

FEDERICA MOGHERINI
HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
VICE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Brussels, **18 MARS 2016**
A(2016)626783-791478

Ms Marietje Schaake MEP
European Parliament
Rue Wiertz 60
1047 Brussels

Dear Marietje,

Thank you for your letter dated 29 January 2016 addressed to First Vice President Timmermans and myself, concerning freedom of the press in Turkey and the life terms demanded by prosecutors for the two prominent journalists Cumhuriyet editor-in-chief Can Dündar and Ankara Bureau Chief Erdem Gül.

The EU welcomes the decision of the Turkey's Constitutional Court to free Can Dündar and Erdem Gül after having been detained for 92 days. The Court ruled their arrest had been against the Constitution as it violated their individual rights as well as the freedom of the press and freedom of expression. This decision represents a much needed step in the right direction in Turkey for guaranteeing freedom of expression, and we believe all charges against the journalists will be dropped.

However, we remain preoccupied by the increasing restrictions on press freedom and freedom of expression in Turkey. In the 2015 EU Enlargement Strategy and Report on Turkey¹ the Commission highlighted the serious deterioration as regards the respect for freedom of expression and called on Turkey to act, as a matter of priority, against intimidation of journalists in all its forms and to defuse the tense political climate which creates an environment curtailing freedom of speech in the media and on the internet.

We reiterated the importance of respect of rule of law and media freedom in all our interactions with the government and political parties in Turkey, including during the High Level Political Dialogue on 25 January, which provided a framework to re-launch, re-energise and revitalise the EU-Turkey strategic cooperation into a broader cooperation. At the press conference afterwards, I also stressed that the importance the EU attaches to the accession negotiations, in particular on the issues of rule of law, human rights, including freedom of expression and freedom assembly, and the independence of judiciary.

¹SWD(2015) 216 final issued 10.11.2015

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_turkey.pdf

Legislation in Turkey must be implemented in a manner which ensures proportionality and equality before the law, in line with article 10 of the European Convention for Human Rights and the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights. Turkey as any country negotiating EU membership needs to ensure the respect of human rights, including freedom of expression, in line with the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). We have also stressed the need for an independent and transparent investigation in case of any alleged wrongdoing, with full respect of the rights of the defendants.

We therefore welcome the announcement of the Reform Action Group, convened on 11 December 2015 by the Turkish government, which reiterated its determination to continue with the political reform process, including the reforms in the area of the rule of law and fundamental rights.

It's our intention to closely follow its works and to remain engaged, considering the preoccupations expressed above.

Yours sincerely,



Federica Mogherini