

ASYLUM SEEKERS FROM TURKEY: CURRENT COUNTRY CONDITIONS

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In this article, we attempt to provide some useful information about the current country conditions in Turkey, and we hope to provide some country condition information on preparing asylum applications for asylum seekers from Turkey. The information and opinions in this article are based on our legal representation of multiple asylum seekers from Turkey and our personal awareness of conditions in Turkey as of the date of this article. Current country conditions in the asylum applicant's country are one of the most overlooked factors in preparing asylum applications. Thoroughly researching and articulating country conditions in light of the applicant's characteristics and the claim of well-founded fear of persecution are a vital part of diligently representing asylum applicants.

Introduction

Turkey is one of the countries leading the news these days. Situated at the crossroads of Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the Middle East, it is strategically vital for the West. Turkey is the only NATO member state to border Iran, Iraq, Syria, and three former Soviet republics: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.¹ It has a mostly Muslim population. Besides NATO, Turkey belongs to the Council of Europe (CoE) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It has a pro-Western foreign policy and a constitution mandating an elected parliament and independent judiciary.²

Since 2002, the Justice and Development Party (AKP), headed by Prime Minister -- and then President -- Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has run the government. By starting off with numerous economic and political reforms, the AKP looked like a guarantor of Turkey's democratic future. But time proved the opposite.

This paper will focus on political developments and the state of human rights in Turkey in light of the regime's gradually intensifying crackdown on media, free speech, and political dissent, which has caused a significant increase in asylum applications from Turkey.

Brief History

¹ Dinesh D. Banani, "Reforming History: Turkey's Legal Regime and Its Potential Accession to the European Union." *International and Comparative Law Review*, 2003.

² Jill Parker, "West Meets East: A Discussion of European Union Enlargement and Human Rights." *Tulsa Journal of Comparative and International Law*, 2004.

After the Ottoman Empire collapsed in 1918, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk founded the Turkish Republic. Ataturk vigorously promoted secularism to forge the fallen empire's multi-ethnic regions into a Westernized nation-state. Ataturk's major strategy was to replace the Islamic legal code with a European one. He closed all religious schools and abolished religious orders, vesting all responsibilities for education in the Ministry of Education. He secularized the constitution incrementally. Ataturk advanced Western ideology by promoting the sciences, education, and secularism. The Turkish military elite backed him by serving as guardians of Westernizing reforms and of the new nation-state. The constitution gave the military the right and duty to intervene in Turkish politics "in the name of the nation."³

Turkey has had multiple constitutions. The 1961 constitution created a bicameral parliament; National Security Council comprised of the armed forces' chiefs, whose job was to help the cabinet decide matters of national security; and a series of liberal reforms. Furthermore, it established a Constitutional Court; legalized trade unions; granted independence to TV and radio stations and universities; and enshrined freedom of conscience, political belief, assembly, and the press, as well as the right to form political parties.

The military coup of 1980 drastically altered the political scene and damaged civil and political rights. The constitution of 1982 was far less liberal than its predecessor. It created a unicameral parliament and granted wide-ranging powers to the president as well as presidential immunity from scrutiny by the legislature and judiciary. This constitution entrenched Ataturk's reforms and stipulated the democratic and secular nature of the state. Turkey has amended the constitution many times since then.

The AKP Era

The AKP, a party with Islamic roots, was founded in August 2001. Erdogan, its devoutly religious leader, claimed that he sought to promote a secular constitution, not his private religious beliefs. However, critics argued that this statement was strictly tactical. Some groups in society asserted that the Islamist motivations of the AKP were evident in its proposals to regulate the retail display and advertisement of alcohol and in the head scarves worn by some AKP leaders' wives.⁴

After the AKP's electoral triumph of 2002, the country initially enjoyed remarkable economic growth, accompanied by political reform and relative stability.⁵ Erdogan gained clout by backing up his party's victory with economic growth. The AKP seemingly sought to enact democratic reforms in compliance with EU membership guidelines. This initial push earned Erdogan the support of the business community, liberal intellectuals, and pragmatic middle class.⁶ The EU and European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) had a great influence on reforms implemented in

³ Id.

⁴ Omer Tashpinar, "Turkey: the New Model," in *The Islamists Are Coming: Who They Really Are?* ed. Robin Wright (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012).

⁵ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/report/2013/05/14/63159/freedom-of-the-press-and-expression-in-turkey>.

⁶ Omer Tashpimar, "Turkey: the New Model."

the early years of the AKP's rule. The ECtHR helped shape Turkish reforms concerning pre-trial detention, trial procedures, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly and association. ECtHR rulings had even more sway when Turkey had to comply with them while pursuing EU membership.⁷

However, eventually the government stopped carrying out reforms and changed direction. It violated freedom of expression more and more often, arrested many journalists, and pressured the opposition ever more severely. Especially after the violent suppression of the 2013 Gezi Park protests, which began in Istanbul and spread nationwide, the AKP drew strong criticism worldwide for its human rights violations.

Statistics kept by the ECtHR in recent years indicate grave human rights concerns in Turkey. In 2014, almost a third of the court's judgments concerned 3 of the Council of Europe's 47 member states. Turkey ranked second, with 101 judgments. In 2015, again, it ranked second, incurring 87 judgments (second to Russia's 116). Most of the judgments affecting Turkey pertained to violations of Article 5 (the right to liberty and security) and Article 10 (right to freedom of expression).⁸

In late 2013, a corruption investigation initiated by the Istanbul Security Directorate snared multiple representatives of then-Prime Minister Erdogan's administration, members of his ruling party, and his sons. On December 17, the Directorate's Financial Crime Department detained 47 suspects close to Erdogan, including officials from the Housing Development Administration, Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning, and the District Municipality of Fatih; the sons of the interior minister, economy minister, and environment and urban planning minister were implicated too, as was the mayor of the Fatih District Municipality. Police confiscated \$17.5 million in cash that had been used as bribes. Prosecutors accused 14 officials of bribery, corruption, fraud, money laundering, and smuggling of gold. In total, authorities detained 91 suspects.

The second wave of the investigation, on December 26, implicated Erdogan's sons as well as certain Al-Qaeda affiliates from Saudi Arabia. However, matters failed to progress when the government fired Prosecutor Muammer Akkas that day. He said he had been prevented from doing his duty.

On January 7, 2014, the government definitively ended the investigation by firing 350 police officers. It sought as well to suppress news of the scandal by temporarily banning YouTube and Twitter.

Fetullah Gulen, a prominent moderate cleric who previously supported Erdogan, described the mass firing as a purge of civil servants, while Erdogan described the corruption investigation as a "judicial coup" by those jealous of his success, including the allegedly foreign-backed Gulen movement. To distract the public from the terminated corruption probe, the AKP declared war on Gulen and his followers. Erdogan ordered their arrests on charges of terrorism. Gulen fled to the

⁷ Carmen Rodriguez, Antonio Avalos, Hakan Yilmaz, and Ana I. Planet, eds., *Turkey's Democratization Process* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁸ http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/Facts_Figures_2014_ENG.pdf.

United States. Authorities accused a number of media groups and other organizations of being part of “Fetullah Galen’s Terrorist Organization” (FETO).⁹

Erdogan kept the feud going by vowing revenge on Gulen and blaming an international conspiracy for the corruption investigation. He also threatened to expel Francis Ricciardone, the U.S. ambassador to Turkey.

In 2015, Turkey was holding hundreds of political prisoners, according to the U.S. State Department. They are mainly journalists, political party officials, academics, and students. Authorities accuse them of participating in or having ties to terrorist groups. The government sweepingly applied anti-terrorism laws in convicting such defendants.

Turkey is witnessing not only numerous human rights violations, as documented by recent reports from local and international human rights bodies. The country is enduring the spillover of refugees from the Syrian war and frequent terrorist attacks. In 2015, 2.2 million Syrians fled to Turkey, according to Human Rights Watch. Afghan and Iraqi refugees have settled in Turkey as well.

Overall, the political situation in Turkey is complex. The human rights situation is poor. The failed military coup in July and recent events following the suppression of that coup signify that bigger challenges are coming. The human rights situation will incur significant damage.

Political Situation and Major Human Rights Challenges

Freedom of Expression in Turkey

a) Journalists

Freedom of expression has been one of the most sensitive areas in Turkey. The AKP government has curtailed it through a number of laws and has stepped up pressure on freedom of expression in recent years.

Turkey jailed more journalists than any country in 2012 and 2013, according to the joint submission to the UN Universal Periodic Review of Turkey by Article 19, the Committee to Protect Journalists, English PEN, Freedom House, P24, and PEN International.¹⁰

The use of criminal defamation charges to silence critics is a critical issue. In the past few years, high-ranking officials including Erdogan himself have lodged numerous such cases.¹¹ In 2012, authorities prosecuted Yalchin Kuchuk and editor Mehmet Bozkurt for a cartoon that showed Erdogan chained to a U.S. flag. Bokzurt faced a sentence of 11 months and 20 days’

⁹ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253121.pdf>.

¹⁰ <https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/37658/en/article-19-joint-submission-to-the-un-universal-periodic-review-of-turkey>.

¹¹ <http://www.osce.org/fom/14672?download=true>.

imprisonment, which later became a fine of 7,000 Turkish lira (TL, about US \$2,300). The Supreme Court of Appeals ultimately suspended the judgment.¹²

Another defendant, Anadolu University student Osman Garip, was sentenced in November 2013 to more than a year in prison for “insulting” Erdogan on Facebook.¹³ Erdogan himself filed the complaint.

Other defendants in 2013 included pianist Fazil Say, who received a 10-month-long suspended sentence for “insulting religious values” in his tweets. Turkish-Armenian writer and linguist Sevan Nishanyan was sentenced to more than 13 months in prison for blasphemy in a blog post defending the controversial film “The Innocence of Muslims” on grounds of freedom of expression. Authorities the same year accused Seda Kenanoglu, owner of the user-generated satirical dictionary Ekshi Sozluk, and 40 contributors to the site with religious defamation and “committing a public order offence via press or broadcast.” The charges related to entries satirizing the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁴

In January 2015, Cumhuriyet daily published a selection of cartoons from the French satirical journal Charlie Hebdo, translating them into Turkish, in a show of solidarity with the weekly magazine after terrorists killed 12 people at Charlie Hebdo's headquarters. Turkish prosecutors accused Ceyda Karan and Hikmet Chetinkaya, columnists for the daily, of inciting public hatred and animosity and of insulting religious values.¹⁵

In March 2015, the Turkish government opened a criminal investigation of 58 individuals, including journalists, musicians, and actors, for criticizing the state-run Anadolu news agency's coverage. They were accused of “provoking persons to hatred and enmity, as well as defamation, slander and intimidation” for their posts on social media.¹⁶

In July 2015, Turkish lawyer Umut Kilich, a member of the Afyon Bar Association, was found guilty of insulting Erdogan after Kilich allegedly shouted at the Supreme Board of Judges and Prosecutors' interview panel that they were representatives of “fascist Erdogan.” Kilich received an 18-month suspended sentence.¹⁷

In 2016, Can Dundar, editor of the daily Cumhuriyet, and Erdem Gul, the newspaper's Ankara bureau chief, were arrested on charges of obtaining and revealing state secrets for the purpose of espionage, attempting to overthrow the government, and knowingly aiding a terrorist organization. The arrests occurred after their newspaper covered an arms shipment to Syrian rebels through Turkey. Later, the Constitutional Court released the journalists.¹⁸ However,

¹² <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/EUR44/001/2013/en/>.

¹³ <https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/37658/en/article-19-joint-submission-to-the-un-universal-periodic-review-of-turkey>.

¹⁴ Id.

¹⁵ http://www.todayszaman.com/anasayfa_two-cumhuriyet-columnists-face-up-to-45-years-in-prison-over-charlie-hebdo-cover_377472.html.

¹⁶ <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/253121.pdf>.

¹⁷ Id.

¹⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/26/turkish-journalists-released-jail-court-rules-press-freedom-violated-dundar>.

Dundar's troubles were not over. On May 6, 2016, he survived an assassination attempt in front of the Istanbul courthouse, where he was fighting charges of treason. Dundar was sentenced to 5 years and 10 months of imprisonment for "leaking secret information of the state."¹⁹

This year has been at least as bleak as 2015. Police arrested various individuals who had displeased the government, including Erol Onderoglu, the Turkey representative of Reporters Without Borders and a journalist with the Bianet independent news website; Shebnem Korur Fincanci, a forensic medicine professor at Istanbul University and head of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey; and writer and journalist Ahmet Nesin. The three face charges of "spreading terrorist propaganda." Onderoglu and Fincanci were released from jail pending trial, but all three could end up with prison sentences as long as 14 years.²⁰

As absurd as they sound, such obscure and vague charges serve as a pretext for convicting numerous journalists, activists, and dissidents. Given the existence of such laws in Turkey, anyone who openly expressed a critical opinion of the AKP or Erdogan would likely qualify for asylum.

To obtain asylum in the United States, the applicant must demonstrate a "reasonable possibility" of persecution in Turkey. That standard is easily met because a Turkish citizen criticizing Erdogan or other Turkish government officials on Facebook is subject to arrest, imprisonment, and sometimes torture. In practice, though, asylum officers and immigration courts require some sort of indication, such as an official step or the threat to enforce those laws against the asylum applicant.

In sum, the Erdogan government's widespread use of sometimes obscure laws to silence dissent leaves no doubt that the number of qualified Turkish asylum seekers will continue to rise steeply in the near future.

b) Internet Freedom

Internet freedom is an issue in Turkey, where Web content and social media have become important sources of information. In 2013, almost half of Turkey's population used the Internet.²¹ Online news is an alternative to traditional news sources, and about 78% of Turkish Internet users read news online. The estimated number of Twitter users in Turkey is more than 15 million.²²

From time to time, the government has enacted restrictions on the Internet, including increases in online censorship. From 2007, the year that Law 5651 took effect, to 2014, the government blocked an estimated 48,537 websites. It blocked thousands of sites and social media platforms,

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/06/turkish-journalist-can-dundar-escapes-attempted-shooting-outside-court>.

²⁰ <http://www.osce.org/fom/250146>.

²¹ http://carnegieendowment.org/files/press_freedom_turkey.pdf.

²² <http://blogs.wsj.com/briefly/2014/03/28/5-things-to-know-about-turkeys-social-media-battle/>.

including YouTube, Vimeo, Dailymotion, and Twitter, at different times.²³ Internet users criticizing the government or calling for protests have become particular targets of repression.

Throughout the 2013 Gezi Park protests, the government monitored social media and issued arrest warrants for organizers and supporters of the protests, based on their activity on Twitter and Facebook. It filed charges against a large number of Turkish social media users, particularly Twitter users, who criticized officials and the government. Erdogan has filed criminal complaints against more than 67 Turks for allegedly insulting him online since his assumption of the presidency in August 2014.²⁴

Erdogan has been openly hostile to social media, calling them “the worst menace to society.” He also vowed once “not to leave this [Turkish] nation at the mercy of YouTube and Facebook.” A few hours after that speech, Turkey blocked Twitter. A few days later, it also blocked YouTube. Eventually, the Supreme Court ordered restoration of access to those websites.²⁵ Erdogan has been personally involved in the decisions of the Turkish government to repeatedly block and unblock Facebook and Twitter.

In March 2015, the government enacted laws allowing itself to temporarily block online content and to conduct surveillance without a court order. During that year, it blocked hundreds of websites and social media accounts. That April, for instance, it blocked 166 websites for publishing photos taken of an abducted Istanbul prosecutor shortly before he was killed in a shootout between his kidnappers and police. Roughly 100,000 websites were blocked as of the end of 2015, according to Engelli Web.²⁶

The Turkish government monitors the online activities of Turkish citizens outside Turkey as well. Besides blocking websites, it indiscriminately prosecutes Internet users. This policy undoubtedly increases the number of Turkish asylum seekers, who cite persecution on account of their online political opinions.

c) Gezi Park and Freedom of Speech

The Gezi Park demonstrations throughout Turkey marked a watershed in the Erdogan era. They began in Gezi Park in Istanbul, when a small group protested a plan to replace the park with a shopping mall. The government's violent suppression of the demonstration triggered protests nationwide.²⁷

By the end of July, 3,545,000 protesters had hit the streets in 80 of the country's 81 provinces. More than 8,000 people were injured in clashes with police. The police used excessive force against peaceful protesters, imposed media censorship, and punished reporters and social media users. Reportedly, 11 demonstrators lost an eye and 104 suffered serious head injuries. Eight

²³ http://carnegieendowment.org/files/press_freedom_turkey.pdf.

²⁴ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2015/turkey>.

²⁵ <https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/37658/en/article-19-joint-submission-to-the-un-universal-periodic-review-of-turkey>.

²⁶ <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/turkey>.

²⁷ <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/12/19/turkey-surreal-menacing-pompous/>.

people were killed, including a demonstrator who was shot, allegedly by a police officer; a demonstrator who was fatally beaten, allegedly by eight pursuers who included four police officers; and a demonstrator who suffered a fatal injury from a tear gas canister exploding on impact with his head.²⁸

Journalists experienced police brutality too. By the end of September 2013, security forces had assaulted 153 journalists covering the events.²⁹ Then-Prime Minister Erdogan sued many citizens for defamation, including high-profile figures. He sued writer, theologian, and publisher İhsan Eliachik and won an award of 2,000 TL for damages. He also sued actor and demonstrator Mehmet Ali Alabora, who faced charges of inciting armed rebellion, which carry a maximum sentence of 25 years. The prime minister sued caricaturist Mehmet Golebatmaz, who was accused of criminal defamation.³⁰

d) Failed Military Coup

On July 15, 2016, a faction of the military tried to overthrow Erdogan. Troops fought with police and protesters in Istanbul and Ankara. Erdogan urged the public to come out, resist the coup, and “protect the Turkish democracy.” More than 265 people were killed and at least 1,440 were wounded. Military helicopters fired on the parliament building and on protesters, while tanks barreled through crowds. The coup failed.³¹

Erdogan, who launched a purge of the armed forces, stated, “They will pay a heavy price for this. This uprising is a gift from God to us because this will be a reason to cleanse our army.”³² After putting down the coup, the government began the “cleansing” through a wave of arrests, beatings, and torture.³³ Human rights observers documented instances of collective beatings, torture, and rape of individuals accused of involvement in the attempted coup.³⁴ One day later, authorities arrested 2,839 soldiers and ordered the arrest of 2,745 judges. By July 19, the authorities had suspended or detained almost 20,000 soldiers, police, judges, and civil servants.³⁵ NGOs reported that the government had arrested 62 children and accused them of treason.³⁶

Moreover, Erdogan demanded that the United States arrest or extradite his nemesis Gulen, who resides in Pennsylvania. Ankara accuses him of being behind the military coup. Gulen rejects those charges. Back in Turkey, the government has suspended more than 21,738 teachers in private institutions for alleged ties with Fetullah Gulen. The Turkish Higher Education Board has

²⁸ <http://www.pen-international.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/PEN-Gezi-Report.pdf> .

²⁹ Id.

³⁰ Id.

³¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/live/2016/jul/15/turkey-coup-attempt-military-gunfire-ankara>.

³² <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-turkey-security-primeminister-idUSKCN0ZV2HK>.

³³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/turkey-coup-attempt-Erdogan-torture-human-rights-suspension-kurdish-prisoners-freedom-from-torture-a7149951.html>.

³⁴ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/detainees-beaten-tortured-and-raped-after-failed-turkey-coup-amnesty-says-a7154091.html>.

³⁵ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3697270/Turkey-demanded-arrest-cleric-Gulen-U-S-justice-minister.html>.

³⁶ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3706496/Turkey-issues-detention-warrant-42-journalists-NTV.html>.

ordered more than 1,500 university deans to resign.³⁷ The government has begun closing 524 private schools and 102 Education Ministry-controlled institutions for suspected ties to Gulen.³⁸ It also has suspended 8,777 Ministry of Interior personnel, mostly police, and 100 Turkish intelligence officers. In total, the government has fired or suspended about 50,000 people.³⁹

One issue alarming the international community is that several Turkish officials suggested reinstating the death penalty for those found guilty of attempting to stage the coup.⁴⁰ In addition, the government arbitrarily blocked access to more than 20 news websites, revoked the licenses of 25 media houses, and cancelled the press credentials of 34 individual journalists, according to Amnesty International.⁴¹

On July 20, Erdogan announced a state of emergency for three months.⁴² On July 21, Turkey temporarily suspended compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights. This decision could result in more-severe crackdowns and human rights violations nationwide.⁴³

On July 24, Amnesty International released a report on torture and other violations of the human rights of detainees being held in connection with the failed coup.⁴⁴ The abuses included rape in the Ankara Police Headquarters sports hall, Ankara Baskent sports hall, and the riding club stables at Baskent, as well as in Istanbul police stations, according to the report. The police are accused of holding detainees in stress positions; depriving them of food, water, and medical treatment; and beating, torturing, verbally abusing, and threatening them. Detainees saw arrested high-ranking military officers raped “with a truncheon or finger by police officers,” the report said. Moreover, detainees often lacked access to lawyers and were not allowed to contact family members. The majority of detainees who obtained counsel were not allowed to choose them.⁴⁵

The number of arrests grows every day. On July 27, the government issued detention warrants for 47 former employees and executives of Zaman, a media group that has ties to Gulen.⁴⁶ The arrests are connected with the investigation of FETO, which Ankara accuses of plotting the failed coup. After the warrants came out, police arrested 13 former Zaman employees, including former columnists and journalists Shahin Alpay and Nuriye Ural. They are accused of attempting to overthrow the government and of “preventing the duties of the state partly or completely, in

³⁷ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3697270/Turkey-demanded-arrest-cleric-Gulen-U-S-justice-minister.html>.

³⁸ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/turkey-state-of-emergency-must-not-roll-back-human-rights/>.

³⁹ <http://www.cnn.com/2016/07/20/europe/turkey-failed-coup-attempt/index.html>.

⁴⁰ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/turkey-human-rights-in-grave-danger-following-coup-attempt-and-subsequent-crackdown/>.

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.*

⁴³ <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/turkey-coup-attempt-human-rights-president-Erdogan-purge-turkish-military-a7148166.html>.

⁴⁴ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/07/turkey-independent-monitors-must-be-allowed-to-access-detainees-amid-torture-allegations/>.

⁴⁵ *Id.*

⁴⁶ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/detention-warrants-issued-for-47-former-zaman-employees-in-gulen-probe.aspx?pageID=238&nID=102135&NewsCatID=341>.

addition to receiving unfair press announcement money from the state with irregularity in circulation,” according to Hurriyet.⁴⁷

These developments raise serious concerns about the future of Turkey. Some analysts argue that Erdogan himself staged the coup to create a pretext for purging his remaining opposition. In fact, he is known for staging publicity stunts. For example, last December, someone posted a video online that allegedly showed him saving a man from committing suicide.⁴⁸ In the much-derided video, Erdogan is seen sitting in his presidential vehicle and ordering his bodyguards to bring over the suicidal man, whom Erdogan allegedly talked out of jumping into the Bosphorus.

Conclusion

Erdogan, who is known to compare himself to Sultan Suleiman “the Magnificent,” recently had a \$615 million palace built for himself.⁴⁹ He reportedly has amassed a \$160 million fortune and two other palaces. His wife is known for her love of luxury shopping abroad and of antique collecting.⁵⁰

The past five years have been critical for human rights in Turkey. In that time, Turkey was one of the top five countries for jailing journalists, interfering with media freedoms, and violating freedom of expression.⁵¹ Turkey abused its own Anti-Terror Law (TMK) and penal code (TCK) and prosecuted journalists, writers, editors, publishers, translators, civil and political rights activists, lawyers, elected officials, students, and other Turks to silence them.

Turkey ranks 149th of 180 countries on the 2015 World Press Freedom Index.⁵² In 2014, Turkey’s status in the index declined from Partly Free to Not Free because of sharp deterioration of press freedoms in 2013.⁵³

The era after the failed coup promises no improvements. Apparently, the human rights situation will worsen. Erdogan is expected to strengthen his position by sidelining his opponents and by restricting freedom of expression even more than before.

Human rights were not flourishing in Turkey even before the attempted coup. Numerous Turkish dissidents had already sought asylum in the United States and other countries. The recent developments will cause even more Turks to go into exile. Human rights abuse in Turkey in recent days has reached its highest levels under Erdogan.

⁴⁷ Id.

⁴⁸ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-35178873>.

⁴⁹ <http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/world/Erdogan-the-deeply-divisive-rule-of-turkeys-sultan/news-story/28d0a1ba468ea76aedfcb8d8ea0281d8>.

⁵⁰ <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3696037/She-silk-wallpaper-bathroom-2-000-roll-Super-spending-habits-Turkey-tyrant-s-shopaholic-wife-laid-bare-two-million-coup-hit-country-earn-3-day.html>.

⁵¹ <https://www.article19.org/resources.php/resource/37658/en/article-19-joint-submission-to-the-un-universal-periodic-review-of-turkey>.

⁵² <https://rsf.org/en/ranking/2015>.

⁵³ https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2014/turkey#.VTGUfCF_Oko.

By suspending the European Convention on Human Rights, the government inhibits foreign intervention in its human rights violations, as well as legitimizing police brutality and other unlawful government activities. This trend will drive up the number of Turkish asylum seekers.