

Fiscal: No Fiscal Impact

Revenue: No Revenue Impact

Action Date: 05/20/15

Action: Be Adopted.

Meeting Dates: 04/20, 05/20

Vote:

Yeas: 9 - Barnhart, Gilliam, Hoyle, Kennemer, McLane, Nosse, Rayfield, Smith Warner, Wilson

Prepared By: Erin Seiler, Committee Administrator

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Urges Congress to work with Turkish diplomats, European Union (EU) and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allies to stop mass arrests and detainment of journalists in Turkey.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- Importance of free speech in democracy
- Jailing of Turkish journalists
- Turkey's role as ally and member of NATO
- Similar memorial adopted by EU

EFFECT OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

House Joint Memorial 16 urges the United States Congress and the United States Department of State to work with Turkish diplomats, the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization allies to influence the repeal of recent laws signed by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that have led to the mass arrest and detainment of journalists in Turkey.

Laws recently passed by the Turkish Parliament allow for search and seizure of individuals, vehicles, homes and property based on suspicion of crimes against the government such as establishing, heading or being a member of a terrorist organization or trying to take control of the state. As a result of these new laws, there has been an increase in the arrest and detainment of newspaper journalists, television producers and script writers who are seen as reporting on information critical of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government. Among those arrested were Ekrem Dumanli, editor-in-chief of the Zaman daily newspaper and Samanyolu Broadcasting Group General Manager Hidayet Karaca.

Targeting and detaining journalists is in direct opposition to Turkish and American constitutional principles. Free speech is the cornerstone of democratic societies. Practices that undermine freedom of expression and freedom of the press result in more authoritarian government. The European Parliament adopted a resolution on January 15, 2015, on freedom of expression in Turkey, criticizing police raids and detention of journalists, stating there is a "diminishing tolerance of public protest and critical media" in Turkey. As a close ally of the United States, it is important to support strong relationships between Turkey and other members of the international community, especially during times of instability when adherence to democratic principles is vital.