ESU at EP: Panel Discussion on the freedom of press in Turkey

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On 18 April 2019, the European Christian Political Movement & The European Post hosted a panel discussion in the European Parliament in Strasbourg on the freedom of press in Turkey.

Freedom of Speech in Turkey?

Peter van Dalen, the ECPM MEP from NL introduced the special guest: Abdullah Bozkurt, founder of the Muhabir News Agency which was shut down by the Turkish government in July 2016 and who spoke about the situation of the press in Turkey. Mr. Bozkurt reminded us of the tragic day for the freedom of speech when 131 media outlets were closed down in one day in Turkey and that hundreds of journalists still languish in Turkish prisons without due process! Erdogan has systematically squashed dissent at every level in Turkey: he has jailed professors, artists, politicians and businessmen and has even replaced secular army generals with Islamists who are faithful to him, removing this way any check on his power.

He cautioned the EU in dealing with Turkey, emphasizing that Erdogan's regime is constantly persecuting Kurds, Syrians, Jews and Christians and breaking human rights. Mr. Bozkurt also talked about Erdogan's interest in non-Turkish communities around Europe (Somalians, Egyptians) whom he would like to influence and plant seeds of discontent in their minds toward the Western countries they live in. The NGOs and charities set up in these communities are sometimes just a front, sponsored indirectly and discreetly by Turkish government and whose educational and social/cultural programs are meant to influence the children and people in the community. Same with the imams in the European mosques: some of their costs studying theology were covered by Erdogan's regime, Bozkurt said. At the end of his talk, Abdullah Bozkurt offered encouragement highlighting the fact that Erdogan is only as strong as the economy in Turkey. Because of his authoritarian tendencies, he has driven out investors and business opportunity and Turkey's economy suffers and is not sustainable in the long run. The journalist suggested that is when the people will eventually turn on him, so "let's speed that up by having the EU increase targeted sanctions on Erdogan, his family and his cronies".

The European Post, a primarily online newspaper, has launched its first print edition at this event. Marco Gombacci, founder and editor warned: "The Turkish government is more committed to fighting Kurdish YPG than fighting ISIS, which means terrorism could start growing on Turkish soil. Europe should be worried about that". Gombacci also raised the issue of Turkey's membership in NATO: "The UN report in January 2019 showed that the Turkish army have committed war crimes in East Syria. Do we want that army in NATO?"

Rima Tuzun, a representative for the European Syriac Union was present and she offered a perspective from the minorities' point of view: "The main problem in Turkey is that we do not have the freedom to be or think differently. Turkey needs to acknowledge that there are other people who are not Turks living in Turkey. Syriacs are never recognized or mentioned by name; we are called the Christians in Turkey. The issue is much more entrenched in the mentality of people in Turkey, who refuse to accept diversity of any

kind. Will anything change if Erdogan is gone tomorrow? Not unless people's minds are changed first".

Bron: European Christian Political Movement. https://ecpm.info/news/freedom-of-speech-in-turkey.html