

Erdogan's purge in Britain? Two minors, two women arrested for selling Kurdish newspaper

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On the 7th of December, British armed police knocked on door to door in Harringey to arrest individuals selling and distributing the news daily, Yeni Ozgur Politika, which translates to "New Free Politics."

Two minors, aged 17, a 50-year old woman, and a 38-year-old were arrested for selling the Kurdish newspaper. [Speaking to the BBC](#), the Kurdistan Solidarity Campaign described the arrests as an "attack on freedom of expression", and argued that Yeni Ozgur Politika plays an important role "for Kurds living across Europe, as Kurdish newspapers and radio stations in Turkey have been shut down due to sustained suppression by the Turkish State".

The Metropolitan Police claimed that the arrests were made on suspicion of money laundering, fundraising for an armed organisation, and fraud, but campaigners are

arguing that these raids are setting a worrying precedent which targets "perfectly legal activities."

Critics further allege that the arrests show a troubling development in UK-Turkey relations, with the latter winning more influence over EU governments like Britain and Germany. A [report](#) released by Global Risk analyst Luke Rodeheffer argued that Turkish clandestine activity has taken a remarkably aggressive approach in Europe since the failed coup attempt in Turkey in 2016. "The increasingly hardline stance" reads the report "that President Erdogan is taking against dissidents at home and abroad are a sign that Turkish clandestine activities in Europe will be a problem for the foreseeable future." The recent raids on the Kurdish Press worry campaigners further, particularly because they are not clandestine and are being committed by U.K. Government authorities.

Since July 15th, 2016, 187 media outlets have been [shut down](#) in Turkey, while over 300 journalists have been arrested. According to a [special report](#) by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) published on Wednesday, "Turkey remains the world's worst jailer for the second consecutive year, with 73 journalists behind bars, compared with 81 last year". The vast majority of these charges are not unlike those levelled by the British authorities, they are based on "anti-terrorism" legislation.

A [report](#) commissioned by Marc Pierini for Carnegie Europe, also states that the Turkish judicial system "tends to equate criticizing government policies and sympathizing with radical ideology", and that furthermore "many imprisoned journalists are detained on charges relating to terrorist activities linked to Kurdish separatism". Pierini is both the former EU ambassador and former head of the EU delegation to Turkey. But the CPJ has also [expressed worry](#) about the risk of "realpolitik" interfering with the EU's "proclaimed press freedom and human rights agenda"

In Britain, [the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee](#) has claimed that while it would like to do what it can to influence civil society in Turkey, it must also do what it can to protect its National Defense agreements with its Nato ally. To take an example, while the British Government has expressed its worry that Turkey uses a broad definition of "terrorism" to silence dissidents, it also wishes to "cement a strategic relationship" which ensures that Britain can continue to sell weapons and aircrafts to the Turkish Government. On January 28th alone, [Theresa May signed](#) a £100M agreement to sell Turkey Fighter jets, which brought strong condemnation

from human rights organisations worried that the warplanes would be used to indiscriminately bomb Kurdish populated cities.

Many analysts have also expressed worry over Erdogan's influence over British policy after Ankara successfully used its refugee population as a bargaining chip to [push for the United Kingdom](#) to ease its visa restrictions on Turkish citizens. Although unconfirmed, if there was any coordination between the Turkish Government and Britain, then the actions of U.K. authorities would fall into a worrying pattern taking place all across Europe. As Turkey has innovated a [national defense doctrine](#) which equates criticisms of the Government abroad with a domestic threat, European leaders have [recieved criticism](#) for collaborating with the Turkish State to arrest journalists and dissidents. Germany, in particular, has been criticized for, among other things, [banning 30 Kurdish symbols](#) including flags in demonstrations that show the picture of PKK co-founder Abdullah Ocalan, raiding Kurdish student organisations, and even prosecuting a comedian for insulting Erdogan after pressure from Ankara.

Turkey has also used espionage to try and influence European policy. [In Austria](#), Peter Pilz of the Green Party released a report claiming that the Austria Turkey Islamic Foundation was making use of Turkish agents to target dissidents. [Switzerland](#) has claimed that agents have targeted academics, and Swiss authorities even sought to open a criminal case against individuals believed to be agents for Turkish intelligence (MIT). Indeed when European Governments have not openly collaborated with the Turkish State to arrest dissidents from Turkey, they have spent considerable effort attempting to clamp down on Ankara's attempt to achieve its goals by other means. Sometimes, both of these coercive strategies have existed side by side. According to [a report](#) by Der Spiegel, MIT handed over a list of 300 names to German parliament demanding the arrest of individuals seen as critical towards the Turkish Government. This was done out in the open, with some speculating that the Turkish Government would denounce the German Government for being "soft on terrorism" if they did not comply.

At this current moment, it is still unclear whether or not the British Government collaborated with Turkey to arrest two 17-year-olds of Kurdish origin, a 50-year-old woman, and a 38-year-old woman. Yeni Ozgur Politika, nevertheless, represents the voice of hundreds of thousands of Kurds in Europe. And the attempt by the British Government to clamp down on its sale and distribution has created an environment of fear for many of the Kurdish migrants who left Turkey for, among many things,

gaining the freedom to express dissent against the Turkish Government.