



P E N  
N O R W A Y



Norwegian  
Helsinki Committee

To

Mr. Espen Barth Eide

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Mr. Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik

State Secretary

The Norwegian Foreign Ministry

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Oslo, 8 April 2025

**Dear Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide and State Secretary Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik,**

On the occasion of your upcoming visits to Türkiye, we are writing to express our serious concern about human rights developments in Türkiye. We also refer to State Secretary Andreas Motzfeldt Kravik's participation in the Antalya Diplomacy Forum from 11 to 13 April. We ask you to raise these critical human rights concerns with the Turkish government.

We are alarmed by the recent escalation in the government's crackdown on freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly following the arrest of Istanbul's mayor, Ekrem İmamoğlu, on 19 March and legislative initiatives targeting the LGBTIQ community.

Türkiye is now facing one of its gravest socio-political upheavals in decades. Tens of thousands of people have taken to the streets following the arrest of Istanbul's Mayor, based on charges of 'corruption' and 'aiding terrorism', in a raid involving detention orders for [more than 100](#) others. İmamoğlu was [remanded in pre-trial detention](#) on 23 March, the same day he was nominated by the Republican People's Party (CHP) as the leading opposition candidate in a symbolic primary for the 2028 presidential election. He was [removed](#) from his post alongside district mayors of Şişli and Beylikdüzü, who also face charges.

#### **Crackdown on mass protest**

The protests were met with unwarranted and unlawful use of police force, with people beaten with batons and kicked when they were on the ground. Law enforcement officials indiscriminately used pepper spray, tear gas, plastic bullets and water cannons against protesters, causing numerous injuries.

The repression also affects forms of protest beyond demonstrations. On 26 March, members of the board of Eğitim-Sen, a teachers' union, were put under [house arrest](#) pending trial for 'inciting crime' following their decision to stop work on 25 March in solidarity with university students – who have been at the forefront of the protest.

Blanket bans on protests have been in place in Istanbul since 19 March and in İzmir and Ankara since 21 March. The Governor of Istanbul also issued a [decision](#) stating that ‘Individuals, groups and vehicles likely to participate in illegal activities – individually or collectively – will not be allowed to enter or exit the city’. It is unclear how this is enforced.

### **Threats and violence against journalists and media outlets**

The crackdown on mass protests has been accompanied by intensified attacks and pressure on independent media and journalists. At least 11 local journalists were [detained](#) in Istanbul and Izmir due to their reporting of the protests, with seven of them remanded in detention on 25 March for allegedly violating the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations and [released](#) after an appeal on 27 March, pending trial. At least 10 local journalists were physically [assaulted](#) by the police while covering the protests on the ground in Istanbul, and one journalist was reportedly assaulted by protesters.

BBC correspondent Mark Lowen, who was in Istanbul to cover the protests, was detained at his hotel and later deported because he was a ‘threat to public order’. On 27 March, the Swedish journalist Joakim Medin, who works for Dagens ETC newspaper, was detained on his arrival in Türkiye to cover protests over the jailing of Istanbul’s mayor. Joakim Medin has been arrested on terror-related charges and for “insulting the president”.

Türkiye’s Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) also restricts reporting on the events. RTÜK’s chair Ebubekir Şahin has [urged](#) broadcast media, their anchors and commentators to ensure their reporting ‘remain free from political bias’, [warning](#) that failure to do so would result in maximum penalties, including the revocation of their licenses. On 21 and 27 March, RTÜK followed through by [issuing](#) administrative fines and temporary broadcast suspensions of up to 10 days to TV channels Halk TV, SCZ TV, Tele 1, and Now TV.

Social media is one of the last channels through which people in Türkiye have access to independent voices and where activists and journalists can share their opinions relatively freely. Amid mass protests, the authorities have swiftly [imposed](#) heavy restrictions on social media and messaging apps, including ordering social media platforms to block protest-related content.

Authorities must refrain from using legal and extra-legal means to exert pressure on social media platforms to censor online content violating their international human rights obligations, particularly content involving political discourse, which enjoys the highest level of protection. Türkiye must allow free and unfettered access to the internet and rescind all unlawful orders to block social media accounts of those exercising their right to free expression to criticize the authorities.

### **Anti-LGBTIQ draft law proposal**

The year 2025 has been designated as the "Year of the Family" in Türkiye, and several related measures have negatively impacted the LGBTIQ community. The latest concerns the preparations for the Draft Law Proposal on Amendments to the Turkish Penal Code and Certain Laws. This draft law is based on the 4th Judicial Reform Strategy Document, prepared by the Ministry of Justice and announced by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on January 23, 2025.

The leaked draft proposal contains highly concerning provisions. If enacted, the law would, among others, make sterilisation mandatory for those who wish to start the gender affirmation process by ‘certifying that they are permanently deprived of the ability to reproduce and that gender affirmation is compulsory in terms of mental health with an official medical board report issued by a full-fledged training and research hospital determined by the Ministry of Health as a result of four evaluations to be carried out at least at three-month

intervals'; and it would amend Article 225 of the Turkish Penal Code, which is titled 'Immoral Acts', and add the expression 'biological sex' to the Penal Code. Consequently, LGBTIQ expressions will be defined as 'immodesty' and making these expressions visible will be penalised.

Amnesty International Norway, the Norwegian Helsinki Committee, and PEN Norway urge you to:

- Condemn Turkish authorities' violent crackdown on freedom of expression and freedom of peaceful assembly, and remind the authorities of their obligations under international human rights law to respect and ensure everyone's right to freedom of expression and peaceful assembly.
- Call on Türkiye to immediately release all those unjustifiably and arbitrarily detained solely for exercising their rights to freedom of expression and peaceful protest.
- Call on Türkiye to ensure that any allegations of unlawful use of force and other human rights violations by law enforcement officials, including gender-based violence, torture and other ill-treatment inflicted on protesters, are subject to an effective, impartial and timely investigation.
- Call on Türkiye to respect the rule of law, including in the case of Ekrem Imamoglu and other arrested opposition figures. International observers should be invited to monitor the handling of these politically sensitive cases.
- Call on Türkiye to uphold the human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons.



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