

PRESS RELEASE

Turkey: Independence, integrity and freedom of expression of the legal profession at stake

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On the weekend of 20 and 21 June 2020, a large number of lawyers and local Turkish Bar Associations presidents launched a symbolic march from their respective provinces to the entrance of Ankara to protest against a new draft bill of the governing party AKP, which is intended to change the electoral system of the chambers and further restrict the independence of the bars and the legal profession.

At the entrance of Ankara, police agents forcedly prevented the lawyers and several Bar presidents, marching under the slogan "Defense Marches" from entering the capital. Following the police intervention, the march quickly turned into a sit-in protest. Eventually, the march was allowed to visit Anıtkabir, the mausoleum of the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

The new draft bill was presented by the Turkish Government shortly after criminal investigations were launched, under Article 216 § 3 of the Turkish Penal Code against the Ankara and Diyarbakır Bar Associations for their recent statements criticizing Turkey's president of the Directorate of Religious Affairs who publicly alleged, during a sermon on 24 April 2020, that LGBTQ+ persons were the source for evil and the COVID-19 pandemic.

In view of the above, the CCBE expresses its serious concerns over the recent repressions by the Turkish authorities on the freedom of expression of the legal profession aiming at further restricting their independence.

Therefore, the CCBE, recalling

- the [European Convention on Human Rights](#), in particular article 10 on Freedom of expression;

- the [United Nations Basic Principles on the Role of Lawyers](#), in particular Principle 16 on Guarantees for the functioning of lawyers, Principle 23 on Freedom of expression and association and Principle 24 on Professional associations of lawyers;
- and the [Charter of Core Principles of the European Legal Profession](#) which states that "Bars and Law Societies (...) should seek to uphold and protect the core principles in the public interest". These core principles are notably a): "the independence of the lawyer, and the freedom of the lawyer to pursue the client's case"; i): "respect for the rule of law and the fair administration of justice" ; and j) "the self-regulation of the legal profession";

calls on the Turkish authorities to withdraw and refrain from taking any measure which would have the effect of hindering the independence, integrity and freedom of expression of the legal profession in Turkey.

About the CCBE:

The Council of Bars and Law Societies (the "CCBE"), recognised as the voice of European Lawyers, unites the Bars and Law Societies of 45 European Countries, including the 27 EU Member States. Through them, the CCBE represents more than 1 million European Lawyers. The CCBE promotes access to justice, respect for Human Rights and defence of the Rule of Law.

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