

PRESS RELEASE

Turkey: Following the tragic death of lawyer Ebru Timtik, the CCBE calls on the EU and Turkish authorities to take urgent measures to prevent the death of lawyer Aytaç Ünsal

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The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) is deeply shocked by the death of Turkish lawyer Ebru Timtik on 27 August after a 238 days hunger strike.

Lawyers Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal, respectively sentenced to 13 years and 6 months and 11 years and 6 months in prison, decided to go on an unlimited hunger strike to denounce their unfair trial as well as the unfair trial of several dozens of Turkish lawyers. (https://www.ccbe.eu/fileadmin/speciality_distribution/public/documents/Human_right_portal/EN_20200618_Final-Report-Fact-Finding-Mission-on-CHD-s-Trials-Oct-2019-June-2020.pdf)

Since 2017, several Turkish lawyers belonging to the Progressive Lawyers Association and the People's Law Office, among which Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal, have been victims of judicial harassment. These lawyers who have fought for Justice and the Rule of Law have defended, among others, persons considered to be opponents of the Turkish government, families of miners massacred in Soma and Ermenek, populations expelled from their homes as victims of urban transformation, families of citizens killed under torture in police stations and prisons as well as persons prosecuted for expressing their opinions, including civil servants, workers and defenders of freedoms.

For exercising their legitimate activity as a lawyer, these lawyers have been accused of being members of a terrorist organisation under Turkey's sweeping anti-terrorism laws and have therefore been the subject of legal proceedings.

They did not receive a fair trial as guaranteed by Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights to which Turkey is a signatory.

This is what led to the hunger strike of Ebru Timtik and Aytaç Ünsal.

The Turkish authorities failed to prevent the death of Ebru Timtik despite the appeals and medical reports concluding that they should not remain in jail.

Aytaç Ünsal is still on hunger strike today and must not suffer the same tragic end as Ebru Timtik.

The CCBE president said today: "Ebru Timtik died in her struggle for justice. This is immensely sad and unacceptable. Lawyers play a crucial role in upholding the Rule of Law, and promoting and protecting human rights. This week will be celebrated the 30th anniversary of the UN Basic Principles on the role of the lawyers. Turkey must take into account and respect the Basic Principles within the framework of its national legislation and practice by ensuring that lawyers are able to perform all of their professional functions without intimidation, hindrance, harassment or improper interference and shall not suffer, or be threatened with, prosecution or administrative, economic or other sanctions for any action taken in accordance with recognised professional duties, standards and ethics."

The CCBE calls on the EU and the Turkish authorities to do everything in their power to save the life of lawyer Aytaç Ünsal and to guarantee him a fair trial.

All lawyers in Turkey must be able to carry out their professional duties to preserve the independence and integrity of the administration of justice and the Rule of Law.

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