Since September 2019, independent newspapers Evrensel and BirGün have been subjected to indefinite bans imposed by BIK (Basın İlan Kurumu), the agency responsible for the distribution of the state advertising budget. Should the bans remain in place for six months (until March) the newspapers will be formally excluded and unable to reapply for funding for three years. Such a result would challenge the economic viability of the newspapers. On 6 February 2019, a delegation of press freedom groups including IPI, EFJ, RSF and CPJ, met with the Director of BIK, Rıdvan Duran, and were told that Evrensel and BirGün had breached technical regulations regarding the crediting and sourcing of articles and their means of distribution. Duran insisted that BIK's ban was not related to their editorial line and that both newspapers still had time to correct their practice to be once more eligible for public advertising funds. Evrensel has been banned since 18 September, accused of bulk buying that distorts their distribution figures against which measure the advertising levels are set. BirGün newspaper also received an indefinite ban at the beginning of September. The initial charge was a failure to submit distribution figures in time. When that was resolved BIK added a new charge that BirGün had failed to properly credit authors or sources in its articles. The secular daily, Cumhuriyet, also received a short-term ban in September for a report ruled to have ‘humiliated the Turkish security forces.’ BIK was first established in 1961. In 2013, its structure was changed to enable it to impose bans for breaches of its code. It has a General Assembly made up of members appointed by the government, the media industry and civil society. In August 2019, Rıdvan Duran was appointed as the new Director. According to Duran, BIK distributes funds to over one thousand different newspapers on an annual budget of 450 million Turkish Lira. On 7 February 2019, the press freedom delegation called on BIK to lift the advertising bans on Turkey's independent newspapers.
NEW  26 Feb 2020: The public advertising ban on BirGün was lifted on 24 February 2020, allowing the newspaper to publish ads as from the following day, which is right before the 6-month period expired. The ban on Evrensel remains in force, as BİK rejected a second appeal, on 14 January 2020. Evrensel's 6-month period ends on 18 March 2020.

Article published by Evrensel

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- News report in Cumhuriyet (in Turkish): "Gazetemiz keyfi ceza"
- Ahval news report: "Turkish daily accuses authorities of imposing unfair advertising ban"
- News report on sendika.org (in Turkish): "Basın İlan Kurumu'ndan BirGün ve Evrensel'e reklam ambargosu"
- CPJ report : "CPJ joins call for Turkish authorities to lift advertising ban on leftist dailies"