



**MLSA**

Media and Law Studies Association  
Medya ve Hukuk Çalışmaları Derneği

# Annual Report

## 2024



# About MLSA

The Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA) is an NGO working in the field of freedom of expression since 2018. MLSA provides free (pro-bono) legal support to individuals whose freedom of expression is violated, particularly journalists, media professionals, and human rights defenders, and represents them in national and international legal processes. By regularly notifying international organizations, especially the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, MLSA conducts advocacy activities and aims to develop the capacities of journalists, lawyers, and NGOs through workshops focused on freedom of expression. MLSA also monitors internet freedom and censorship in Turkey with the FreeWeb project. Additionally, through its civil society capacity-building program, it provides consultations to civil society organizations.

The MLSA website also creates a platform for independent journalists to publish their articles and disseminate their work.

Since 2018, MLSA has been running the most extensive trial monitoring program in Turkey. To date, MLSA's Case Monitoring Program has tracked over 2,500 hearings, providing resources for many media outlets and rights organizations.

## Core and flexible funding partners in 2024:

National Endowment for Democracy, the Norwegian Embassy, and the Sigrid Rausing Trust. These partners played a crucial role in supporting the sustainability of our work.

## Project-based partners in 2024

ARTICLE 19, Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF), Freedom House, the Consulate General of the Netherlands, Index on Censorship, the Consulate General of Sweden, the Embassy of Switzerland, the Embassy of Canada, Media Defence, Protection International and UNESCO.

### Directors

Evin Barış Altıntaş  
Veysel Ok

### General Coordinator

Batıkan Erkoç

### Financial Coordinator

Gülhan Çorlu

### Trial Monitoring

Semra Pelek

### Office Coordinator

Metin Yener

### Censorship Project

Ali Safa Korkut

### Correspondents

Deniz Tekin  
Eylem Sonbahar

### Legal Unit

Emine Özhasar  
Hazal Sürmeli  
Muhammed Ünsal



Media and Law Studies Association  
Medya ve Hukuk Çalışmaları Derneği



# 2024: Year in Review

2024 has been yet another challenging year for press freedom and journalists in Turkey. Authorities have continued to impose significant pressure on media professionals, inventing new threats including the looming possibility of introducing a restrictive "foreign agent" law. Against this backdrop, continued to provide essential support to journalists, human rights defenders, and activists navigating an increasingly difficult environment.

Throughout the year, MLSA's Legal Unit represented 204 clients across 154 cases, including 39 journalists facing charges related to terrorism, misinformation, and insults against public officials. Despite intensified judicial harassment, our efforts led to notable victories: securing 12 acquittals, dropping charges in six cases, and achieving landmark rulings from Turkey's Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

Our extensive trial monitoring program observed 641 hearings across 304 trials, closely tracking systemic abuses and supporting 1,856 individuals, including 366 journalists. These observations provided critical data that informed our advocacy efforts domestically and internationally.

We significantly expanded our training initiatives, conducting targeted workshops on digital security, legal challenges, disaster response, and human rights advocacy. Our initiatives included two workshops for European Court of Human Rights applications, digital security training for young journalists, and disaster management training for earthquake-affected regions.

We actively engaged international bodies, including the Council of Europe, and UN mechanisms. Our advocacy was amplified by strong international partnerships, resulting in over 20 joint statements with more than 60 global organizations condemning censorship, arrests, and the persecution of independent media.

Our reports and publications, including the detailed "30 Years of RTÜK" report and "FreeWeb Censorship Report," highlighted escalating media restrictions, gaining widespread media coverage and reinforcing our role as a crucial NGO monitoring rights violations.

We extend our deepest gratitude to our partners, whose invaluable support enables us to continue fighting for media freedom and human rights in Turkey.

**Team MLSA**

# Legal Unit: Overview

MLSA currently represents **204 clients in 154 cases**. In 2024, we represented **49 clients in 95 hearings of 73 active cases**. 39 nine of those on trial were journalists, while we also represented two lawyers and also two activists, one writer, and a documentary filmmaker.

We also supported the Seyme Music company, whose Kurdish language concerts were banned and also supported the former board members of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, who were met with accusations after commemorating the anniversary of the Armenian Genocide.

Our clients faced a range of accusations, all of which stem from their exercise of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression, assembly, and activism. A prominent category of charges our clients faced were accusations of terrorism-related offenses for journalism.

Seven of our clients faced allegations of membership in a terrorist organization, while at least five others were accused of spreading terrorist propaganda and in some cases both terrorism and propaganda. Several cases focused on “publicly spreading misinformation”, which was added in 2022 as Article 217/A of the Turkish Penal Code. Accusations of publicly insulting the Turkish nation, its institutions, or security forces, were brought against multiple clients under Article 301.

A significant number of cases particularly against the journalists we defended involved alleged offenses against public officials, particularly accusations of violating Article 299 of the Turkish Penal Code, which criminalizes insults against the president. Other cases extend similar accusations to public officials more generally, with journalists charged with insulting civil servants in the course of their duties.



# Rulings in the cases

Over the course of 2024, we secured significant legal victories despite the increasing pressure against free speech and the media, including multiple acquittals and case dismissals. In total, **12 clients were acquitted**, while **6 cases** were dropped due to lack of merit. Additionally, one lawsuit was dismissed in favor of our client, and one case was dropped due to the statute of limitations.

Mesopotamia Agency journalist **Sedat Yılmaz** who was accused of "terrorist organization membership and leadership," over his news reports was detained and arrested in an operation that took place in 2023. Yılmaz, who spent 8 months in prison **was acquitted of all the charges** on 29 February.

In October, Dicle Fırat Journalists Association Co-Chair **Dicle Müftüoğlu** and editor of Mezopotamya Agency, whose legal team is supported by MLSA, was also acquitted of charges of "establishing and running a terrorist organization" after spending 303 days in prison.

Among the acquittals, several cases involved journalists who were targeted for their reporting. **Nurcan Baysal**, a rights defender and a columnist was acquitted of "publicly insulting the Turkish nation" was also acquitted.



Photo: Journalists Elif Akgül (third left) and Haluk Kalafat (fourth left) were acquitted of charges of "publicly insulting the Turkish nation", related to their coverage of the Armenian Genocide in Bianet.

# Rulings in the cases



On Feb 29, Sedat Yılmaz was acquitted in a trial where he was imprisoned for eight months. Pictured here with journalist Abdurrahman Gök (L) and VeySEL Ok.

**Yağmur Kaya**, another journalist, faced accusations of "targeting individuals engaged in counterterrorism efforts" but was ultimately found not guilty. Kaya later secured another acquittal in a separate case concerning unauthorized assembly.

Charges against Journalist **Sibel Yüklér**, who was investigated for "targeting an official in counterterrorism work" for sharing a news report about a judge and

prosecutor couple who were assigned to the trial of the 16 Diyarbakır journalists, were dropped.

In another press freedom victory, **Zilan Azad** was acquitted of participating in an illegal protest, and **Bülent Kılıç** was found not guilty of insulting a public official.

Other acquitted journalists include **Beril Eski**, **Onur Öncü**, **Haluk Kalafat**, and **Elif Akgül**, who were charged under various provisions, including defamation, unauthorized protests, and violations of counterterrorism laws.

In another legal victory in 2024, our client journalist **Bilal Meyveci**, was granted compensation by a court for the police violence he suffered during news coverage.

In another legal victory for the MLSA Legal Unit, a Turkish regional administrative court overturned a ban imposed by the Adana Governorship on a **Kurdish concert**, marking a significant decision for freedom of expression rights. The concert, organized by the **Mesopotamia Cultural Center** (MKM) to celebrate its 30th anniversary, was initially prohibited by the Adana Governorship citing security concerns.



# Rulings in the cases

Six cases resulted in sentencing or fines, primarily targeting journalists and activists for their public statements, social media activity, or participation in demonstrations.

Journalist **Neşe İdil** was sentenced to **one year and three months in prison** on charges of “terror propaganda” for a tweet she posted in January 2015 regarding the recapture of *Kobane* from ISIS, but the case was deferred. In another case involving **İdil**, she was found guilty of **insulting the former Minister of Family and Social Policies** over critical tweets. Similarly, journalist **Ceren Bala** faced a **conviction for insult** due to a 2022 tweet in which she called a conservative cleric a “pervert” after he made derogatory remarks about women athletes.



Pictured above next to lawyer Emine Özhasar, our client journalist **Pelin Özkaptan** was sentenced to **one year and six months in prison** for “terrorist propaganda.” The court ruled against her based on content she had published, and her legal team has appealed the decision, which is currently at the **appellate court level**.

Journalist **Zeynep Kuray** was handed a **five-month prison sentence** for participating in an unauthorized demonstration. As with Özkaptan’s case, the verdict has been **appealed to the higher courts**.



# Constitutional Court

Over the past year, the **Constitutional Court and the European Court of Human Rights** have played a crucial role in reviewing cases related to press freedom, digital censorship, and political persecution. Several of our clients have successfully challenged violations of their rights, particularly in cases concerning **freedom of expression, access to information, and fair trial rights**.

In 2024, we secured a series of landmark Constitutional Court rulings.

For our client journalist **Rabia Çetin** we successfully challenged the blocking of a podcast episode she had produced, with the Court ruling that the access ban was an unlawful restriction of freedom of speech. Similarly, Van journalists **Erhan Akbaş** and **Sercan Akbaş** both secured rulings recognizing that their freedom of expression had been unjustly violated.

**MLSA** and our anti-censorship website **FreeWeb** also achieved a major victory when the Constitutional Court ruled that access bans imposed on three of their online publications constituted violations of free speech and the right to an effective legal remedy. In another case, journalist **Canan Kaya**, who had reported on AKP MP Tolga Ağar, successfully argued that the removal of her news article was unlawful.

MLSA Legal Unit also obtained a judgement in favour of human rights activist **Efruz Kaya** who was attacked online with hate comments and the Constitutional Court found that **her right to effective remedy was violated**.

Also in May, in an application filed by MLSA, the Constitutional Court ruled that journalist **Sultan Keleş's** right to a fair trial was violated in a defamation case. The Court found a deferred sentence for insulting the President to be a violation of fair trial rights. In another ruling, the Constitutional Court ruled that MLSA client **journalist Çetin Yılmaz's** right to a fair trial was violated in a case where he was sentenced to prison on charges of "terrorist propaganda."



# Cases before ECtHR

## A first against travel bans

Two civil society activists who were both subjected to **travel bans as a form of judicial control**, also won their constitutional court challenges. The Constitutional Court ruled that their **freedom of expression and right to privacy had been violated**, setting an important precedent for journalists facing similar restrictions.

However, not all Constitutional Court decisions have been favorable. The court rejected journalist **Cemil Uğur's** case, in which he had sought protection for his right to bodily integrity and personal security. Similarly, **Barzan Şerefhanoglu's** conviction for terrorist propaganda was deemed to be legally justified, and **Cengiz Çandar's** challenge against a warrant issued while he was in Sweden was dismissed as unfounded. Additionally, Meryem Yıldırım's appeal was dismissed on procedural grounds due to a missed filing deadline.

## European Court of Human Rights cases

We escalated three cases to **the European Court of Human Rights this year**. And we have secured some landmark decisions: In October In a case filed by MLSA's Legal Unit, the **European Court** has ruled that Turkey violated the free speech of Kurdish musician **Hozan Canê**, also known as Saide İnaç, after she was convicted of insulting the president in a post.

In 2024 we also filed an individual application to the ECtHR on behalf of **Delal Akyüz**, a reporter for the Mezopotamya News Agency, challenging his house arrest and allegations of mistreatment. Akyüz had been under house arrest since February 2024 over his journalistic activities.

We also took the case of **Hişyar Barzan Şerefhanoglu**, an editor convicted for terrorist propaganda, whose conviction was upheld by Turkish courts and the case is now before the ECtHR.

# Strategic litigation

MLSA's strategic litigation efforts in 2024 remained central to defending digital rights, press freedom, and access to information in Turkey.

Despite the judicial recess in August, MLSA's Legal Unit remained active, responding to the escalating wave of internet censorship by Turkish authorities. The **Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK)** intensified its blocking of social media platforms, gaming services, and online content, leading to urgent legal action from MLSA.

In August 2024, MLSA filed a legal challenge against **the ban on Instagram**, arguing that the restriction violated fundamental rights and harmed public access to information. The lawsuit was escalated to a higher court and merged with similar cases, highlighting the widespread public concern over the government's control of digital platforms.

Simultaneously, MLSA initiated another legal action against the blocking of Roblox, a popular gaming platform that was also censored in Turkey. The case was filed to set a precedent against arbitrary digital restrictions that disproportionately impact younger audiences and stifle digital access.

## Litigating against internet shutdowns

MLSA has continued its legal battle against internet restrictions imposed during crises, particularly the bandwidth throttling following the February 6, 2023, earthquake. The government's deliberate slowing of internet services during the earthquake rescue efforts severely hindered the ability of citizens to access emergency services, coordinate relief efforts, and communicate with loved ones.

In August 2024, a court rejected MLSA's appeal against the dismissal of its lawsuit against BTK, which sought to hold the government accountable for restricting digital communication during the 6 February earthquakes of 2023, which was one of Turkey's deadliest disasters.

Additionally, MLSA's legal challenge against a police directive limiting video recording during public events was heard by the Council of State on December 24. The directive had been used to curtail independent journalism and suppress documentation of police misconduct during protests. The court is expected to issue a landmark ruling in the coming months.

# Emergency legal support

Throughout 2024, MLSA's Legal Unit continued to provide emergency legal assistance to journalists, human rights defenders, and media workers facing detention, interrogation, or judicial harassment.

Early in the year, MLSA lawyers assisted journalists under investigation for social media posts or news coverage. On January 2, they accompanied journalist Beril Eski during police questioning. On January 8, they supported Ozan Acidere after he was injured while reporting. Days later, they represented Onur Öncü and Arat Barış, both questioned for tweets. On February 15, Şükran Ekinçi received legal support after being accused of “spreading misinformation” over a tweet about a mining disaster.

Between February 13–16, six journalists in İzmir were detained; MLSA ensured legal representation throughout their questioning and court appearances. On February 23, MLSA represented Zeynep Kuray, summoned over a tweet on deforestation protests in Akbelen.

In April, legal support continued during protests over the refusal to recognize Abdullah Zeydan as Van's mayor. Journalists Ferhat Sezgin and Sema Korkmaz were arrested while covering demonstrations; MLSA challenged the judicial measures against them. On April 26, MLSA defended journalist Erdoğan Alayumat, detained following a home raid. In May, MLSA followed the cases of cinematographer Koray Kesik, detained for four days, and journalist Zeynep Kuray, again summoned over a courthouse incident. On June 13, MLSA assisted Ömer Sönmez, who was investigated for insulting the President.

A major crackdown on November 26 led to the detention of at least 10 journalists, including Alayumat, who was transferred to Eskişehir. MLSA met with him in Istanbul and later represented Bilal Seçkin in the same case.

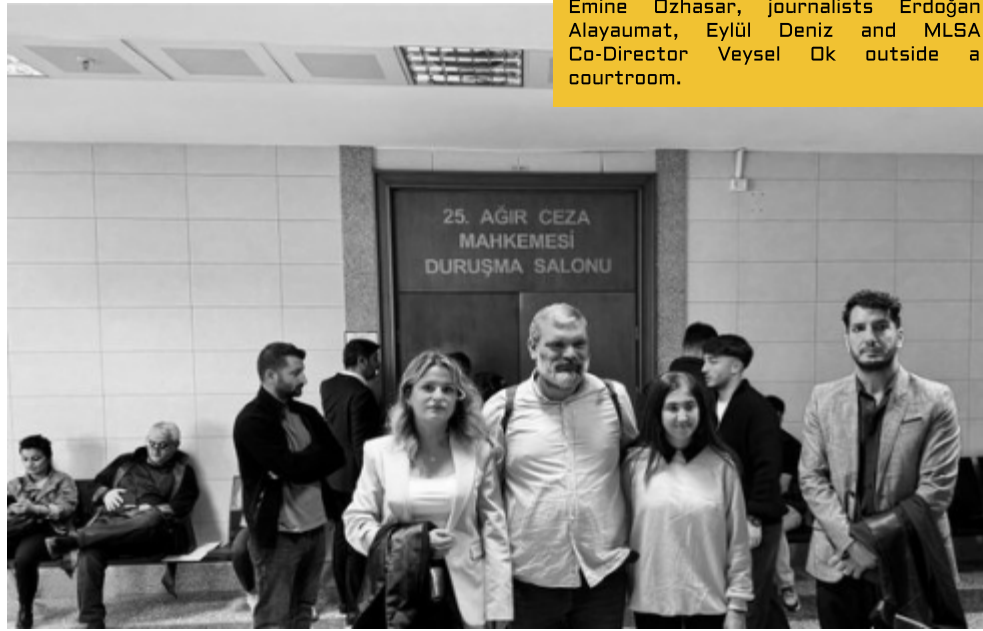


Photo: From left to right, MLSA lawyer Emine Özhasar, journalists Erdoğan Alayumat, Eylül Deniz and MLSA Co-Director VeySEL OK outside a courtroom.

# Legal opinions and briefs

In 2024, MLSA continued to provide legal insights and updates to stakeholders through the publication of legal briefs, information notes, and expert opinions.e to international advocacy efforts for press freedom and digital rights.

One of the most significant publications was the information note on the new judicial package, which analyzed the reinstatement of the crime of "**committing offenses on behalf of an organization without being a member**" (Article 220/6 of the Turkish Penal Code). This provision had previously been annulled by the Constitutional Court, but was reintroduced through legal amendments, raising concerns over its potential misuse against journalists and human rights defenders.

In February 2024, MLSA collaborated with **Article 19** to submit a legal opinion in defense of journalist Sinan Aygül, who was accused of spreading false information under the censorship law ("spreading misinformation", under TCK 217/A). The submission argued that the criminalization of journalistic content under this vague and overly broad provision posed a serious threat to press freedom.

## Prison visits

In 2024, MLSA's Legal Unit conducted prison visits every month to support and monitor detained journalists and human rights defenders. The year began with a visit to **journalist Dicle Müftüoğlu** at Sincan Prison on January 9, followed by two visits to German activist **Patrick Kraicker** at the same facility in February and April.

On April 30, lawyers met with **Esra Solin Dal** at Bakırköy Women's Prison, shortly after her detention in Istanbul. Visits to **Erdoğan Alayumat** (May 2), **Furkan Karabay** (November 13), and **Bedirhan Sarsilmaz** (also November 13) followed at Silivri Prison. The final visit of the year was to **Hayri Tunç** at Marmara Prison on December 22, after his arrest during a protest in Şişhane. Other detained journalists were also visited at that time.

# International legal work

In 2024, MLSA's Legal Unit undertook strategic litigation efforts to uphold freedom of expression and defend human rights in both domestic and international arenas.

## Engagement with the Council of Europe

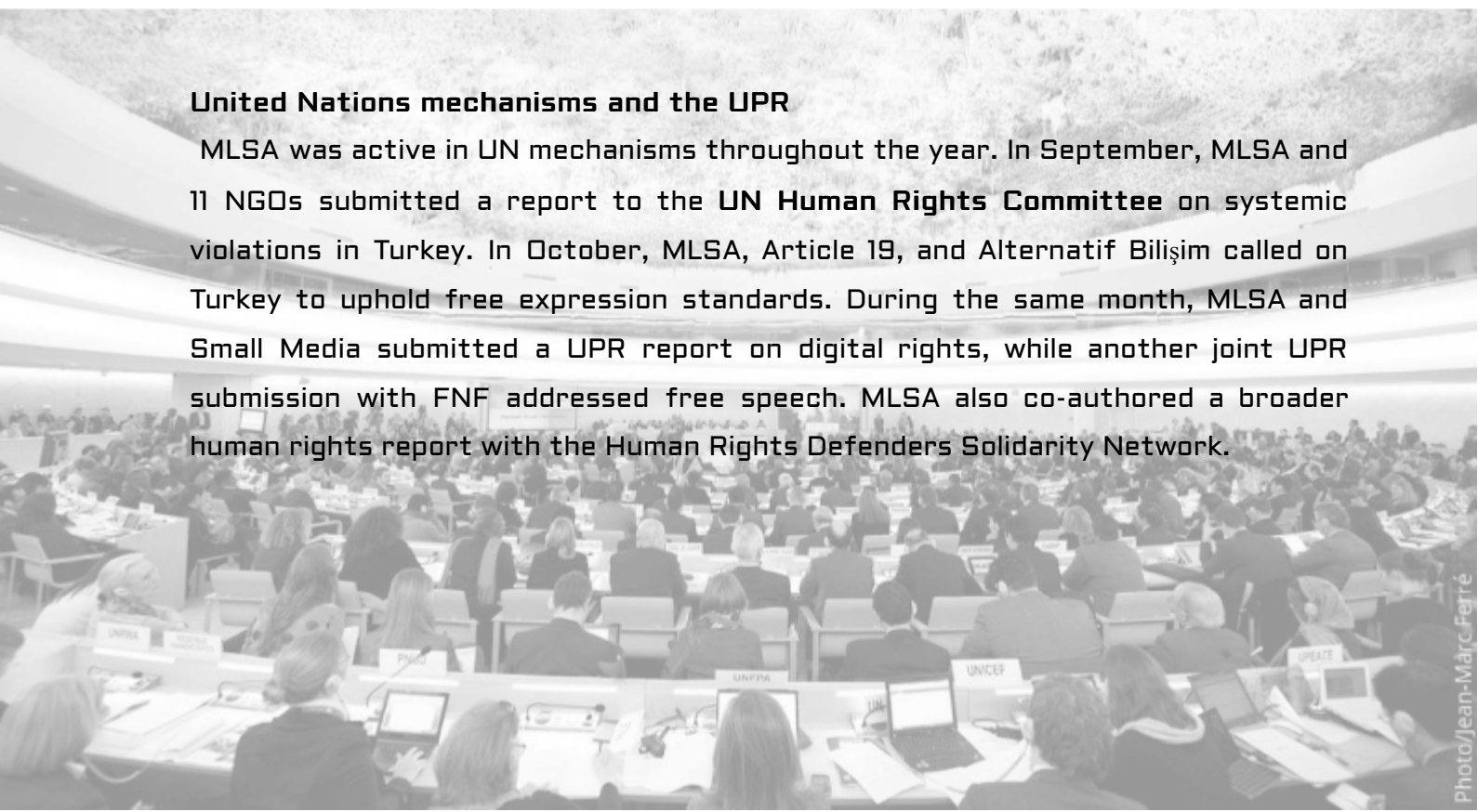
In February, MLSA made **two Rule 9.2 submissions** to the Committee of Ministers, one addressing the abuse of “committing a crime without being a member” charges against journalists, and another urging Turkey to comply with ECtHR rulings, focusing on internet bans. In March, MLSA submitted a report on RTÜK's expanding censorship powers, and later that month, raised concerns about the cancellation of 28 Kurdish-language events. In October, MLSA highlighted threats to journalist safety, referencing the *Dink v. Turkey* case in a submission to the Council of Europe.

## Amicus briefs with international partners

MLSA collaborated with international legal experts on key freedom of expression cases. In February, an expert opinion from Article 19 was submitted in the case of journalist Sinan Aygül. In March, Russian exile lawyers Agora contributed an opinion in MLSA's data breach case, stressing state obligations to protect personal data. In May, MLSA submitted an amicus brief supporting the former head of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, citing fair trial standards.

## United Nations mechanisms and the UPR

MLSA was active in UN mechanisms throughout the year. In September, MLSA and 11 NGOs submitted a report to the **UN Human Rights Committee** on systemic violations in Turkey. In October, MLSA, Article 19, and Alternatif Bilişim called on Turkey to uphold free expression standards. During the same month, MLSA and Small Media submitted a UPR report on digital rights, while another joint UPR submission with FNF addressed free speech. MLSA also co-authored a broader human rights report with the Human Rights Defenders Solidarity Network.



# Justice monitoring

Since 2018, MLSA's Journalism and Freedom of Expression Trial Monitoring Program, the most extensive case monitoring program in Turkey, has been observing cases related to freedom of expression, press freedom, and freedom of assembly and sharing human rights violations with the public.

Over the five years from 2018 to 2024, the program monitored over **3000 hearings**, becoming the most comprehensive and systematic freedom of expression trial monitoring program in Turkey. The program, which serves as a resource for many media outlets and rights organizations, was supported by the Norwegian Embassy, the German Federal Republic Istanbul Consulate General and the Friedrich Naumann Foundation Turkey Office in 2023.

Throughout the 2024 judicial year, MLSA continued its comprehensive trial monitoring program, closely observing court cases involving journalists, activists, and students facing politically motivated charges. We observed **641 hearings in 304 free speech trials in 2024, with the support of 26 observers across 25 provinces** of Turkey. A total of **1,856 individuals, including 366 journalists**, faced prosecution during this period in the trials we observed.

MLSA's systematic monitoring identified recurring violations of fair trial standards, misuse of anti-terror legislation against media professionals, and judicial harassment of civil society representatives. The program remains an essential tool in documenting systemic judicial practices undermining freedom of expression and press freedom in Turkey.

## 2024 Trial Monitoring stats unveiled

MLSA's 2024 Freedom of Expression Report on our trial monitoring program was on Nov. 22 at a widely participated event with renowned human rights defender Eren Keskin, veteran journalist Tolga Şardan and prominent women's rights defender Gülsüm Kav being the guests of a panel following the report presentation. Nobel Laureate Maria Ressa sent a video message to the event.





# Justice monitoring

## Panel on judicial harassment of journalists

As we launched our *2024 Justice Observation Program Report* on Nov. 22, we held the "Judicial Harassment Against Freedom of Expression in Turkey" panel with the participation of **Eren Keskin**, Co-Chair of the Human Rights Association, T24 journalist **Tolga Şardan** and **Gölsüm Kav**, head of the We Will Stop Femicide Platform. The panel followed the sharing of the results and it was moderated by our Co-Director Barış Altıntaş.

**Keskin** described the deep-rooted challenges stemming from Turkey's official ideology. Highlighting her personal experiences, Keskin said, "There has never been a time when freedom of expression was more restricted. As a human rights defender, I face 143 lawsuits, a prison sentence of 26 years and 8 months, and fines amounting to 800,000 TL. " **Journalist Şardan** highlighted the government's use of disinformation laws to target investigative journalists.

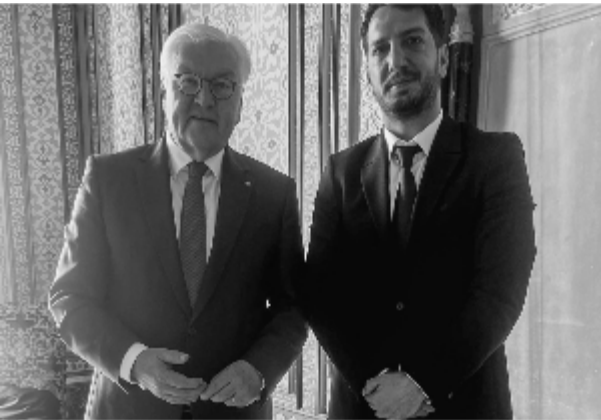
**Kav** addressed the **importance of trial monitoring** in cases of gender-based violence. Kav recounted systemic failures in the judiciary, noting that her organization observed 1,000 trials in 2022, many of which were dismissed due to impunity. "We monitor trials because the judiciary fails to deliver justice."



# Advocacy and solidarity

Throughout 2024, MLSA strengthened its advocacy and international solidarity efforts through direct engagement with prominent European and international institutions.

MLSA representatives held meetings with influential stakeholders, including the Council of Europe and even heads of states, to raise awareness about the deteriorating press freedom and human rights landscape in Turkey.



In April, MLSA Co-Director Veysel Ok met with **German President Walter Steinmeier**, who was in Istanbul to mark the 100th year of diplomatic ties between the two countries. The meeting addressed critical issues such as **freedom of expression, democracy, and the rule of law** in Turkey. Ok highlighted the erosion of judicial independence as a significant barrier to freedom of expression.

MLSA also joined several **joint advocacy initiatives** and issued statements alongside international partners, condemning journalist arrests, digital censorship, and harassment of independent media outlets. These efforts were integral to amplifying international awareness and fostering a collective response to the ongoing challenges faced by journalists and media freedom advocates in Turkey. In 2024, MLSA issued over 20 statements and joint declarations addressing press freedom, censorship, human rights violations, and journalist safety in Turkey. Collaborating with **more than 60 national and international organizations**, including Article 19, IPI, Amnesty International, Freedom House, IFJ, EFJ, and Media Defence, we continued our global advocacy efforts.

MLSA Co-Director Barış Altıntaş in November came together with Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, **Michael O'Flaherty**, who was in Turkey to meet with civil society representatives in Istanbul ahead of his official meetings in Ankara.



## International visits



MLSA Co-Director Veysel Ok came together with **Marco Buschmann**, Federal Minister of Justice of Germany, in Geneva where he was attending an event to mark the opening of a new office of the Friedrich Naumann Stiftung.

In March, MLSA attended the **Council of Europe Ministerial** briefing in Strasbourg where case groups against journalists were discussed. During the same visit, MLSA General Coordinator **Batikan Erkoç** also visited the **Department for the Execution of the Judgements** of the ECtHR ahead of the visit and also shared the findings from our **Trial Monitoring Report** findings with the CoE in Strasbourg.



In April, With our partners **Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF)**, our Co-Director **Veysel Ok** visited Berlin as part of a team of experts where representatives of NGOs explored the intersection of business and human rights and possible implications of the German **Supply Chain Act** and the **Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive** on human rights in Turkey.

# Panels and events

## Press Freedom Day panel

On 3 May World Press Freedom Day, MLSA, together with the Journalists Union of Turkey (TGS), organized its traditional 3 May panel with journalists İpek Özbey, Çiğdem Toker, Ali Topuz and Barış Avşar on our era dominated by propaganda. The event also featured Dicle Müftüoğlu, the co-president of the Dicle Fırat Journalists Association, who was detained for 306 days before being released.



## AI impact on media, freedoms, and daily life

On Dec. 6, MLSA's FreeWeb platform hosted a roundtable discussion in Istanbul titled "Artificial Intelligence and Freedom of Expression." Civil society representatives, journalists, lawyers, and technology experts gathered to examine the societal and professional impacts of artificial intelligence (AI) across two key sessions.



## Masters of Manipulation panel in Berlin

On October 9, 2024, together with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation (FNF) we held a panel event to mark the launch of the publication, **Masters of Manipulation: Authoritarian Propaganda in Russia and Turkey**, at the Reform Space in Berlin.





# Proud moments

On September 2, MLSA co-director Veysel Ok was awarded the **Max Stadler Medal** in a ceremony held in Berlin. The award was presented to Ok in recognition of his efforts to promote freedom of expression and the rule of law in Turkey. The ceremony featured speeches from former German Federal Justice Minister Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger and journalist Deniz Yücel.

In his acceptance speech, Ok highlighted the work of MLSA and the current state of freedom of expression in Turkey. He described the award as a call to intensify the struggle to rebuild the rule of law, human rights, and a free democracy in Turkey. "This award is an invitation to a stronger fight to restore the rule of law, human rights, and a free democracy in Turkey," Ok stated.



## GCC award for MLSA's excellent court reporting

MLSA court reporter Deniz Tekin was honored with the Journalist of the Year award given by Southeastern Journalists Association (GGC) for his report titled **"Quake report deemed 'misleading' turns out true"** published for our Trial Monitoring programme.



# Trainings and workshops

Throughout 2024, MLSA significantly expanded its training and capacity-building efforts to empower journalists, human rights defenders, and legal professionals. We organized targeted workshops and training sessions focusing on digital security, navigating complex legal environments, disaster response contexts, and human rights advocacy.



## Digital Security Workshop for Journalists

MLSA held a "Digital Security Workshop for Journalists" August 27, at TGS Academy. The workshop, facilitated by Mehmet Şafak Sarı, provided practical advice for journalists facing digital risks. The workshop covered essential topics such as internet security, secure information and communication security, data protection, and social media safety.



## ECtHR application workshop for lawyers

On 11 May, MLSA and Diyarbakır Bar Association held a workshop on ECHR individual applications with former ECHR judge Rıza Türmen, Head of the ECHR Turkey Desk Atilla Nalbant, Levent Yalçın from the ECHR Turkey Desk, and Ümit Kılınç from the Strasbourg Bar Association.



## GazeteMLSA workshop

The sixth edition of our GazeteMLSA workshop for Journalists took place on May 10-11 in Diyarbakır. The session was supported by the Journalists Association and featured T24 Ankara Representative Gökçer Tahincioğlu and TGS Secretary General Banu Tuna as coordinators.

# Trainings and workshops



## ECHR applications workshop in Van

With the Van Bar Association we hosted a workshop titled “Procedures for Individual Applications to the European Court of Human Rights ” on November 30, 2024. The event aimed to enhance lawyers' skills in effectively submitting applications to the ECtHR and addressed common procedural mistakes and admissibility criteria.



## GazeteMLSA Seventh Session

Designed to offer young journalists an experience of working in a newsroom alongside seasoned professionals, the program has seen many of its past participants go on to work at various media outlets in Kilyos on December 13-15.



## Turkey-Greece Journalists platform

Our second year meeting of MLSA's Turkey-Greece Journalists platform to foster cross-border dialogue took place in late November near İstanbul where 14 participants, journalists from Turkey and Greece discussed ways to collaborate. A joint newspaper and plans for more collaboration between journalism students came out of the event.



# Solidarity and resilience

The MLSA team visited the **Istanbul Bar Association** to congratulate its new president **İbrahim Kaboğlu** and board members on 3 December. We had to visit the Bar Association one more time together with the members of our Human Rights Defenders Solidarity Network to show support and solidarity, after legal action was taken against the newly elected board for their remarks criticizing the killing of two Kurdish journalists from Turkey in the north of Syria in a drone attack.



## Resilience meetings

We organized two "**Solidarity and Resilience**" meetings together with our partner **ARTICLE19**, focusing on a future of media freedom and human rights. The meetings brought together **14 organizations**, showing the will for collective strength in advocating for democracy.

# Partner events

Throughout 2024, MLSA actively participated in sessions organized by partner organizations, contributing expertise, sharing insights, and enhancing collaboration on key issues of press freedom and human rights. These engagements provided valuable platforms to exchange best practices, strategize collective responses, and reinforce solidarity among organizations committed to defending free expression and judicial independence in Turkey and internationally.

In June, our co-Director **Veyssel Ok** participated in the 16th annual **Oslo Freedom Forum** in Norway. Themed "Reclaim Democracy," the event addressed the global rise of authoritarianism and its impact on democracy and human rights.



MLSA Co-Director **Bariş Altıntaş** spoke at the "2024 Media Conference on the Transformation of Journalism & Searches" on **April 26-27**, focusing on media freedom laws, online censorship and what media organizations should push for to make possible legal reform regarding Big Tech.

MLSA Co-Director **Veyssel Ok** participated in a panel on "Turkey's Experiences in Global Discussions" on 10 December in Istanbul, marking Human Rights Day. He also participated in the **Uğur Mumcu Investigative Journalism (UMAG) Rights Project** closing meeting, discussing media, democracy, and civil society.

## ZEG Storytelling Festival

MLSA attended the ZEG Storytelling Festival held in Georgia in June. **Bariş Altıntaş** spoke at the "Exile: The New Normal" panel at the event in Tbilisi on June 23, 2024. The panel was moderated by **Nabeelah Shabbir**, joined by journalists **Polina Ivanova**, **Abduweli Ayup**, and **Bariş Altıntaş**.



# Partner events



## Interviews for Truth series, January 2024

MLSA Co-Director **Barış Altıntaş** spoke about the common aspects in all journalist murders internationally, at the “Interviews for Truth” session organized by the Hrant Dink Foundation as part of the sessions to mark the murder anniversary of Hrant Dink. Her speech focused on MLSA’s documentation from our **Unsolved Murders** series.

## Human rights institutions in practice, 9 May

On **May 9** MLSA Co-Director **Veysel Ok** participated in the “Human Rights Institutions in Practice” panel of the **Friedrich Naumann Foundation**, discussing key issues in human rights protection. The intersection of human rights and business practices has become an increasingly important topic of debate for press freedom as well, as more and more Big Tech companies have increasingly become offenders of stifling free speech themselves.



# FreeWeb: Online censorship

On 13 July 2024, MLSA publicly presented the findings of our FreeWeb 2023 Internet Censorship Report and hosted a panel titled "*Journalism Under Censorship*," featuring journalists who experienced censorship firsthand. The report revealed alarming levels of digital restrictions, noting that approximately 200,000 domain names were banned in Turkey during 2023. Of these, **over 14,000 contained news-related content**, with the censorship significantly affecting journalists and media freedom.

The FreeWeb project's earlier reports from January 2024 had already underscored the gravity of the censorship crisis, revealing that over 200,000 domains had been blocked in 2023 alone, many without clear justification. Notably, FreeWeb documented the alarming pace of censorship, identifying that over **14,000 censored news domains** directly obstructed public access to crucial information, with 17 journalists contributing 22 articles detailing these restrictions and their implications. Furthermore, a significant finding noted by the Republican People's Party was that within just the first weeks of 2023, 688 news URLs and content from numerous websites had been swiftly blocked.

## FreeWeb report launch and panel event: Journalism under the grip of censorship



At our report launch event, the panel "Journalism under the grip of censorship" featured **Yiğit Günay** (soL Haber), **Diren Yurtsever** (Mezopotamya Agency), and **Furkan Karabay** (10Haber).

Karabay spoke about his six-day detention over a news report, Yurtsever addressed access bans on Kurdish media, and Günay stressed censorship's impact on all stages of journalism.



# Publications

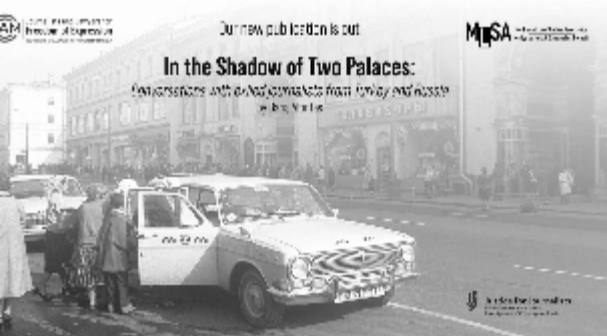
MLSA's publications and special reports in 2024 provided critical insights and in-depth analysis into the state of media freedom, censorship practices, and the challenges faced by journalists both within Turkey and in exile. Through detailed examinations, such as the comprehensive analysis of RTÜK's censorship practices over the past year and an extensive 30-year overview, MLSA offered critical context for understanding systemic limitations on media freedom. Further enriching the public discourse, MLSA published "Shadow of Two Palaces," featuring poignant dialogues with journalists exiled from Turkey and Russia, alongside the fifth issue of GazeteMLSA. Additionally, through nationwide screenings and interactive discussions of the documentary "Our Wonderful Past," MLSA fostered greater public awareness and dialogue about Turkey's evolving socio-political landscape.



## Report: 30 Years of RTÜK Censorship

In December, we published our report titled "30 Years of Censorship: RTÜK", highlighting the council's increasing control over Turkish media.

The report found widespread discussion in the public opinion and we also hosted a special program on the report with guest RTÜK members on MLSA TV.



## Shadow of Two Palaces

In February, we released *Shadow of Two Palaces: Conversations with Exiled Journalists from Turkey and Russia* with support from JFJ. The publication, featuring interviews by our Co-Director Barış Altıntaş, also highlights MLSA's work on exiled journalists.



## My Evil Twin: Journalism in Russia and Turkey

This publication came out in April exploring how courts in authoritarian systems impact press freedom. "My Evil Twin: A brief history of judiciary's war on journalism in Russia&Turkey," is an updated version of our previously published "Gavels against Pens," which was supported by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

# Publications



## Know Your Rights for Journalists handbook

In July, we published the "Legal Handbook for Journalists," which details the legal rights of journalists, particularly during news coverage. The guide addresses the practical issues journalists face and offers practical solutions for these problems.

The handbook aims to be a reference resource for journalists facing interventions in their freedom of expression.



## The fifth issue of Gazete MLSA

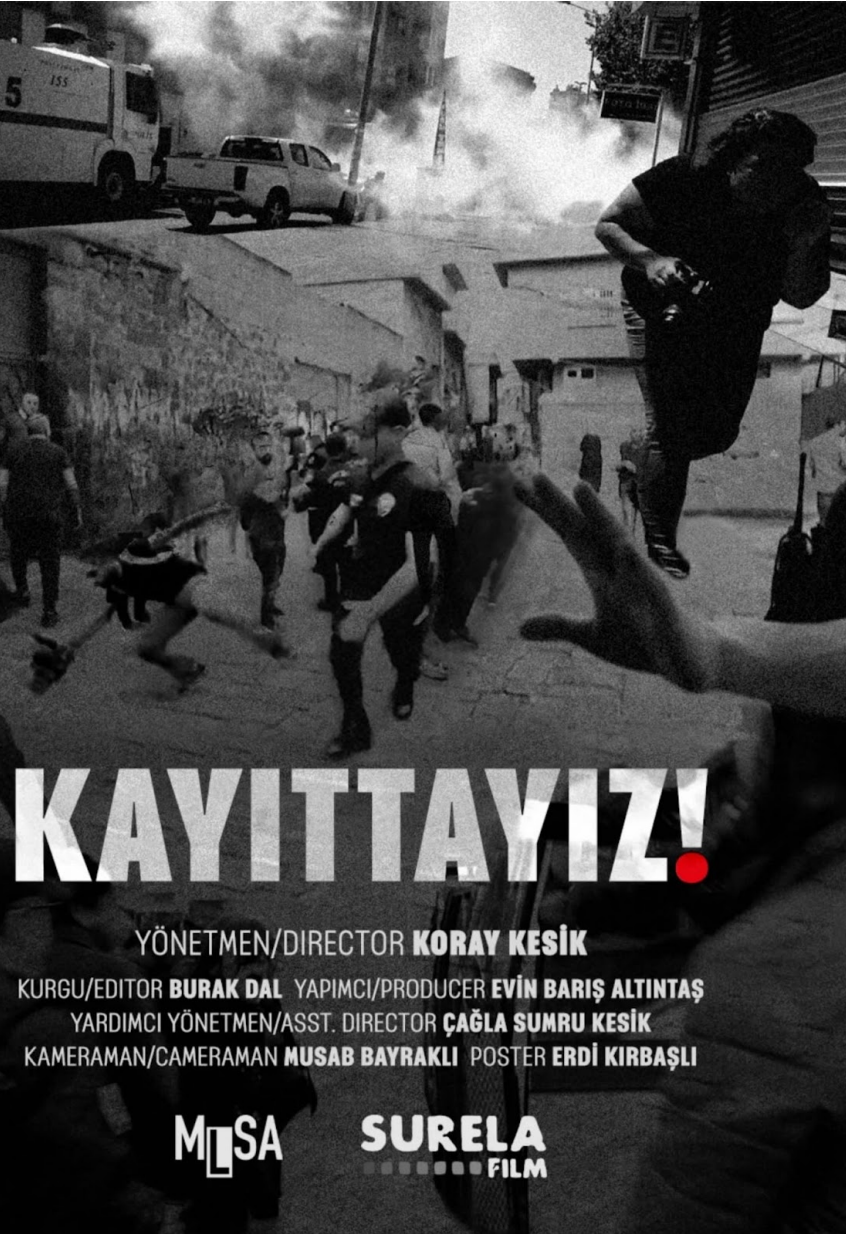
Coordinated by T24 Ankara Representative Gökçer Tahincioğlu and Turkish Journalists' Union General Secretary Banu Tuna, the 5th edition of Gazete MLSA was published in February. During the program, 17 young journalists received training across different areas of journalism. Veteran journalist Tuğrul Eryılmaz shared insights on journalistic ethics and news writing. Experienced journalist Özlem Akarsu Çelik



## Freeweb Internet Censorship in 2023

Our anti-censorship platform FreeWeb's 2023 Internet Censorship Report was also published in English. The report shows that there has been a sixfold increase in blocked online content in 2023. The English-language version of the report also includes details about forms of online censorship.

# Documentaries



MLSA's documentary *We are on record!* was screened on December 14 at Aynalı Geçit as part of the 14th Which Human Rights? Film Festival.

Following the screening, MLSA Co-Director Veysel Ok held a discussion with director **Koray Kesik** and journalist Beyza Kural.

*We are on record!*, which portrays how journalists were obstructed and subjected to violence by law enforcement while reporting in the field, was produced by MLSA. The film was directed by Koray Kesik, edited by Burak Dal, and produced by Barış Altıntaş

The documentary features testimonies from journalists Beyza Kural, Yıldız Tar, Sedat Yılmaz, and Bülent Kılıç, who were subjected to physical and psychological violence—including acts amounting to

torture—during and after being taken into custody. They recounted the legal processes that followed, their struggles for justice, and how they continued to practice journalism despite all the pressure.

## Documentary "Our Wonderful Past" screenings and discussions

MLSA's documentary on exiled journalism, 'Our Wonderful Past', directed by Barış Altıntaş and Russian journalist Andrei Zhvirblis premiered with an audience for the first time at ZEG Storytelling festival Tbilisi, and the second time for a second time at the Turkish Journalists' Union (TGS) space in Sisli.



# MLSA TV



In 2024, MLSA TV's *Söz Hakkı* (*Right to Speak*) aired 37 episodes, hosted by Yıldız Tar, covering key issues such as press freedom, censorship, digital rights, state repression, gender-based violence, and judicial cases against journalists and activists. Discussions featured experts analyzing RTÜK's censorship, the foreign agent bill, internet restrictions, and police violence, while also addressing high-profile cases like the Kobani trial and the **Tahir Elçi case**. Episodes also examined algorithmic censorship by Big Tech, the impact of Google's changes on news sites, and the closure of **Açık Radyo**. Beyond these discussions, MLSA TV continued publishing videos of its panels, report launches, and journalist interviews, providing English subtitles to expand its reach internationally.

## Work on right to protest

Since November 2023, MLSA, together with the **Truth, Justice and Memory Center**, **Amnesty Turkey**, and the **Human Rights Foundation of Turkey**, monitored violations of the right to protest by the Saturday Mothers—a group seeking justice for loved ones disappeared by the state in the 1990s.

Their gatherings resumed in April 2023 (Week 941), and joint observation began in Week 944. Until November 4, detentions continued regularly. Starting November 11, a limited group was allowed without detention.



The observation ended on May 25, 2024, as the Saturday Mothers marked their 1000th week at Galatasaray Square—with no restrictions for the first time since 1995.

# Press coverage and impact

In 2024, MLSA and its anti-censorship project FreeWeb appeared in the press a **total of 816** times, with extensive coverage in both local and international media. Our trial monitoring, legal support, and investigative reports were widely reported.

Internationally, major outlets such as **VOA, BBC, Euronews, Deutsche Welle and Die Welt** and others also covered our work, highlighting its global significance. Meanwhile, **local media** played a crucial role in amplifying our advocacy, with top outlets including Evrensel (57 mentions), Bianet (49), T24 (44), and Gazete Duvar (41). The media extensively reported on our news reports censorship (33 mentions), legal support and trial monitoring (19 mentions), journalist arrests and press freedom violations (9 mentions), surveillance and data privacy (8 mentions), LGBTI+ rights and civil society issues (21 mentions), and election-related topics (5 mentions).

MLSA's trial monitoring, legal support, and investigative reports were widely covered, particularly through stories on censorship, digital rights, and high-profile court cases. One of the most reported stories was **MLSA's Censorship Report, Our 2024 Justice Monitoring Program** report also received significant coverage, with five separate articles discussing its findings.





