

TURKEY: Securing civil society through targeted legal action

Why Turkey's democracy needs support

Democracy in Turkey has deteriorated sharply over the past two decades, and the country is descending towards a closed autocracy.

The government increasingly uses the state apparatus and the judiciary to suppress dissent. Journalists and activists face politically motivated prosecutions, arbitrary arrests, and judicial restrictions such as travel bans and house arrests.

Despite the deterioration of Turkish democracy, civil society remains mobilised, with a united opposition achieving significant legal and electoral victories despite systems and processes deemed to be unfair by international observers.

How to support

Legal action through both national and international courts remains one of the few available avenues for civil society to intervene and contest unlawful practices.

These interventions preserve key elements of civic space, anchoring democratic norms in constitutional and international law, especially through wins, which can establish precedents. Over time, the jurisprudence, documentation, and legal capacity generated through this work can help sustain the conditions and institutional memory necessary for future democratic recovery, should political opportunities for reform emerge.

Who to support

Founded in 2017, the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) is an internationally recognised Turkish human rights organisation defending speech and press freedoms through direct legal support, strategic litigation, and field building.

Averaging 150 cases a year, MLSA offers a legal lifeline to journalists who have been persecuted via arbitrary charges. Its work has set legal precedents on travel bans as a violation of speech freedoms and the right to document police at protests.

Funding MLSA's strategic case load supports its work on contesting unlawful state practices, building accountability records, and maintaining the civic and legal infrastructure and norms necessary for future democratic recovery.

About us

Power for Democracies strengthens and protects democracy by identifying and recommending highly effective civil society initiatives for donors to support. It is non-profit and non-partisan. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of Power for Democracies.

Registered office

c/o UES – Gemeinnützige GmbH für Effektives Spenden
Müllerstrasse 138D, 13353 Berlin, Germany
+49 30 12144574, hello@powerfordemocracies.org
www.powerfordemocracies.org

Responsible: Markus N. Beeko

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