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Turkey: Corrosion of Rights and Democracy

Brussels, 9 May 2016 (ITUC OnLine): The resignation of Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, forced out of office by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, has moved Turkey further down the path to autocracy. The sentencing of two senior journalists from the Cumhuriyet newspaper, Erdem Gul and Can Dunder to 5 years and 5 years 10 months in prison respectively is yet another example of fundamental freedoms being swept aside as President Erdogan assumes total control over the government and ruling AK Party.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said: "Turkey is heading towards the status of de-facto dictatorship, with the consolidation of power around one political figure and the repression of fundamental rights to freedom of speech, association and assembly. Developments in recent days will heighten the risk of deeper conflict within Turkey, as well as further deterioration in relations with the EU and greater tensions with Greece in particular."

Erdogan has said he will maintain Turkey's draconian "anti-terror" laws, which are being used to suppress civil rights across the country. Hundreds of academics and teachers are being investigated under the laws for calling for a resumption of peace talks with the Kurdish minority, and several are already being held in detention.

Immediately prior to the Gul and Dunder's court hearing, Dunder escaped an assassination attempt outside the Istanbul courtroom. He escaped unharmed; however, a journalist who was at the scene was wounded. Dozens of journalists are currently being held behind bars.

Anthony Bellanger, General Secretary of the International Federation of Journalists, said: "The sentencing of these two journalists, who uncovered a plot to supply weapons into Syria, is a travesty and an affront to the basic principles of democracy. Turkey has become Europe's biggest prison for journalists."

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