Turkey Detains Dutch Journalist; Frederike Geerdink taken into custody in Hakkari province


Abstract (summary)
None available.

Full Text
ISTANBUL—Turkey detained on Sunday a Dutch journalist covering the escalating war between the state and Kurdish insurgents, signaling an expansion of the government's clampdown on reports from the country's restive southeast.

Frederike Geerdink, who already has a pending terrorism-related trial in Turkey, was taken into custody at about 2 a.m. local time in the Hakkari province that borders Iran and Iraq, according to the Dutch reporter's lawyer, Ramazan Demir.

The detention came after Ms. Geerdink accompanied Kurdish civilians acting as human shields to prevent Turkish military operations against the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, Mr. Demir said. The Dutch reporter may face deportation if her residence permit in Turkey isn't up to date, he said.

Hours later, Vice News said two of its British journalists arrived in the U.K., after a brief imprisonment last week on charges of aiding terrorism with their reporting on the PKK in Turkey. A third journalist for the New York-based media organization, Iraqi national Mohammed Ismael Rasool, is still in jail.

"Vice News continues to work around the clock with all relevant government and legal representatives to secure his release," spokeswoman Meera Pattni said in an emailed statement.

The media outlet, known for its edgy content targeting young audiences, had slammed Turkey's government for leveling "baseless" and "alarmingly false" charges to "intimidate and censor" its journalists. It wasn't immediately clear whether Turkish authorities would still proceed with the trials of U.K. citizens Jake Hanrahan and Philip Pendlebury.

A re-emergence of foreign-journalist detentions in Turkey—which had mostly ceased since the bloodiest years of the PKK conflict in the 1990s—comes as three-year peace talks between the government and Kurdish insurgents have practically collapsed.

News organizations covering the volatile regions bordering Iraq and Syria are fast becoming the Turkish government's latest target as Ankara fights a two-front war against the PKK and Islamic State, while also grappling with a leadership vacuum that is dragging the country to early elections in November.

"Details regarding the detention of Frederike Geerdink are still hazy, but it fits into a disturbing pattern of state harassment of journalists in Turkey," said Howard Eissenstat, a historian at St. Lawrence University, who also serves as a Turkey country specialist for Amnesty International. "Police harassment of the journalists who tell this important story won't make the story go away."

Citing the charges against Vice News journalists and the mounting conflict in Turkey's majority Kurdish regions, Mr. Eissenstat said "there is clear evidence of human-rights abuses" targeting of civilians as the state's war with the PKK intensifies.

Since June, violence has escalated daily with the PKK—a terrorist-listed organization in Turkey, the U.S. and the European Union—and its youth wing expanding the war into cities and the government responding with emergency measures, including curfews and military operations including hundreds of airstrikes, at home and on the group's camps in northern Iraq.

On Sunday, two policemen were killed and three wounded after the PKK attacked an armored vehicle with a rocket-propelled grenade in the southeastern province of Diyarbakir. Turkish authorities haven't lifted a curfew imposed Friday evening in the Cizre district of Sirnak province, where Kurdish militants and security forces are engaged in ongoing deadly clashes.

As Turkey plunged over the past two months into its worst violence since the 1990s, at least 80 security officials and 23 civilians, as well as almost 1,000 PKK members have been killed, according to Turkey's state-run Anadolu news agency. More than 40,000 people have been killed since the PKK started its armed campaign in 1984.

Before her latest detention, Ms. Geerdink was taken into custody in early January by Turkish officials, who accused the Dutch journalist of spreading "propaganda for a terrorist organization" after they raided and searched her home in Diyarbakir. She was acquitted of the charges mid-April, but a prosecutor appealed the decision.

"I told several friends after my acquittal: I have this strong feeling the state won't let me get away this easily," Ms. Geerdink said on her Twitter account at the time. "Et voilà."

Ayla Albayrak contributed to this article.

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Peker, Emre

Wall Street Journal (Online)
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