Türkiye must end the coordinated crackdown on LGBTI+ civil society

article, anti-gender movement, lgbti

We, the undersigned organisations, condemn the large-scale police raids and detentions targeting LGBTI activists and human rights defenders, organisations and community spaces across Türkiye. We call for the immediate protection and release of those detained, and respect for their procedural rights. We also call for an end to any measures obstructing the fundamental rights to freedom of association and assembly and for the respect of human rights principles and the rule of law in Türkiye.

According to information from LGBTI organisations as well as international media reports, the police raided homes and association offices during the night of Saturday 12 – Sunday 13 September. At least 162 people were detained, including approximately 50-60 LGBTI human rights defenders and activists, and are being held in police custody, with the number reportedly increasing. Reported accusations include “obscenity”, “prostitution”, and morality-related offences. Clubs were also raided, with additional people detained, including sex workers.

The operation primarily targeted members of the boards of directors and auditors of LGBTI+ associations—the legally required governing and oversight bodies through which associations operate. Members of these bodies from Kaos GL and Pembe Hayat in Ankara; Muamma and 7 Renk in Mersin; and SPoD, Hevi, Lambda, L?STAG, Pozitif Ya?am and Pozitif-iz in Istanbul have reportedly been detained.

The raids followed only hours after a 12 September court order blocking the websites and social media accounts of LGBTI+ organisations. The scale, timing and selection of targets indicate a coordinated attack on organised LGBTI+ civil society in Türkiye.

Justice Minister Ak?n Gürlek stated that 162 people, nine associations and 13 businesses are being targeted in an operation titled **“My Family is Safe”,** and stated that this was an investigation into associations which, in his words, “promote LGBT and immorality”. He also announced scrutiny by the Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) of funding received from public institutions and organisations abroad.

The raids mark an escalation of a concerted attack on LGBTI activism and community support that had been going on for years in Türkiye, including restrictions and detentions at Pride, censorship of LGBTI content, pressure on organisations, and political narratives portraying LGBTI people as threats to children, families and public morality. However, the combination of morality-based allegations, raids, detention of governing body members, digital censorship, equipment seizures and scrutiny of foreign funding are taking the attack to a new level, as they violate the fundamental right to freedom of association and point to a much broader attempt to attack civil society organisations in Türkiye.

The seizure of digital equipment is particularly concerning. LGBTI organisations hold highly sensitive information concerning activists, beneficiaries, people living with HIV, survivors of violence and discrimination, lawyers, journalists, donors and other human rights defenders. Its confidentiality and integrity must be protected, and seized information must not be used to identify, profile or target additional people.

International funding and cooperation are essential to independent civil society and are not evidence of criminal activity. Financial oversight must not be instrumentalised to stigmatise organisations because of the communities

they represent or the rights they defend.

We call on the Turkish authorities to immediately:

- Unconditionally release all persons detained for their human rights work and for exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association or peaceful organising;
- Guarantee the safety, dignity and procedural rights of everyone detained, and provide clear, individualised legal grounds for every detention, search and seizure and ensure effective judicial review;
- Guarantee immediate and confidential access to lawyers;
- Protect seized digital information and prevent the misuse of confidential data;
- Lift disproportionate restrictions on the websites and social media accounts of LGBTI organisations;
- Ensure that financial investigations do not criminalise legitimate international cooperation or foreign funding;
- End the use of “family protection”, “morality” and similar narratives to justify discriminatory restrictions; and
- Guarantee that LGBTI organisations can operate, communicate and receive funding without intimidation or discriminatory interference.

We urgently call on the European Union, Council of Europe, United Nations, OSCE/ODIHR, diplomatic missions in Türkiye, international human rights organisations, donors, and partner organisations to act.

EU institutions, the Council of Europe and UN bodies should condemn the raids and detentions directly with the Turkish authorities, pushing for safeguards against further reprisals, and call for the respect of human rights defenders and the right to freedom of association publicly and in any political dialogue with Türkiye.

The **EU and European governments** should urgently raise these cases with the Turkish authorities; monitor the detention and judicial proceedings, including through diplomatic presence at hearings; and activate available protection, legal and emergency support for those affected. European public funders must stand by their civil society partners, maintain funding and reject attempts to criminalise international support for human rights work.

It is crucial **in all communications** that these developments are named for what they are: matters of rule of law, democracy, freedom of association, freedom of expression, protection of human rights defenders and shrinking civic space.

We call on **LGBTI organisations and allies** across Europe and Central Asia to amplify the calls of the Turkish movement, press their own governments and European institutions to act, and mobilise practical support where requested. Solidarity now needs to translate into political pressure and concrete support, while following the guidance and security needs of those directly affected.

We call on **international human rights organisations** to activate urgent action and protection mechanisms, monitor the detention and judicial processes, and bring their legal, advocacy and protection capacity behind the organisations and defenders targeted. This must be treated as a wider attack on freedom of association, expression and human rights defence, not as an isolated LGBTI issue.

We stand in full solidarity with all those detained, and everyone affected.

Human rights work is not a crime, and we will never stand aside in the fight for democracy and democratic values!

We call on our members, partners and the wider European and international human rights movement to react publicly, contact relevant institutions and diplomatic missions, and amplify information from LGBTI organisations in Türkiye.

Silence in the face of this escalation will only create space for further aggressive repression.

List of signatories

TGEU — Trans Europe and Central Asia

ERA Equal Rights Association for Western Balkans and Türkiye

ILGA-Europe – the European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association

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