

REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS

**Press Release
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CALL FOR FIRM ACTION FROM GOVERNMENT IN FACE OF POLICE NEGLIGENCE AND MISCONDUCT IN DINK CASE

While eight people have been charged in the 19 January murder of Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, the negligence of the authorities in this case and the sympathy for the murderer displayed by police in a video made public last week call for sanctions and measures to protect journalists in Turkey, Reporters Without Borders said today.

“As the murder investigation continues, recent developments have made it absolutely necessary that the Turkish authorities actively combat the ultra-nationalist groups, including those within the security forces, whose very existence threatens the safety of journalists,” the press freedom organisation said.”

“The video of policemen posing beside Dink’s confessed murderer, Ogün Samast, is a scandal,” Reporters Without Borders added. “The apparent negligence of the police as regards information received more than a year ago about a plot against Dink is also shocking. The government must punish those responsible as a matter of urgency.”

On 1 February, the privately-owned TV station TGRT broadcast footage showing Samast on the night of 20 January shortly after his arrest in the northeastern port city of Samsun. He is seen holding a Turkish flag posing for souvenir photos with police officers in the local police station. A quotation of Mustapha Kemal Atatürk can be seen on a calendar in the background: “The soil of the motherland is sacred. It cannot be abandoned to its fate.”

The video has triggered an outcry in the Turkish press. The newspaper Radikal said it clearly showed the mentality that led to Dink’s murder, adding that all that was missing was for someone to “come and kiss the murderer’s forehead.” Radikal editor Ismat Berkan said: “This video proves that the murderer and his accomplices are not alone and that the support they enjoy has penetrated all levels of the state.”

The tabloid newspaper Sabah’s headline was “Shoulder to shoulder with the murderer,” while the daily Vatan said the video was “as serious as the murder itself.”

Samsun prosecutor Ahmet Gökçinar announced that an investigation has been ordered into the incident while the interior ministry said that eight police officers have already been relieved of their duties. But the high command of the Turkish armed forces reacted by withdrawing TGRT’s press accreditation.

The video has fueled the already fierce criticism of the police, who are accused of failing to protect Dink although he had reported in the newspaper he edited, the bilingual Turkish-Armenian weekly Agos, that he had been receiving threats and hate e-mail.

On 30 January, several newspapers reported the allegations made by a police informer, Erhan Tuncel, who has been arrested as part of the investigation. Tuncel is said to have told the police in the northeastern city of Trabzon (Samast's home town) in February 2006 of plans to murder Dink, identifying Yasin Hayal (one of those now charged along with Samast) as the potential murderer. The police did reportedly begin to check out the claim but did not pursue it.

Aside from Tuncel, Hayal and Samast himself, the youth who gunned down Dink outside the offices of his Istanbul-based newspaper, the other people charged with Dink's murder are Ahmet Iskender, Ersin Yolcu, Zeynel Abidin Yavuz and Tuncay Uzundal.

A well-known journalist and one who was respected by his colleagues, Dink had been the target of several prosecutions over his views on the massacres of Armenians from 1915 to 1917. In 2005, he received six-month suspended sentence for "humiliating Turkish identity." He was prosecuted again in September 2006 over an interview he gave to Reuters in which he referred to the massacres in Anatolia during the First World War as "genocide." He had been facing a possible three-year prison sentence. Dink had been due to appear before Istanbul courts on 22 March and 18 April.

http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=20932