalists and professors, for seeking to undermine the government with a convoluted conspiracy—known as Ergenekon, after a mythical place of origin of the Turkish people—of assassinations and false flag operations. The indictments and trials were marked by appalling breaches of due process and judicial procedure, years of pretrial detention, and simple logical incoherence.

Nevertheless, Ergenekon ended in September 2013 with the conviction of 275 defendants, including the former chief of the Armed Forces. With military tutelage finally broken and the political opposition still tainted by its association with the military, the AK Party became the dominant political force in Turkey.

The AKP did not break the old media or military tutelage by itself. Until recently, one of its key allies was the Gülen movement, a tightly networked group following the teachings of Islamic preacher Fethullah Gülen. The movement wields enormous economic and social power with a network of hundreds of schools and colleges in Turkey and abroad, and extensive business interests inside and outside the country. Turkey's highest-circulation daily *Zaman* and the influential English-language *Today's Zaman* are owned by the Gülen-affiliated Feza Media Group. Koza İpek Holding, which owns Bugün daily and Kanaltürk TV station, is also affiliated with the movement.

When Doğan Media Group was under attack, Gülenist outlets were vocal in defending Erdoğan and blaming the group's owner Aydın Doğan for bringing the prime minister's wrath upon himself.[16] During the Ergenekon cases, prosecutors allied with Gülen were seen as driving the charges against the military through leaks and stories in the movement's outlets and to sympathetic journalists.

The alliance between Gülen supporters and Erdoğan started to change as the government took a more confrontational stance towards Israel and pursued rapprochement with the Kurdish PKK, which the Gülen movement has opposed for decades.[17] A failed attempt to remove Turkey's intelligence chief Hakan Fidan in February 2012 was widely attributed to Gülen supporters within the judiciary unhappy with the outreach to PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan.[18] The split between Gülen supporters and Erdoğan has now burst into full public view with the December 17 corruption scandal, which has been played out in leaks to sympathetic journalists and stories in the movement's outlets.

Table 1.
Main ownership groups in Turkey's media, January 2014

Ownership Group	Newspapers	TV	Other Business Interests
Doğan Group	*Hürriyet, Radikal, Posta*	CNNTürk, Kanal D	Energy, retail, industry, tourism
Doğuş Group	--	NTV, Star	Finance, Automotive, Construction, Energy, Retail
Feza Media Group	*Zaman, Today's Zaman*		Not available
Ethem Sancak	*Akşam*	SkyTurk 360	Pharmaceuticals
Star Media Group	*Star*	Kanal 24	Energy (50 percent owned by the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan)
Kalyon Group	*Sabah, Takvim*	ATV	Construction
Ciner Group	*Habertürk*	Show TV, Habertürk TV	Energy, Mining, Services
Demirören Group	*Milliyet, Vatan*	--	Energy, Mining, Industry, Construction, Tourism
İhlas Holding	*Türkiye*	TGRT Haber	Construction, Industry, Tourism, Mining
Albayrak Group	*Yeni Şafak*	TVNET	Construction, Industry, Logistics, Energy, Services
Koza İpek Holding	*Bugün*	Kanaltürk	Mining

The Media in Crisis

The tools used to pressure and control media outlets and individual journalists existed before the AK Party came to power. But the party, with its extraordinary political dominance, has used them unapologetically and with increasing frequency and force. The wave of firings and resignations during the Gezi Park protests, as outrageous as they are, are unfortunately just one example of the AKP's determination to suppress a free press and full public debate.

#occupygezi

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The Gezi Park protests started on May 27, 2013, with a small group of environmental activists determined to block government plans to replace a park in Istanbul's Taksim Square with a complex of hotels, a shopping mall, and restaurants. As news of the occupation spread on social media, hundreds of people joined in, united by their frustration with the government's lack of accountability. The tipping point came on May 29 and 30, when police routed protesters with tear gas and water cannons. Images of the brutality circulated rapidly on social media. A Reuters photograph of a young woman being sprayed in the face with pepper gas by a policeman wearing a gas mask became the iconic image of the protest. Tens of thousands rushed to occupy all of Taksim Square. Over the next two weeks, protests spread to 80 of the country's 81 provinces, with more than 3.5 million people participating, according to the government's own estimates.

Many of Turkey's media outlets were caught off guard by these events and slow to adapt their coverage, drawing popular ire. Most notoriously, on June 1, as mass protests filled Istanbul and CNN International showed round-the-clock coverage, the Doğan-owned CNNTürk was broadcasting a nature documentary about penguins. The penguin became an ironic symbol of media cowardice in the protests. Some papers and television stations, including CNNTürk, soon caught up with the news, while other pro-government stations like NTV continued to push the government's conspiratorial talking points (protesters even gathered in front of NTV's offices). But the initial failure to cover Gezi showed the reflexive compliance and conflict aversion of the conglomerate-dominated media.

It is difficult to firmly establish the number of reporters, editors, and broadcasters fired in the wake of Gezi. On July 26, the Turkish Journalists' Union said that 59 journalists had been fired or forced out; the opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) has compiled a list of 77 journalists who were fired or forced out due to their coverage of the protests. Some media employees cite much higher numbers. *NTV Tarih*, a history magazine owned by NTV, was shut down entirely and its staff let go after the magazine's editors prepared a special "Gezi edition." The Gezi firings continued through the fall. In November, the public broadcaster TRT fired two employees who used social media to voice their support for the protests.[19]

The government and its backers insist that there is no proof that the coverage of Gezi was behind any of these firings. That argument is hard to accept, given the government's track record of intimidation and pressure against the media. Even before Gezi, it had become commonplace for top officials, especially Erdoğan, to publicly attack journalists who displease them, and for those journalists to be fired soon after. In 2011, after NTV host Nuray Mert compared the government's policies in eastern Turkey to a nationalist massacre 70 years before, the prime minister denounced her writing as "despicable." She lost her show with the channel, and was later fired from *Milliyet*.[20] In August 2012, as the government's peace process with the PKK foundered, the prime minister warned the press in a televised debate that it must ignore the conflict, arguing that broadcasting information about Turkish solders' deaths would provide propaganda support for terrorists. "I really expect the media to act as one hand, one heart," he said. "On whose side will the media be?"[21]

In March 2013, *Milliyet* columnist Hasan Cemal, one of Turkey's most respected journalists, defended his paper's decision to publish leaked informationon PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's attitudes toward peace talks. In a speech two days later, the prime minister attacked Cemal, saying, "If this is journalism, then down with your journalism!"[22]*Milliyet* fired Cemal later that month. In December 2013, one of *Sabah*'s best-known columnists Nazlı Ilıcak was fired the day after she criticized the government over the corruption scandal on a television news show.[23] In January this year, Murat Aksoy, a prominent writer for *Yeni Şafak*, was also dismissed after making similarly critical remarks on air.

Editors and journalists in the mainstream media say that they receive regular phone calls from the prime minister's office to change stories, to downplay coverage, or to fire reporters or columnists. The accounts are consistent and come from both government critics and those who have supported the AK Party, although the government officials Freedom House met with all denied such calls take place. One journalist said that the phone calls were no longer necessary: "There isn't a person who calls every five minutes, but there is an expectation that they will."[24] Some editors have developed a pre-Pavlovian response—firing those who fail to heed the party line even before they hear the bell.

The government also uses the courts to go after offending journalists. Despite strong international criticism,[25] defamation is still criminalized under Turkish law. There is no official tally of defamation lawsuits by the prime minister, but the number may be in the hundreds. In addition to journalists, Erdoğan has sued high school students,[26] political cartoonists, and musicians.[27] In February 2012, he sued the then-editor of *Taraf* daily, Ahmet Altan, for defamation after Altan wrote an editorial criticizing his refusal to apologize after 34 civilians were killed by a Turkish airstrike. Altan later stepped down under pressure from the ownership of *Taraf* after advertisers became reluctant to advertise. In July 2013, Altan was convicted of defamation and ordered to pay a EUR2,800 fine, on top of the 6,000 euros he was already required to pay in compensation to Erdoğan under a previous civil suit.[28] In December 2013, Erdoğan accused *Taraf* journalist Mehmet Baransu of "treason" for a story describing a National Security Council plan to counter the influence of Gülen and his movement.[29] Baransu and *Taraf* are under criminal investigation for the story.[30] In 2008 and 2009, the National Security Organization (MİT) ordered wiretaps of several journalists at *Taraf* who broke major national security stories. It was later revealed that MİT used false names for the reporters to prevent the judges from knowing who was being wiretapped.[31]

Journalists say it has become increasingly hard to predict what will draw the prime minister's ire. One editor in chief told Freedom House, "It could be environmental, economic. After all, everything related to life is related to politics."[32]Journalist Can Dündar, who was fired from *Milliyet* in August 2013, said about his editors, "They told me at [*Milliyet*], I don't want news that will irritate the prime minister, but I don't know what news will irritate him. Anything can be irritating, and once we irritate them they fire us."[33]

The prime minister is not alone in practicing intimidation. During the Gezi protests, the AKP mayor of Ankara, Melih Gökçek, started a Twitter campaign against BBC reporter Selin Girit with the hashtag "#Don't be a spy in the name of England Selin Girit." The BBC issued a statement calling the campaign "unacceptable."[34] In October, the AKP mayor of Eskişehir sent an email to a reporter from *Radikal* saying it was "vile and inglorious" to continue to report on the case of a protester who was beaten to death by police.[35]

One journalist described how her colleagues relished interviewing the opposition because it gave them a chance to act like "real journalists" by asking difficult questions and pressing for answers. Such aggressive reporting, she said, is not allowed with the AK Party. That too ensures that the coverage of the opposition is far more critical than that of the government.

How a History Magazine Fell Victim to Self-Censorship

Andrew Finkel

The abrupt closure of *NTV Tarih*, a popular history magazine with a healthy circulation, may not be the most egregious example of self-censorship in Turkey. But it is an unhappy illustration of a mainstream media nervous of its own shadow.

"There was an element of happenstance. The magazine might have survived had it gone to press a few days earlier," explains Neyyire Özkan, who was herself forced to step down as head of the Doğuş Magazine Group. She describes the magazine as a "star" in a list of publications that consisted of mainly Turkish-language franchises for titles such as *Vogue*, *National Geographic*, and *GQ*. *NTV Tarih* was among the best-selling monthly magazines in Turkey, but created entirely in-house.

"We weren't stuffy, and we weren't ideological. We took on controversies and tried to make people understand them from different historical perspectives," says its editor, Gürsel Göncü. In short, it tried to turn "official" history into just history. When Prime Minister Erdoğan issued a guarded apology in November 2011 for the massacre of Alevis Kurds in the late 1930s in the eastern province of Dersim, the magazine followed with a cover story about this no-longer taboo episode of Turkey's early Republican past. Monthly sales of around 35,000 nearly doubled.

Göncü was expecting an even more enthusiastic reception for the July 2013 issue, which was inspired by the previous month's headline-grabbing occupation of Istanbul's Gezi Park. It set out to chart the history of popular protest in Istanbul from the 404 AD Nika riots of Byzantium, through Ottoman and Republican times. And it tried to see Gezi in the context of world events. The editors had also reconstructed a painstaking, hour-by-hour, tweet-by-tweet timeline of the Gezi events. This was billed on the front cover as *#yaşarkenyazilantarih*

Cover of the censored edition of NTV Tarih. Reproduced by permission of the publisher

(#historywrittenasitislived). Success for the issue seemed all but guaranteed by an ingenious front cover. Artist Taha Alkan had recreated the iconic photo of the Gezi protest—a young woman university lecturer in a red dress being sprayed in the face with pepper gas by a masked policeman—in the style of an Ottoman miniature painting.

NTV Tarih was not the only Doğuş publication to use the Gezi theme. Even that month's issue of Turkish *Vogue* featured Gezi chic. However, by the time the presses were ready to turn, the entire media group had become embroiled in far greater controversy. NTV television station, the group's flagship 24-hour channel, had come under bitter attack by its own viewers for its initial reluctance to cover the Gezi events, and then for its eagerness to comply with the government's spin that the protests were part of a greater conspiracy. As a result, crowds of demonstrators gathered in front of the media giant's imposing Istanbul headquarters. On the other side of the city, near Gezi Park itself, protesters set upon and destroyed an NTV remote-broadcasting truck.

These protests appear to have prompted a great deal of soul-searching within the NTV newsroom. Cem Aydın, the media group's chief executive officer, assembled the entire staff to confess that the organization had lost its way. Well before Gezi, the news channel had begun axing its hallmark discussion programs and shedding many well-known presenters and commentators who had given the station its critical edge. It had adopted an all too familiar, anodyne editorial policy to avoid giving the government offense. "We only covered news that wasn't news," one cameraman said, according to accounts by those who attended the meeting. Aydın pledged to recover the public's trust, no matter how long it took. Tayfun Ertan, NTV television's first editor in chief, reflects on the irony of it all. The station was founded in 1996 by Cavit Çağlar, a businessman-politician who had been a supporter of then-President Süleyman Demirel and who was later convicted of bank fraud. "We only signed on to the project when he gave his word he would never interfere with news content. And he kept that promise, even during politically turbulent times," Ertan says.

Ertan, still working for Doğuş Group (he was subsequently dismissed), listened to Aydın's apology, and afterwards the two men spoke. "We have to get ourselves organized like we were at the beginning," Aydın told him. Instead of trying to strike a balance that was not possible, he said that NTV should go back to its first principles of doing the news.

He never got the chance. A few days later, Aydın stepped down from his post. All this was before *NTV Tarih* tried to go to press.

Erman Yerdelen, chairman of the board of Doğuş Media Group, makes it clear that Aydın had no authority to convene that meeting of employees, nor to change the direction of NTV's editorial policy. He describes that policy as "center of the road." He rejects suggestions that NTV news channel had turned into an uncritical vehicle for the ruling party's point of view but says nor is it the station's mission to be a soapbox for the government's critics.

If the television conveyed the message of the government, this was because it was popularly elected by 50 percent of the population and they wanted to know what the government had to say. The views of the opposition were also being reported. "To my way of thinking, Turkey has full freedom of the press. Anyone can start up a newspaper tomorrow," Yerdelen says.

And Yerdelen is unapologetic about his decision not just to spike the Gezi issue of *NTV Tarih* but to shut down the magazine, lock, stock, and barrel. The reasons he gives are twofold: Despite its relatively high sales (twice as many copies as Turkish *Vogue*), it wasn't bringing in advertising revenue. Printing extra copies would not have made it profitable. And he accused its editor of turning a history magazine into a political platform, and of trying to rush the magazine into press without approval. "It overstepped the boundaries," he says.

Göncü takes issue with this interpretation of events. He says it is impossible that a strong-selling magazine produced by an editorial staff of five, that did not pay a foreign license, could have been taking a loss. And he says it was inconceivable to think the magazine could leave the printers without the publisher's consent.

At the same time, he remains philosophical about his brainchild's plight. The pages of the magazine found their way onto the Internet, and from there to the publishing house Metis, who reprinted the Gezi issue as a book. The proceeds go to the families of those who died in the Gezi protests. "What happened to the magazine cannot be erased. It became part of the history it tried to write."

Media Ownership and Dependency

Money is the government's most potent tool for controlling the media. The breakup of Turkey's two dominant media groups was complete by 2011, when the Sabah-ATV group had been sold to Çalık Holding, led by Erdoğan's son-in-law, and Doğan sold the newspapers *Milliyet* and *Vatan* to settle its bill from the tax case. The sale of *Milliyet*, perhaps the most respected brand in Turkish journalism, dramatically diminished the influence of the Doğan Media Group. The huge tax fine also served as a clear warning to other media owners of the cost of challenging the government.

Every holding company with interests in the media sector benefits from government contracts. The following are only select examples:

- Doğuş Holding (NTV, StarTV) won a $702 million bid in May 2013 to operate Istanbul's Galataport in Karaköy.[36]
- In November, İhlas Holding (*Türkiye*, İhlas News Agency, TGRT TV) signed a $1.86 billion deal to redevelop Istanbul's Gaziosmanpaşa neighborhood.[37]
- The Demirören Group, whose Milangaz subsidiary is one of the country's liquefied petroleum gas giants and which built the controversial Demirören shopping center on Istanbul's Istiklal Avenue, bought *Milliyet* and *Vatan* from Doğan in 2011. According to Erdoğan himself, the company's owner, Erdoğan Demirören, asked the prime minister for his recommendation for editor in chief of *Milliyet* after buying the paper.[38]

The role of public tenders and privatization in maintaining government influence over media cannot be overstated. The prime minister's office controls billions of dollars in projects per year as the chair of the Privatization High Council (OİB). The PM has final say over privatization approvals, creating a clear incentive for diversified holding companies to avoid all conflict with his office. An even larger amount of money flows through the public procurement process. In 2012, the government issued $46.2 billion worth of contracts, with key holding companies with media outlets eagerly bidding. Billions more are distributed through the Housing Development Administration (TOKİ), also run by the prime minister's office. Defense industry procurement, also overseen by the PM through the Defense Industry Executive Committee, is another major source of patronage and pressure.

Over time, these procurement practices have become even less transparent. In the last two years, amendments to procurement law placed tenders in multiple sectors (including defense, security, intelligence, technology, and railways) outside the purview of the watchdog Public Procurement Authority (KİK) that is responsible for issuing monitoring reports on public tenders.[39] A change buried in the fourth judicial reform package in 2012 also reduced criminal charges for bid rigging in public tenders.[40]

The Court of Accounts, which is charged with monitoring and reporting to parliament on government spending, was defanged by June 2012 legislation that limited the court's autonomy to pursue audits.[41] The Constitutional Court overturned the legislation in December 2012, yet the Court of Accounts has been unable to audit public institutions for the last two years and will not be able to do so for at least three more because of an amendment that exempted state institutions from providing account details.[42]

The Savings Deposit and Insurance Fund (TMSF), the body attached to the prime minister's office that recovers debt owed to banks and failed financial institutions, provides another means for to assert control over the media. TMSF has on several occasions seized control of media organizations whose parent companies have been in trouble. The reliable result is resale to companies sympathetic to the AK Party. This was the mechanism by which the Sabah-ATV group was sold to Çalık Holding in 2007, and in 2013 Çukurova's media properties went to Ethem Sancak, a wealthy businessmen and a passionate supporter of the PM.[43] Even before Sancak's purchase of Akşam, TMSF had appointed a former AKP deputy to be the editor in chief of the newspaper.[44]

A remark heard frequently during Freedom House's investigations is that many owners of powerful holding companies regard media properties as a burden rather than a privilege—a levy that must be paid to ensure continued access to government contracts. An increasingly common phenomenon is a game of "pass the can," where holding companies bear the cost of running a pro-government media group for a time and then try to transfer ownership to another beneficiary of government favor as quickly as circumstances allow.

The result is an atmosphere of complicity, censorship, and outright stenography on the part of a large segment of the media. It is no longer unusual for multiple newspapers to run the same headline when the political stakes are particularly high. In November, during a very public rift between Deputy Prime Minister Bülent Arınç and Prime Minister Erdoğan over Erdoğan's vow to use the police to investigate co-ed student housing, six newspapers ran near-identical headlines quoting the prime minister playing down the feud: "We will solve it amongst ourselves" is what readers saw when they picked up their papers.

The same thing happened in early June when seven papers ran headlines with an identical quote from the prime minister on his return from North Africa during the Gezi protests: "I would give my life for the demands of democracy," he declared, suggesting that like his hero Adnan Menderes, the prime minister hanged by the military in 1960, he was willing to martyr himself for the cause of democracy.[45]

Six pro-government newspapers on November 9, 2013, feature headlines saying "We will solve it amongst ourselves"

The government and its supporters acknowledge that media owners are eager to please the prime minister, and even that these owners may be afraid of the consequences of displeasing him. But they refuse to take responsibility for the atmosphere of intimidation described consistently by reporters, editors, and even some owners, speaking privately. Without apparent irony, ministers insist that if owners and editors are "real journalists," they should be able to withstand the pressure against them.[46] As the editor in chief of one of the country's leading papers told Freedom House, "You are 'free' to write anything, if you are willing to pay the price. This is the atmosphere created by the prime minister's office."[47]

Imprisonment and Detention

The most chilling example of government abuse is the detention and imprisonment of a large number of journalists, mainly but not all Kurdish. As of December 1, 2013, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) found that 40 journalists were imprisoned as a result of their work. While down from the 49 that the organization documented in 2012, the number still made Turkey the top jailer of journalists in the world, ahead of China and Iran.[48] Local monitoring organization Bianet lists 59 imprisoned journalists and 23 media employees.[49]

As other reports have documented, the majority of the journalists in prison or in pretrial detention are Kurds working for outlets associated with the Kurdish movement.[50] According to some analysts, the government is keeping the journalists and activists to be used as bargaining chips with the PKK in negotiations.

Approximately one-quarter of the imprisoned journalists (as counted by CPJ) work for media outlets associated with banned leftist movements, while a smaller number were swept up in the Ergenekon trials. Two of the reporters that covered the trial, Ahmet Şık and Nedim Şener, were held in pretrial detention for over a year on charges of being part of Ergenekon, the organization they were supposed to be covering. Şener, who had written a book accusing police of organizing the murder of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, and Şık, who had written a book about Gülen supporters in the police, are still facing charges of supporting an armed terrorist organization in the OdaTV case, one of the spinoffs from the original Ergenekon trial.

The high number of imprisoned and detained journalists in Turkey is a direct consequence of overly broad and aggressively applied antiterrorism laws, combined with a judicial system that too often sees its role as protecting the state, rather than the individual.[51] Flagrant abuses of due process and fair trial are common. Even after several rounds of reform, the antiterrorism laws make it possible to prosecute journalists for producing "propaganda" for terrorist organizations or "aiding" a criminal organization with a low burden of proof. The definitions of "terrorism," "terrorist organization," and "propaganda" continue to be so open-ended that interviews with PKK leaders or descriptions of PKK activities, as well as other "armed" or "terrorist" organizations, could easily be used for prosecution of journalists. According to Human Rights Watch, the Ministry of Justice's own figures show that 8,995 people were imprisoned as of last year on terrorism charges.[52] These fundamental ambiguities in the law and the history of their use should be remembered when Erdoğan describes the Gülen movement as an "organization" that has committed "treachery."[53]

Prognosis

The Gezi events and the December corruption scandal have reinforced the AK Party leadership's historic sense of victimhood and its fear of another coup. With the military marginalized, its suspicions are primarily focused on the many members of the judiciary and the police that are affiliated with their former allies in the Gülen movement. At the same time, they are stepping up attacks on freedom of expression. Proposed amendments to Law 5651 regulating the Internet, under discussion in parliament at the time of writing, would allow government officials to order websites blocked for "violations of privacy" without a court order. This would be a flagrant rejection of the European Court of Human Rights, which ruled on this issue in a case against Turkey in December 2012.[54] Unless the prime minister and his advisers change course, tensions will grow, with additional revelations of corruption likely and the country preparing for three critical elections (for local office in March 2014, president in August 2014, and parliament in June 2015). One of the most pernicious effects of the widespread firings of reporters and editors from the "mainstream" media is that there are fewer moderate voices to be heard. The result is an increasingly shrill and divisive media—and public debate—split into "Erdoğanist" loyalists and polemical critics.[55]

In the medium term, there are reasons for hope, especially if the United States and other members of the international community do more to support and defend Turkey's democracy. The clash between the powerful Gülen movement and the AK Party has opened more space for critical reporting as well as criticism of the government, despite the government's best efforts to silence debate. The rise of social media provides a new platform for journalists to challenge the government's claims and voice their opinions. After her firing from *Sabah* in December, Nazlı Ilıcak cited her Twitter reach, saying, "I have 500,000 followers. That's more than *Sabah*'s circulation."[56] Most important, there is a new generation of media outlets developing, with a strong commitment to more balanced reporting.

Gezi also showed there is a strong demand in Turkey for professional news and journalists willing to stand up to government pressure. The news site *T24* has become a refuge for fired journalists and has seen its readership quintuple from 25,000 to 125,000 this year. Upstart sites like Vagus. TV, founded by journalist Serdar Akinan, incorporate user-generated video and commentary. The dramatic changes in Turkey's politics, economy, and media present an opportunity for entrepreneurs, international foundations, and development agencies to invest in Turkey's media market.

Turkey's business community has an important role to play. The current crisis notwithstanding, the long-term promise of increasing European investment remains a guiding incentive for business leaders to press the government to support legal reforms, including more transparent procurement practices. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), currently being negotiated between the United States and Europe, provides an opportunity for a parallel investment pact between Turkey and the United States. If approached with rigorous standards that condition agreement on greater accountability and transparency in government, these processes could help promote institutional development and a more democratic political system.

Recommendations

Turkey

The AKP-led government must recognize that its efforts to control a free debate are further alienating Turkey's citizens and could potentially threaten the country's stability. It could also put at risk Turkey's integration with Europe and its strong alliance with the United States.

The problems of how to construct and defend a democratic state are fundamentally ones the Turkish people must resolve. In Freedom House's meetings with high-ranking officials in November 2013, the government came prepared to discuss legal reforms and the long list of imprisoned journalists. We saw this as a sign that international criticism was having at least some impact. The harsh official response to the unfolding corruption scandal, however, casts serious doubt on whether a government that sees itself permanently locked in a mortal struggle with its persecutors can engage in a process of reform. Turkey's citizens and the world are watching. To strengthen Turkey's democracy, this government, and any future government, must do the following:

- Cease all efforts to bully and intimidate the press. High-ranking officials must drop their personal vendettas, and the government must fully implement European Court of Human Rights rulings that have clearly stated that Turkish officials who bring defamation suits to silence criticism are violating freedom of expression. The court has also ruled that issuing injunctions against publications without strict judicial scrutiny violates freedom of expression.[57]
- Abolish the Anti-Terror Law (TMK), which makes investigation, prosecution, and sentencing of people accused of crimes involving terrorism fall under a different, dangerously vague, and draconian legal regime. This law has been used repeatedly to prosecute journalists for doing their job.
- Further revise Article 220 of the criminal code (TCK) concerning "Criminal Organizations." The article's overly broad language, including "committing a crime in the name of" or "aiding" a criminal organization, gives the courts far too much discretion.
- Abolish Article 301 of the criminal code criminalizing "insulting the Turkish nation."
- Decriminalize defamation by abolishing Article 125 of the criminal code.

The government must also address the widespread perception of corruption in the public procurement and privatization processes. The government cannot dictate that media owners will place journalistic mission and ethics above the profit motive. But with more transparency and fewer conflicts of interest, the capacity for Turkish governments to control media content will diminish. To improve the transparency of public procurement, the Turkish government should do the following:

- Commence accession to the World Trade Organization Government Procurement Agreement (WTO GPA) in order to improve transparency and accountability in the bidding process. The GPA will be complementary to both EU accession and a TTIP parallel pact with the United States.
- Review, in coordination with the EU, the institutional arrangements that place the Housing Authority (TOKİ) and the Privatization High Council (OİB) in the prime minister's office and that make the prime minister the chair of the Defense Industry Executive Committee. Authority for procurement should be aligned with EU best practices in order to prepare for accession.

European Union

The European Union has encouraged important reforms in Turkey. But the EU's leverage diminished as some member states, consumed with their own crises and wary of admitting a Muslim-majority nation, obstructed further progress and soured many in Turkey on the accession process. With the European financial crisis stabilized, a new president in France, and a relatively pro-Turkey Social Democratic Party now in the ruling coalition in Germany, there have been signs of progress. Accession still remains a distant goal, but the process of harmonization is the best course for Turkey's economic and political future. The "positive agenda" begun in May 2012, the opening this year of a new chapter of the acquis, and the recent agreement to pursue visa liberalization are all positive steps. The EU must continue to press for reforms in Turkey, while offering economic incentives to help keep those reforms on course. It must also make clear that backsliding into repression will damage the relationship and cause serious harm to Turkey's economy. Specifically, the EU must do the following:

- Maintain its emphasis on media freedom as a key barometer of Turkish democracy, pressing Turkey to follow unambiguous European Court of Human Rights rulings on defamation law, use of injunctions, and judicial scrutiny for any restrictions on access to information.
- Complete the visa liberalization protocol that would allow Turkish citizens to travel visa-free to the EU as an incentive for further Turkish engagement with the EU and reforms.
- Place additional emphasis on transparency in public procurement practices as part of the accession process, including by emphasizing Turkish accession to the World Trade Organization Government Procurement Agreement.
- Release, without further delay, the official criteria for opening chapters 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (justice, freedom, and security) of the accession acquis.
- Expand public diplomacy efforts across Turkey, including outside of Istanbul and Ankara, promoting both democratic values and the economic and political benefits of Turkish integration into the EU.
- Provide greater resources in support of media independence and civil society as part of its pre-accession funding programs.

United States

For years, the Obama and Bush administrations oversold Turkey's potential to be a model for the reconciliation of Islam and democracy. This government's increasing authoritarianism cannot be ignored or denied any longer. The United States urgently needs a policy that fits the reality of current events in Turkey.

President Obama cultivated a close relationship with Prime Minister Erdoğan—in October 2011, the *Los Angeles Times* said he had spoken more with Erdoğan than any world leader other than British Prime Minister David Cameron[58]—, but Erdoğan has received nearly all of the benefit. Obama's decision to visit Turkey on his first overseas trip in 2009—in the midst of the government's fierce attacks on the Doğan Media Group—was viewed as a particular triumph for Erdoğan, and Obama's decision to compliment Turkey's performance on media freedom in his speech to parliament was a profound error. It was inevitably seen by the Turkish government as new license to harass and intimidate the press. Several pro-Western journalists interviewed for this report expressed anger and bitterness over that speech and at the administration's uncritical support for Erdoğan until very recently.

The White House's attitude toward Turkey has soured in recent months, primarily because of Erdoğan's refusal to follow through on rapprochement with Israel as well as differences over Turkey's support for extremist groups in Syria. But the Obama administration is still not speaking out at a high enough level against Turkey's suppression of the media and dissent. Statements of concern from the State Department spokesperson are not enough. Prime Minister

Erdoğan and President Abdullah Gül both need to hear unequivocally from President Obama that steps to roll back democratic reforms are damaging relations and undermining the ability to work towards shared goals. In addition to speaking out, the United States should support Turkey's democracy with the following steps:

- Establish a new policy framework that integrates human rights and democracy as enduring pillars of the bilateral relationship on par with the security and economic dimensions. This should be shared from the highest levels of the U.S. government with Turkish counterparts, and a regular timetable should be established for assessing progress, such as biannual policy dialogues. A senior official on each side should be designated as point person for these dialogues, and there should be a component that facilitates input and transparency with the media and civil society.

- The appropriate U.S. government bodies (i.e., State Department, Department of Defense, National Security Council) must work more collaboratively in constructing a longer-term, holistic Turkey policy that acknowledges that the viability of Turkey's democracy and its adherence to human rights commitments, starting with freedom of expression, affect United States foreign policy objectives in Europe and the Middle East.

Like the EU, the United States can use economic negotiations to support greater government accountability and transparency. The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) between the U.S. and the EU offers an opportunity to increase free trade with Turkey as well. Turkey's customs union with the EU means that Turkey has a high stake in the outcome of the TTIP, but cannot participate in negotiations. Turkish business leaders and the government are rightly concerned that they not be ignored in the process. The U.S. government should:

- Begin parallel negotiations with Turkey on a free-trade pact to accompany the U.S.-EU TTIP, and make transparency and accountability in the public procurement process and all business and financial dealings a central component of these negotiations.

Turkey is an important player in some of the U.S.'s most important strategic arenas and interests, including resolution of the war in Syria, maintenance of the NATO alliance, and preservation of the territorial integrity of Iraq. Washington and Brussels both must recognize that Turkey's future as a stable democracy, and a reliable ally, is increasingly in doubt. The current government's abuses pose a serious threat to Turkey's democracy. They must not go unchallenged.

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