

# Strike in Turkey: No, Mr Fries, That's not blackmail!



A little phrase which says a lot about the lack of consideration and bad faith of management. For Fabrice Fries, who was speaking during Tuesday's question and answer session with employees, the current strike launched by local staff in the AFP bureaus in Istanbul and Ankara is nothing more than "*blackmail*" to obtain better salaries.

What nerve! **A strike is not blackmail!** It is a perfectly legal method for collective action, whereas blackmail is a crime! Not to mention that the employees on strike will lose wages and that this will have serious short-term financial consequences for them and their families.

The CEO's view is all the more shocking because this strike is due to the intransigence of a management obsessed with making savings, including at the expense of employees, especially those on local contract.

If our Turkish colleagues have come to launch a rolling strike on May 3 — after several months of fruitless negotiations — it is because the Paris management refuses to grant them a mechanism to stabilize their purchasing power, which is constantly falling with the sliding value of the Turkish lira.

But the CEO, who certainly doesn't have a salary problem (we still don't know how much he earns despite his so-called willingness to be "*transparent*" when he joined AFP in 2018), is turning the desperation of these employees into a desire to harm the agency because of the electoral deadlines in Turkey.

To defend itself, management pointed out on Tuesday morning that it was dealing with the question of inflation in each country on a "*case-by-case basis*", but at the same time indicating that employees in Turkey are not entitled to ask for more than others who have seen between 30-50% of their lost purchasing power compensated.

## Management's new yardstick: the poverty line

AFP's effort seems to be substantial, some might think... Except that one cannot compare the fall in purchasing power in a country where inflation is 6%, and Turkey, where it hit 62% last year according to the government's undoubtedly low figures! The Turkish strikers are therefore within their rights to demand compensation which takes into account the magnitude of their falling purchasing power.

A concrete example: a Turkish AFP employee working on a local contract saw their salary, converted into euros, fall from 2,435 euros a month five years ago to 1,580 euros today under the impact of the devaluation of the Turkish lira, and this despite all the increases received during this period!

The lowest salary in AFP offices in Turkey is currently (given the current exchange rate) 928 euros per month. The strikers are demanding a minimum wage equivalent to 2,090 euros, while management is proposing to increase it to the equivalent of 1,345 euros, plus small temporary increases if the value of the Turkish lira falls again.

This Tuesday morning, the management defended its proposal of 1,345 euros per month, claiming that it would keep the pay of Turkish staff above the poverty line... How dismal! AFP's management is now measuring the salaries of its professional journalists against the poverty line... What's more, it seems to be ill-informed, since the poverty line calculated by Turkish unions is at 1,543 euros (33,015 Turkish lira), which is nearly 200 euros higher than AFP's offer.

This explains why our colleagues are calling for a minimum wage equivalent to 2,090 euros, which would allow them to be temporarily protected from inflation, which is continuing its hellish rise (112.51% over one year in March 2023!)

It is important to know that all of our colleagues are now living under the threat of eviction from their apartments because their landlords are planning to triple the rents, which have reached a minimum of 1,000 euros per month in the center of Istanbul.

The management must therefore make an effort to align itself with the demands of the Turkish strikers and put an end to this strike which is very damaging for the image of the agency and harmful to its public interest mission.

The financial effort required to achieve this would be around 200,000 euros per year, which seems reasonable when we know that management is spending 6.5 million euros in 2023 to compensate for inflation throughout the AFP network (an amount calculated on the basis of figures given on Tuesday).

**SUD therefore calls on management to make this effort to exit this crisis from the top, and not the bottom.**

**SUD gives its full support to our Turkish colleagues on strike who are fighting to obtain a decent salary that will allow them to escape poverty, and asks all employees of the agency to do the same.**

Moreover, HQ employees may one day have to follow the path of their Turkish colleagues to defend their purchasing power in the face of inflation. Fabrice Fries' comments on Tuesday morning are hardly reassuring. Asked about the current negotiations for the renewal of the aims and means contract (COM 2024-2028) between the French state and AFP, Fries said he had "*no illusions*" about getting a huge additional chunk of money.

If his fears come true, then French employees should have no illusions either: the annual wage negotiations (NAO) scheduled for the end of 2023 will be short-lived, with no real increase in AFP salaries in France.

**Employees under French law must also mobilize!**

**Strike action is not blackmail! It is the last resort to defend our purchasing power.**

Paris, May 09, 2023

**SUD-AFP (Solidarity-Unity-Democracy)**

