

Satranç, Saklambaç ve İnat

Zor Zamanlarda Sivil Toplum

Chess, Hide-and-Seek and Determination

Civil Society in Difficult Times

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Özlem Kaya • Pınar Öğünç



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Foreword

According to the World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2019, Turkey has the worst scores especially in the areas of "constraints on government powers", "fundamental rights" and "government influence on criminal system". It ranks 109 out of 126 countries and has the worst score among Eastern European and Central Asian countries. This is not just statistics, these figures have become the substance of our lives, part and parcel of what we experience and breathe.

Osman Kavala, the founder and chair of Anadolu Kültür, was taken into custody on 18 October 2017 and arrested on 1 November 2017. What befell Osman Kavala, who is one of the pioneers for the expansion of the cultural sphere in Turkey, made us vulnerable to attacks by police, judiciary, ministry of finance and government aligned media.

Like many other civil society institutions we suffered -and have been suffering- from the oppressive measures especially after the declaration of State of Emergency in 2016. Osman Kavala was kept in Silivri prison for more than two years with a scandalous indictment that was accepted 16 months after his arrest and did not make any attempt to discover a causal link between the alleged evidence cited and the heavy charges against him. On the same day that he was acquitted and ordered to be released in the trial, İstanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office issued a detention warrant on him as part of a separate investigation which was already mentioned in the ruling of his arrest in 2017. Kavala is sent back to prison on the following day. In order to circumvent both the national law which limits the maximum pretrial detention period to two years, and the verdict of the ECHR, he was arrested once again with even more absurd accusations. Obviously, the case is political and serves the criminalization of all civilian and democratic activities, as well as the persons and institutions that partake in them.

This report is about civil society institutions and people working there who resist various oppressive measures including the unjust imprisonment of Osman Kavala, those who keep on hoping and standing in solidarity. It aims to explain how the particular period is being experienced by the civil society actors who are interviewed. The report deals with the institutions in the field of human rights, institutions focusing on gender, international institutions operating under the same name in different countries, institutions specialized in the field of culture and arts and institutions from Diyarbakır working around the Kurdish issue and offer suggestions addressed to Europe-based funding institutions and foreign institutions. The damage in diverse fields due to prohibitions, forced prevention of activities, threat of closure, detention and arrest as well as the efforts to protect and even, persistently expand the field through new strategies are recorded.

We believe that the report which provides us with an insider view of the perseverance and courage of the civil society during one of the most challenging periods in the history of Turkey will be of help to those in the field and to those researching about the field.

We are grateful to our friends Özlem Kaya and Pınar Ögünç who did the research and wrote the report and Meltem Aslan and Evren Balta who made valuable contributions to the setting up of the project and finalizing the report.

Asena Günal
Anadolu Kültür

Introduction and Method

The shrinking civic space is a development frequently observed in recent years, and the term generally refers to a dual situation: On the one hand, a general regression in democratic values, revealed in the violation of freedom of expression and citizenship rights, and within a more limited scope, the restriction of the movement ability of civil society groups as a result of the widespread use of repressive state apparatuses on the other. Although democracy and the effectiveness of civil society do not directly correspond to the same thing, in well-functioning democracies, there is the expectation of a civil society which can present its needs and demands, is not repressed by the government, can participate in decision-making mechanisms and where different layers of society can express themselves through various organizations. It is precisely for this reason that the shrinking of civil society is directly related to the general decline and deterioration in democratic systems.¹ The fact that this decline is taking place on a global level expands the platform of the discussion, resulting in the highly widespread adoption and use of this concept of the “narrowing” of civil society.

Wars continue in many parts of the world, the right to life of thousands of people is violated, and millions of people are forced to migrate. The social transformation this situation creates beyond areas of conflict is instrumentalized by populist discourses of conservative governments, and “national sovereignty and the will of the majority” further exacerbate polarization in societies. The security policies are justified via unidentified “threat” and this walks hand in hand with a policy of fear spreading among people. Such vast expansion of the definition of terrorism allows for the widespread and excessive use of accusations of terrorism. On the basis of moral values, many rights, including the right to life of people - women and LGBTI+ first and foremost among them - are violated, and their living spaces are taken from them. The long-criticized progressivism is no longer convincing, since the “democratic West” no longer provides a model. The fact that this regression is being experienced in many countries at the same time undermines any discourse based on values to be defended on a global scale. While in the past, leaders learned about military methods and mechanisms

¹ Åsa Eldén ve Paul T. Levin, *Swedish Aid in the Era of Shrinking Space - the case of Turkey*, 2018: 27.

of oppression from each other, today, they share new ways of building undeterred oppression without recourse to weapons. According to Freedom House's 2018 report, 68 countries across the world experienced a regression of political rights and personal freedoms compared to the previous year, while only 50 countries experienced progress.² When we look at the course since 2006, 116 countries have undergone decline, while only 63 countries have experienced improvement. And again according to this 2018 report, 61% of the world's population lives deprived of "conditions of freedom".³ According to the 2018 assessment⁴ of the V-Dem Institute,⁵ as of the end of the year 2018, one third of the world's population lives in countries undergoing autocratization. This new wave, described as third-wave autocratization by V-Dem researchers, affects democratic states more; and develops not through upheavals that result in sudden, large-scale change but in a slower manner, step-by-step and via legal means.⁶

Democratic gains earned through constant and persistent struggle are being taken away from various social groups, and their struggle against this decline is also being prevented through various means. According to V-Dem indicators, the number of countries across the world where freedom of expression and independent media, rule of law and freedom of association is in decline is higher than the number of countries where they have improved.⁷ The freedom of association is repressed mainly by targeting civil society institutions rather than political parties.⁸ If the shrinking of civic space in recent times is discussed so widely because of its experience as a widespread phenomenon, a further reason is that it also expresses the loss of spaces and rights gained through struggle. The considerable gains of class struggle; changes in the system brought on by struggles against racial-and-ethnic discrimination; the point reached by the women's and LGBTI+ struggles for existence and equality, point towards magnificent if not complete success. It was precisely these gains that had increased the perception of a "threat" in the eyes of authoritarian administrations. Today, we are witnessing a retreat from the positions that enabled, as a result of struggles, civil society to construct and empower itself as an actor. Historically, the goal of the struggle was to expand these zones, yet today, a struggle must be carried out to protect the gains.

A healthy or "open" civic space implies that civil society and individuals are able to organize, participate and communicate without hindrance, and in doing so, claim their rights and influence the political and social structures around them.⁹ Yet today, in order to close off this "open" space, investigations are launched and smear campaigns are carried out against those who are involved in rights' struggles, they are targeted, some

2 See https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/ABRIDGED_FH_FITW_2019_Report_FINAL.pdf

3 *ibid.*

4 See https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/99/de/99dedd73-f8bc-484c-8b91-44ba601b6e6b/v-dem_democracy_report_2019.pdf

5 *Varieties of Democracy.*

6 See Lührmann, Anna and Staffan I. Lindberg, "A third wave of autocratization is here: what is new about it?", *Democratization*, 2019, Vol. 26, Issue 7.

7 See https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/99/de/99dedd73-f8bc-484c-8b91-44ba601b6e6b/v-dem_democracy_report_2019.pdf.

8 *ibid.*, p.18.

9 See <https://sur.conectas.org/en/infographics-civic-space-explained/>

are imprisoned, associations are trapped between financial audits and legal inspection and closed down, their actions are blocked, they face police violence; and media channels that are expected to include opposition voices are silenced. According to the 2018 report of CIVICUS, which observes civic space across the world, rights' violations such as the detention of activists, attacks on journalists, censorship, excessive use of force and the disruption and prevention of protests are among the most frequently applied methods in keeping civic space under pressure.¹⁰

Turkey receives its share of all these developments, and in fact, it has entered the category of countries shown as an example for this particular narrowing of civil society. Throughout its history, the Republic of Turkey progressed with "small" steps along the path of democratization, and it does not allow civic space to extend and civic actors to gain strength under its strong state tradition. An overview of the last 40 years shows us first that the 1980s, or the aftermath of the military coup d'état, were a period when the voice of all democratic organizations was muffled, and when the conditions for the emergence of a "civil" space could not appear as the armed conflict between the state of Turkey and the PKK began. The end of the 1980s and the 1990s became a period when attempts at institutionalization in the field of civil society continued under the weight of the war, when religion- and identity-based organizations increased, and the legal field took precedence in the struggle of civil society actors. When, in 1999, Turkey was given candidacy status for the European Union, throughout the 2000s, the influence of the EU accession process began to be felt on civil society. Both the impact of legal regulations required by candidacy, and the significant priority afforded to civil society in financial aid given to Turkey during this process led to an increase in projects involving civil society activities.¹¹

The turning point for developments that would cause the most recent narrowing of civil space in Turkey was the mid-2010s. The resolution process continued along with negotiations carried out with Abdullah Öcalan from 2013 to 2015, and it played an important role in the expansion of civic space, and in an increase of activities and impact. During the Gezi protests in 2013 and later, prohibitions on actions and protests in public spaces began to slowly increase, with Istanbul the first to suffer. At the general election held on 7 June 2015, for the first time in 13 years, the Justice and Development Party (AK Parti) failed to gain parliamentary majority. The decision was then taken by Supreme Committee of Elections to repeat the election. With the ending in the summer of 2015 of the ceasefire that accompanied the resolution period, indefinite curfews began to be declared in provinces including Diyarbakır, Mardin, Hakkari, Şırnak, Bitlis, Muş, Bingöl, Tunceli, Batman, Elazığ and Siirt.¹² Clashes moved into city centres,

10 See <https://monitor.civicus.org/SOCS2018/>

11 For the historical development of the field of civil society in Turkey see Keyman, E. F. and İçduygu, A. Globalisation, Civil Society and Citizenship in Turkey: Actors, Boundaries, Discourses, *Citizenship Studies*, 2003, 7:2, 219-234; Heper, M. and Yıldırım S., *Revisiting Civil Society in Turkey*, *Southeast European and Blackeast Studies*, 2011, 11:1, 1-18.

12 See TİHV Dokümantasyon Merkezi, 16 Ağustos 2015-1 Temmuz 2019 Tarihleri Arasında İlan Edilen Sokağa Çıkma Yasakları [TİHV Documentation Centre, Curfews Declared Between the Dates 16 August 2015-1 July 2019]. <https://tihv.org.tr/16-agustos-2015-1-temmuz-2019-tarihleri-arasinda-ilan-edilen-sokaga-cikma-yasaklari/>

resulting in the death of many civilians, and the migration of thousands of people. The discourse of an “anti-terror struggle” and the accusations of “terrorist propaganda” or “divisive propaganda” were now used more frequently to silence civilian voices. Bombings took place in the west of Turkey as well during the same period, resulting in many losses; and the space for both life itself and organization narrowed further. Following the 15 July 2016 coup attempt, when the struggle against the Gülen community, held responsible of the coup, extended to all groups branded as “terrorists” and the arrests and closing of associations during the State of Emergency period that was extended seven times to last a total of two years, increased the dimensions of repression targeting civic space in Turkey.

In this report, we try to understand how this period we are passing through is being experienced by civil society actors. We wanted to see how this condition, which has spread and worsened especially after the summer of 2015, has affected different actors. The methods used to suppress civil society in Turkey are not necessarily different than those used in other countries. Peaceful demonstrations carried out in public space, which must be considered within the scope of freedom of expression, are met with police violence. State officials that carry out this kind of violence are protected with a shield of impunity. The influence of the discourse of “the struggle against terror” has constantly increased since the recommencement of clashes. Human rights defenders are targeted, and even murdered. The content of civil society activities and meetings continue to be investigated. Legitimate financial support provided by legal international institutions is considered grounds for accusations of “secret agency activity” and “crimes against the government”. Although traditionally not considered part of civil society, media and universities are no longer a field of freedom of expression. The borders of this research project and report cannot include all factual references to the narrowing of civil space in Turkey, the legal steps and the plane of discourse. Freedom House,¹³ CIVICUS,¹⁴ V-Dem¹⁵ and International Centre for Non-for-Profit Law,¹⁶ all working in the international field, follow current developments on a country-basis since they produce global-scale reports. The Third Sector Foundation of Turkey, too, focuses on developments in the field of civil society in Turkey, and carries out observations¹⁷ and an enabling environment assessment.¹⁸ In addition to these, in the most recent period, comprehensive work on the shrinking of the civic space in Turkey has been carried out.¹⁹ It is possible to find, in most of these reports, the dimensions and methods of the restrictions implemented in Turkey. In the report you are reading now, we

13 See <https://freedomhouse.org/article/turkey-halt-crackdown-civil-society>

14 See <https://monitor.civicus.org/country/turkey/>

15 See https://www.v-dem.net/media/filer_public/99/de/99dedd73-f8bc-484c-8b91-44ba601b6e6b/v-dem_democracy_report_2019.pdf

16 See <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/turkey.html>

17 See <https://www.tusev.org.tr/tr/arastirma-ve-yayinlar/sivil-toplum-izleme-raporu-1>

18 See <https://www.tusev.org.tr/tr/yasal-calismalar/sivil-toplumun-gelisimi-icin-elverisli-ortamin-izlenmesi-projesi>

19 For some detailed reports on recent developments in Turkey, see, Amnesty International, *Fırtınaya Göğüs Germek/Weathering the Storm*, April 2018; Åsa Eldén and Paul T. Levin, *Swedish Aid in the Era of Shrinking Space - the case of Turkey*, 2018; Stephanie Leysen and Ebubekir Işık, *EU Support to Dismissed Civil Society in Turkey: Yes, There is a Better Alternative*; Center for American Progress, *Istanbul Policy Center and Istituto Affari Internazionali, Trends in Turkish Civil Society*, July 2017.

sought to transmit the everyday experiences regarding the environment of pressure of individuals we met with, and preferred to touch upon factual developments only if they were mentioned as having an impact upon these experiences. We presented data related to developments indicated by the people we interviewed in accordance with the categorization of the report.

Our aim was not to carry out a classification on the basis of a comprehensive landscape of civil society in Turkey and show the impact of the narrowing via every single section, either. When we take the classification made by Yaşama Dair Vakıf/YaDa Foundation into consideration, excluding the funding institutions and foreign institutions we interviewed for the purpose of this report, most civil society organizations active in Turkey may be considered within the category of defenders, and this corresponds to a 3,3% section of the field of civil society institutions.²⁰ Since the fields of work, and thus, the problems faced by organizations that are included in this category are different from each other, this report does not claim to cover, or represent all of them.

This report, in essence, is the product of the research project we carried out in the period from March 2019 to December 2019 under the title "The Transformation of Civil Society in Turkey". For this end, first of all, we reviewed recent studies on the narrowing of civil society, in the world generally, and in Turkey specifically. Departing from this review, we progressed by selecting certain fields in civil society. Institutions in the field of human rights, institutions focusing on gender, international institutions operating under the same name in different countries, institutions working in the field of culture and arts, and institutions operating in Diyarbakır around the Kurdish issue were taken up in different chapters. We allocated a separate chapter to the experiences of employees/members of institutions that have been closed in the most recent period. The final chapter focuses on interviews we held with Europe-based funding institutions and foreign institutions.

We believe that the areas we have selected are of critical importance in order to explain the extent of repression civil society has been subjected to in Turkey in the most recent period. In the interviews, we had the chance to listen to both the personal experiences of institution employees and the organizational experience of the institution they are affiliated with. By extensively including the interviews in the report, we wanted to lay bare the gravity, prevalence and also, similarities and differences of these experiences. As the political agenda in Turkey changes rapidly, the impact of these developments and the way in which this impact is perceived are also rapidly changing. Our desire to prevent the experiences of the people we interviewed from disappearing amidst this rapid change was also nurtured by our belief that these experiences can act as a guide for times ahead.

From a total of 19 institutions, we conducted interviews with 20 individuals, of which 9 were women. We selected the people to interview from among high-ranking institu-

²⁰ Verilerle Sivil Toplum Kuruluşları [Civil Society Institutions Explained with Data], Prepared by: Yaşama Dair Vakıf. The other categories of YaDa are: Self-organized, Politically-Oriented, Philanthropist, Protector, Specialist, Build-Maintain-Improve, Fellow Citizen, Socialization, Club, Subsidiary, Profession/Industry Oriented, Market Oriented.

tion employees/members with the power of representation. In the interviews we held with 14 representatives of civil society in Turkey, we discussed the difficulties experienced by these organizations and their members/employees, how they compared the past and present in the context of their institution, what kind of strategies they developed in order to overcome challenges, and their expectations of and proposals for the future. We also carried out interviews with funding institutions that provide financial support to civil society institutions in Turkey, and foreign institutions that develop joint projects with Turkey-based institutions. We listened to six individuals from five different institutions within this framework. There were a few reasons for us to want to interview foreign partners and funding institutions. First of all, we wanted to present the experience of civil society in the most recent period from the viewpoint of their observations as well. Secondly, we wanted to understand how foreign institutions were affected by this environment of repression. Finally, we wanted to talk about the different dynamics that determine the specific positions of these institutions.

In the permission form for the people we interviewed, we left the decision regarding how we could use the content of interviews and to what extent we could reveal their identities up to them. It was important for us that the people we interviewed comfortably expressed their experiences. Besides, in this field, for someone to not desire to express their views under their open identity can be treated as an indicator in itself regarding restrictions on the freedom of expression and organization. Rather than anonymizing all identities in the report, we preferred to use the names of institutions and individuals that did allow us to do so.

As the researches and writers of the report we work in different fields: One of us is a journalist-author, the other a civil society worker. We worked by blending the experiences and methods of the two different fields. The "Introduction", "Being an International Institution", "Diyarbakır Narrowing under Clashes", "Foreign Funding Institutions and Partner Institutions" chapters of the report were penned by Özlem Kaya; while the chapters titled "As It Becomes More Difficult to Defend Human Rights", "From A Gender Perspective", "As the Field of All Manners of 'Expression' Narrows", "Doors Closed Doors Opened" and "Conclusion and Proposals" were written by Pınar Öğünç. All these chapters were written in consideration of the scope and boundaries of the research, but in fact each one of them is broad enough to deserve to be a separate subject of research. It is our wish that this report becomes a modest contribution to the struggle of those who, despite all the difficulties they face, continue to defend civic space under all circumstances by revealing their experiences and presenting a perspective for the future, and once again extend our thanks to all the individuals we interviewed for allocating their valuable time to us.

As It Becomes More Difficult to Defend Human Rights

Shaped by the political climate that determines the intensity and diversity of violations, defending human rights in Turkey has always been a tough field of struggle. The post-2015 period, too, when violations increased and were normalized, and the field of civil society can be said to have experienced a general narrowing, was a period when defenders were subjected to direct repression and the threat of prosecution. This experience is important not only because it describes the narrowing process that is taking place, but also since it enables us to make comparisons within the own histories of long-established institutions.

A pioneering institution in this field, İnsan Hakları Derneği/Human Rights Association (İHD), was founded in 1986 by 98 human rights defenders including relatives of the detained and the sentenced, writers, journalists, doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers and academics. İHD's Istanbul Branch Chairperson Gülseren Yoleri has worked as a volunteer in different positions at İHD since 1991, and she states that the repression has never lifted entirely although the degree has changed, adding that there has been no period throughout the history of the institution when İHD worked with a feeling of complete "freedom".

When İHD was founded, the effects of the coup could still be felt. In the 1980s there was the army, while the 1990s were dark years when JİTEM [Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Organization] and the counter-guerrilla entered the stage. The typical characteristic of the 2000s, and especially of the AK Parti period, was how much more prominent their masks became. We could say that this continued until the end of the resolution process. In previous years, for instance, when we asked for appointments from the Ministry of Justice or the General Directorate of Prisons and Detention Houses in order to present our report on violations and arbitrary practices in prisons, they would not accept, and if we went without an appointment they would treat us even worse than kicking us out. In the 2000s, with the arrival of the AK Parti cadres, they did give us appointments, they met us at the door and showed hospitality, and knew everything in the report as much as we did. But when you mentioned a solution, they began to juggle the ball. It was a period when everyone passed the buck, never said, I'm not listening, or, I won't solve this, but in practice, didn't solve anything.²¹

21 Gülseren Yoleri, personal interview, Istanbul, 13 June 2019.

The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey (TİHV/HRFT) was founded in 1990 from within İHD and the Turkish Medical Association as an institution prioritizing the treatment and rehabilitation of victims of torture in the period following the 1980 coup. It is still the only organization that presents people, who were tortured, and their relatives with treatment and rehabilitation services and works for the documentation and prevention of torture, and the preparation of alternative reports. Ümit Efe has been the Istanbul representative of the TİHV for five years, and has worked in the field of human rights since 1986. She states that in the 1980s when systematic torture continued, the detention period was reduced from 90 days to 45 days thanks to the persistence of the struggle and that the gatherings of the Saturday Mothers that began 24 years ago led to a reduction in cases of torture - that did continue in the 1990s, too, although in a more secretive manner - and unsolved murder cases. This is how Efe describes the 2000s:

No longer was there strappado, electric torture, rape, the use of animals and blind-folding, perhaps, but there were large-scale prison massacres. On 19 December 2000, television channels broadcast live the operation [that was officially named "Return to Life²²"] on prisons.²³

Efe explains that the "changing face of visible torture" appeared during the Gezi actions in 2013, which spread almost across the whole of Turkey, and she describes a more concentrated and intense form of violence which affected not only those who participated in the actions, but for instance, because of the intense use of pepper gas, people who were in their homes, and street animals.

Saturday People/Mothers

Human rights defenders and relatives of the forcibly disappeared sat at Galatasaray Square for the first time on 27 May 1995 to demand to know the fate of their disappeared loved ones. They had to suspend their action in 1999 because of police violence, and when they recommenced in 2008, they were gathering not only in Istanbul, but also in Diyarbakır, Cizre, Batman, İzmir and Yüksekova. During the period of long-term curfews declared following the end of the resolution process in the summer of 2015, the actions could no longer be held in Diyarbakır, Cizre, Batman and Yüksekova. When they gathered in Istanbul on 25 August 2018 for their 700th week action, they were met with intense police violence. Since that day, Galatasaray Square has been closed to Saturday People/Mothers, the action has been held in front of the Istanbul branch office of İHD. Following the end of curfews in Diyarbakır, the actions began again to be held at Koşuyolu, however, the action has been banned since its 499th week, and since they are prohibited from even stepping outside the Diyarbakır branch office of İHD, the press statements are read inside. The Saturday People/Mothers have been forced to experience the narrowing of their fields of struggle in the physical sense as well, however, although they are pushed away from public spaces, they continue their actions.

We held our third interview under this heading with Hafıza Merkezi/Truth Justice Memory Center. The center was founded in 2011, by a group of lawyers, academics,

²² For further information: <https://m.bianet.org/english/human-rights/172894-justified-decision-on-return-to-life-soldiers-shot-gendarmerie-kurt-to-death>

²³ Ümit Efe, personal interview, Istanbul, 14 June 2019.

journalist and human rights defenders, some of which had worked in this field before. The centre aims to “reveal the truth about gross human rights violations, support victims in their search for justice and by reinforcing social memory regarding these violations, contribute to social peace and democracy”. This was a period when the resolution process had not yet begun, but, to use the expression of Murat Çelikkan, a director of the centre, when the first signals could be sensed, “and that the obligatory reforms of the accession period to the EU created a positive mood, and democratic and civic space expanded”.²⁴ The de-conflict environment that accompanied the resolution process set the scene for developments that were also part of Hafıza Merkezi’s field of interest. It was possible to reconsider a number of shelved criminal cases. For instance, violations that took place in Cizre in the 1990s were brought to court, and although the state tradition did not totally change, there were “some ruptures in traditional impunity”. This political climate enabled Hafıza Merkezi to work in the field and carry out more than 200 interviews with victims and their relatives in the region. The stories and the judicial process of the forcibly disappeared were made public at the web site <http://zorlakaybetmeler.org>

After 7 June 2015

Today when you click on the address it tells you that the web site “cannot be accessed”. Çelikkan points at the turning points that led to this. The first was the crack that appeared in the political power block with the 17–25 December 2013 operations. The second break took place with the verdicts of acquittal ruled in three fundamental cases (Cemal Temizöz, Mete Sayar, Musa Çitil) that appeared to be heading towards sentencing,²⁵ followed by the end of the resolution process. Following the 7 June elections, a further break took place, especially during the periods of “ditches” and “blockades”, when it became a crime even to utter the word “peace”.

We began to receive phone calls. Especially those whose names were mentioned on the site demanded that their names be removed. And then came a legal equivalent to that demand as well, since they had begun to be acquitted in court. So we had to close down the site for renewal. This was also necessary to protect those who had shared their witness accounts: their statements could, now, with the end of the resolution process, the failed coup attempt and the declaration of a State of Emergency, constitute a crime. There were such grave problems during the renewed clashes and the blockade period that it became impossible to talk about the 90s without mentioning the current situation. The past had suddenly become the present.²⁶

The resolution process was not a period when human rights defenders “stopped”, after all, rights violations continued, in different fields, during that period as well. Once the table of peace was toppled over, the days of clashes that began in the Kurdish provinces meant that conditions became much graver for TİHV employees, as the institution’s Istanbul Representative Ümit Efe states:

²⁴ Murat Çelikkan, personal interview, Istanbul, 10 June 2019.

²⁵ Hafıza Merkezi brings together information related to cases where state officials are tried and other cases at the web site www.failibelli.org.

²⁶ Murat Çelikkan, personal interview, Istanbul, 10 June 2019.

At a time when all civilians were made to suffer, we were the first institution to enter the field and carry out documentation work, and that was very important for us. The type of work we carried out during the curfews can be described as extreme-risk work. In an environment where we had no roof to protect us, we had to document the destruction and the attack on culture. We informed official institutions that we would be working, we did this in order to carry out our activities in the most open manner possible, yet we still faced threats and we were tracked. Our Cizre Reference Centre was burned down. We faced an investigation and inspection regarding our Cizre report. Our Chairperson Şebnem Korur Fincancı was arrested. Her ten-day arrest was a significant threat to the entire field of human rights. Many court cases were filed, which still continue. This was followed by the closing via KHK/state decree of some of the institutions that had signed the Cizre report, including Gündem Çocuk Derneği/Gündem Children's Association, TUHAD-FED (Federation of Associations of Solidarity between Families of Detainees and Prisoners), and Mezopotamya Hukukçular Derneği/Mezopotamya Lawyers' Association.²⁷

The İHD's Istanbul Branch Chair Yoleri emphasizes the gravity of the period with the words, "In the past, villages would be forcibly evacuated, burned down, and we would know about it. But now cities were destroyed in their entirety. This was a threat targeting society as a whole. Trust in international mechanisms also disappeared". The bomb-attack targeting the Labour, Peace and Democracy Rally held in Ankara on 10 October 2015 then created a real rupture. Yoleri relays her observation that even the rights struggle became meaningless after the rally attended by many people from the field of human rights, adding that a sense of "When human beings are torn apart, what use is there in writing reports?" settled in. Talking about the lasting effect of the massacre upon them, she says: "In the past, I couldn't understand those who came to the association, worked for a period, and then left. Yet after 10 October, I understood that not everyone can carry this weight."²⁸

The State of Emergency declared five days after the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016, was extended seven times for periods of three months each time, and narrowed the field of all opposition views and mostly the media, academia and civil society, through dismissals and arbitrary arrests.²⁹ The arrest on 6 June 2017 of Taner Kılıç, the Chairperson of Amnesty International's Turkey Office, followed a month later by the operation targeting ten human rights defenders that had met in Büyükada for a human rights workshop, the detention and then arrest of Osman Kavala in October of the same year, were all signs of the increasing degree of the repression and intervention targeting civil society.

It is possible to read the impact of all that took place since the 7 June elections in the specific experience of the Hafıza Merkezi. At the point that they are, they can no longer

27 Ümit Efe, personal interview, Istanbul, 14 June 2019.

28 Gülseren Yoleri, personal interview, Istanbul, 13 June 2019.

29 The Amnesty report "Fırtınaya Göğüs Germek/Weathering the Storm" (<https://www.amnesty.de/sites/default/files/2018-04/Amnesty-Bericht-Weathering-the-storm-Tuerkei-April-2018.pdf>) and the report "Olağanüstü Hal Tedbir ve Düzenlemeleri/State of Emergency Measures and Regulations" (http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SoE_17042018.pdf) prepared by İnsan Hakları Ortak Platformu/ Human Rights Joint Platform, treat in detail the rights violations during OHAL/State of Emergency and the repression imposed during their documentation.

conduct interviews in the field, or only lawyers can conduct such interviews. Following a formal investigation targeting the institution employee in whose name the institution telephone was registered, they decided not to announce their activities via social media anymore. They cancelled some meetings and chose not to publish some books. During that period, four out of their ten-person-team faced either an investigation or a court case, some were sentenced and received prison sentences. The lawyers of the centre, who had chosen as their task the monitoring of rights violation cases from the 1990s, now had to focus on the institution's own court cases.³⁰

Many İHD members have paid heavy prices in the past. And that price varies according to the political climate:

In the 1990s, during the period of unsolved murders with unknown perpetrators, our administrators fell victim, too. We suffered repression, faced arrests and were subjected to torture. During that period, it was almost only human rights defenders who raised their voice, whatever the circumstances were. Beside the abductions, the forcibly disappeared and the unsolved murders, during that period many of our association's administrators remained under arrest, there are still those who are in prison, or face investigation.³¹

Human rights defence requires activities such as documenting, reporting and court case monitoring as well as establishing relationships, sharing views with and making demands from state institutions at different levels. All three institution representatives state that the post-2015 narrowing process weakened such contacts, and even, in some areas, ended them completely. Hafıza Merkezi is an NGO which sends all its reports not only to civil actors but also to state institutions, and establishes contacts at ministry level and makes presentations at parliamentary commissions. Now their relationships with public institutions and pro-government media and academia have been severed completely. Çelikkan tells us that after this process, the first contact was established in the first half of 2019, upon the invitation of the Ministry of Justice with the aim of drawing up a human rights roadmap. He is doubtful whether the views they expressed at that meeting will be taken into account.³²

For İHD and TIHV, too, particularly the State of Emergency period has been a time when relationships with public institutions have been almost completely severed. The first contact re-established on the level of ministry, undersecretariat and directorate took place during the hunger strike of Leyla Güven, HDP Member of Parliament for Hakkari Province and Co-Chair of the Democratic Society Congress began on 7 November 2018 when she was in prison.³³ The hunger strikes, which more than 3000 people in Turkey and abroad joined, ended with Güven's statement on the 200th day.

30 Murat Çelikkan received a 1 year and 6 months prison sentence for acting in solidarity with Özgür Gündem newspaper as a one-day editor-in-chief. Co-Director Meltem Aslan was detained with dawn raid on 16 November 2018, as part of a police operation targeting the field of civil society and released the same night. Chairperson Yiğit Ekmekçi's trial in the Gezi file continued as this report was being prepared.

31 Gülseren Yoleri, personal interview, Istanbul, 13 June 2019.

32 Murat Çelikkan, personal interview, Istanbul, 10 June 2019.

33 Gülseren Yoleri, personal interview, Istanbul, 13 June 2019 and Ümit Efe, personal interview, Istanbul, 14 June 2019.

What Did All This Change?

IHD/Human Rights Association's Istanbul Branch Chair Yoleri tells us that despite the worsening conditions, they have not given up on any campaign, that they do not hold back from saying anything, but that they have developed new methods to cope with oppression. From torture claims targeting those who are accused of taking part in the coup attempt to the prison conditions of those on trial in FETÖ files, and to recent abductions taking place in relation to the same file, Yoleri states that they continue to work in line with the principles in their charter.

In the immediate aftermath of the coup attempt, on the morning of 16 July 2016, representatives of İHD/Human Rights Association came together once again at Galatasaray Square for the Saturday Mothers gathering that has continued since 1995. They believed that they had to continue the action whatever the circumstances, and worried that if they did not go to the square one week, that their action would be prevented from that point on. Under the puzzled looks of a plainclothes police officer, who said, "Do you really think you can perform an action on a day like this? People were chopping each other's heads off until daylight broke, you might face a lynching from passers-by, and I can't protect you", and although anxious of the strange crowd around them, they voiced their demand for justice on that day as well. However, a month after the end of the State of Emergency, on 25 September 2018, just before the action for the 700th week, a ban was imposed first on Galatasaray Square, then on the whole of İstiklal Street, and then on all streets that lead onto İstiklal Street. At the time of our interview with Yoleri, the Saturday Mothers/People were meeting in front of the street entrance of the Human Rights Association Istanbul Branch building. This is how Yoleri tells us about this noteworthy transformation:

We have been prohibited from taking a single step out of the main door, but we do. On the one hand, we think how bad it has got, while we are, on the other hand, outside the boundaries they want to suffocate us in, we still carry out our action. We have not given up on our demand for justice, our struggle to look for our forcibly disappeared.³⁴

TİHV, too, rather than narrowing down its field of activity or implementing self-censorship because of the pressure, decided to extend the scope of the struggle. The institution adopted a strategy of including within its structure certain institutions that had been closed by KHK/State Decree, and certain academics that had been discharged from their positions. The work that had already been in the making for five years for TİHV Akademi,³⁵ with branches in Diyarbakır, İzmir and Istanbul with the goal of training human rights activists and specialists that will carry out scientific research, was

³⁴ Gülseren Yoleri, personal interview, Istanbul, 13 June 2019.

³⁵ Academics that form TİHV Akademi establish their aim on the idea that "the activist-academic identity is related, first and foremost, to the collective responsibility felt towards the world we share". For the two reports they have published, title "Üniversitenin Olağanüstü Hali: Akademik Ortamın Tahribatı Üzerine Bir İnceleme/State of Emergency at Universities: Analysis on the Destruction of the Academic Environment" and "Akademisyen İhraçları: Hak İhlalleri, Kayıplar, Travma ve Güçlenme Süreçleri/Dismissals of Academics: Rights Violations, Losses, Trauma and Processes of Empowerment" please see <https://tihvakademi.org> and for the English newsletters https://tihvakademi.org/?page_id=431

accelerated and activities began. During this period, there was no drop in the participation of volunteer professional specialists and in applications to the Experience Sharing Program. And the Human Rights Movement Conference, held after the Büyükada operation targeting human rights defenders, turned into a meeting with greater participation than usual, where defenders gave hope to each other. To retain motivation and psychological well-being amidst all this required empowering and supporting activities.

The work we do is among the most conscientious work done in the world, but also among the toughest. Our doctors work with people who have been torn apart, people who have been subjected to torture. On the one hand, we are passing through a period when many hard-earned democratic rights are lost, and torture is normalized through perception management. This is what determines the platform of work for human rights organizations. In order to raise the awareness of rights, it is sometimes necessary to wipe the slate clean and begin from scratch. A question we most often get is, "You have been continuing your struggle for so many years, but what have you gained?" We may have to explain certain things time and again as if we were caught up in a cycle, we may progress with the steps of a tortoise, if you ask me, we are winning. As long as this political perspective and system remains in power, we believe there is a need for us and a mechanism that will remind and repair. Even the existence of the tradition of struggle can prevent an unbridled course of events. On the other hand, I believe that in the founding work of the future, we can act as a kind of litmus paper, regarding both the sovereigns and the people.³⁶

During the same period, the Hafıza Merkezi/Truth, Justice, Memory Centre also chose to opt for a strategy change. A director of the centre, Çelikkan tells us that following a first wave targeting the field of human rights and media, and a second wave targeting academia, a third wave of systematic pressure has targeted the field of civil society, amounting to an all-out attack on those sections of society that "raise their voice". Çelikkan tells us that this wave, which continued with the operation targeting rights defenders at Büyükada and Osman Kavala's arrest, created anxiety and demoralization on an individual level in their team, but that they have, nevertheless, chosen to grow as an institution. For the last year, they have included the narrowing of civic space among their fields of activity, and are carrying out a project on defending human rights' defenders. Another project they are focusing on in collaboration with Heinrich Böll Stiftung involves the distribution of approximately 1 million 700 thousand Euros of institutional support to human rights organizations on behalf of the EU delegation.

In the 20th century, we witnessed how democratic regimes and human rights suffered heart attacks and died. The heart attack came in the shape of a military coup, the army taking over. In a single day, the entire civic space would be interrupted, and this would be followed by a long period of normalization and democratization. There are common characteristics, too, of implementations in countries where we see tendencies towards autocratization and the narrowing of the civic space in the last five-six years. In the 21st century, democracies die by suffocation, suffering death throes in the hands of elected leaders. Leaders learn so rapidly from each other. It's almost as if there is a guide book they all have. Putin does something, and three

36 Ümit Efe, personal interview, Istanbul, 14 June 2019.

days later you can see a similar thing being done in Hungary or Turkey. We know that we have similarities with Poland in the field of law, with Hungary in the field of civil society and politics, and with Russia regarding certain implementations. I believe that this is an international assault, and that it can be countered only by standing together on an international level.³⁷

This process also affected the access of NGOs to funding sources. For instance, the Open Society Foundation, a supporter of the Truth, Justice, Memory Center, took the decision to leave Turkey completely. Çelikkan states that other changes have also taken place regarding relations with international and local funding sources. There is also another aspect to his change interpreted by Çelikkan with the words, "People want to see results when they provide funding. Just like the free flow of capital, funds have shifted towards places where they can get more results". Some institutions, precisely because they began to perceive the importance of support during difficult times, set a new path for themselves. This is how Çelikkan interprets the EU's decision, during this period, to reduce the resources it supplies to the state while increasing the funding it provides to civil society.³⁸

Although some of its branches, from time to time, receive project-based EU funding, İHD prefers not to use funding. Yoleri states that they find it in breach of their principle of independence to receive funding from states and centres of political power. Although they have no principle against receiving funding from civilian organizations, she states that creating resources through donations "multiplies" them and increases their self-confidence. During this difficult period, too, they continued to do everything through membership fees and donations.³⁹

TİHV benefits from project-based international financial support as long as it fulfils conditions outlined in their foundation voucher, prioritizing EU funds and the support of anti-torture institutions. Efe says that, because of their clear preferences in this field, they do not sense any exceptional reservation following judicial interventions directly targeting the field of civil society, such as the arrest of Osman Kavala and the Büyükada Case.⁴⁰ TİHV had faced this kind of pressure through financial inspection before, and a case filed against them had been ruled in favour of the foundation.

37 Murat Çelikkan, personal interview, Istanbul, 10 June 2019.

38 Murat Çelikkan, personal interview, Istanbul, 10 June 2019.

39 Gülseren Yoleri, personal interview, Istanbul, 13 June 2019.

40 Ümit Efe, personal interview, Istanbul, 14 June 2019.

From a Gender Perspective

Rights violations based on gender identity, sexual orientation and gender roles are rooted in an inequality that spreads throughout the history of humanity, dominates body politics and is reflected in male dominance and heteronormativity. However, this long past does not detach the struggle against discrimination and the violence it leads to from the “intensity” of everyday politics, quite to the contrary, it drives socially disadvantaged groups such as women and LGBTI+ people towards an even more fragile point. Such rights’ struggles can be effectively blocked through political repression, and such processes also lead to the loss of the social accumulation of knowledge and experience that has formed over many years, thus extending the damage into the long term as well. The State of Emergency declared after the 15 July coup attempt became a period when this situation crystallized.

Since 2016, the 8 March Feminist Night March and the 25 November protests for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women has been restricted via arbitrary implementations. The Pride Parade, performed thirteen times without any problem before, has been prevented by security forces since 2015. In Ankara, too, since 2017, KuirFest (“QueerFest”) and all LGBTI+ activities have been prohibited indefinitely. This, however, does not mean that people do not take to the streets for every single action. For instance, attendance at the 17th Feminist Night March held in Istanbul in 2018 was so high that the New York Times used a photograph from Istanbul for its 8 March news report.⁴¹

41 See <https://static01.nyt.com/images/2018/03/09/nytfrontpage/scannat.pdf>

According to data provided by Women's Rights Defenders Digital Platform⁴² (Kahidep), founded in 2018 to document and render visible repression and rising resistances, during the State of Emergency period, kayyums/state trustees were appointed to 88 municipalities, 44 women municipal co-chairs were deposed and 36 women municipal co-chairs were arrested. Eleven women's organizations were closed by KHK/state decree, and the activities of 52 women's institutions were ended by appointing kayyums/state trustees. In some places, even vocational courses for women and specific projects like "training woman bus drivers" were ended. Six woman members of parliament have been arrested. According to the booklet titled A Balance Sheet of Women's Rights Violations During the State of Emergency Period,⁴³ 23%, or in other words, 25 thousand 532 of those expelled from public positions by KHKs/state decrees are women. One third of students whose grants to study abroad have been cancelled, and one fifth of academics expelled from universities are women. In addition to all this, 16 woman journalists were arrested during the State of Emergency period. The women's news agency Jinha was closed by KHK/state decree.

The survey KESK carried out in 29 provinces with 237 women is important in that it helps us take a closer look at the matter.⁴⁴ During the State of Emergency period, the number of people expelled who were members of unions within KESK is 4218, and 25,3% of them are women. According to the survey's results, 68% of the expelled women had not faced any investigation before. 46% of them had another expelled person in their close social circle, which means life became even more difficult for them. 17% of them moved away from the province/district they lived. 68% of them say that their general condition of health has deteriorated. 88% state that they face serious financial difficulty.

At the point we are today, even the Istanbul Convention (The Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence) that came into force in 2014 is not effectively implemented, although Turkey was among its first signees. In fact, the convention is targeted by certain representatives of the government and pro-government media for "damaging the family".

The Real Break Took Place Before 2015

The first civil society organization that comes to mind regarding women's rights in Turkey, Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı [Mor Çatı {lit. Purple Roof} Women's Shelter Foundation] was founded in 1990 upon the accumulated experience of pioneering steps such as the campaign carried out in 1986 for Turkey to sign the United Nation's Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Mor İğne {Purple Needle} campaign in 1989, the Bedenimiz Bizimdir {Our Body Belongs to Us} and divorce actions in 1990, and the Women's Solidarity Against Beatings Campaign. We met with Gülsun Kanat Dinç as a representative of this collective structure. She has been part of

42 Kahidep organizes solidarity among women, collects data, and also continues its State of Emergency Witness Accounts-Oral History Study. <https://www.kahidep.org>

43 http://disk.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ohal_kadin_kitapcik.pdf

44 <http://www.kesk.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/KESKLI%CC%87-1%CC%87HRAC%C-C%A7-KADINLAR-ARAS%CC%A7TIRMASI-RAPORU.docx>

the women's movement since that period, and despite interruptions, she has also been part of Mor Çatı. She remembers the early days when they struggled with enthusiasm against the negative perception of "feminists" despite the difficulties of raising issues considered taboo within the antidemocratic atmosphere of the period. The foundation in 1994 of the first independent women's shelter; the inauguration in 1998 of the Assembly on Women's Shelters and Solidarity Centres' which continues to this day in an expanded form with a magnificent accumulation of knowledge and experience; the experience of the shelter managed jointly with the Beyoğlu District Governorate in 2004; and the active role assumed in changes to be made to the Civil Code and the Penal Code are some of the links in this chain. According to Dinç, the important aspect of the 2000s was the hope brought to civil society institutions by Turkey's EU membership negotiations and the more effective relationships established with public institutions.⁴⁵

Dinç prefers to mark the starting point of the period when their fields of activity narrowed and they had to relinquish some of their gains not in 2015, but further back, around the years 2008-2009. These are the years when it became evident for women that the government was "pretending to care" in the field of women's rights. Among developments Dinç states that indicated that "things weren't going right" were: The founding of pro-government "gongo"⁴⁶ women's organizations; the change of the population unit of measure for shelters through a change in the Municipalities Law; the state increasing its "project fetishism" at a time when women's organizations persisted that the struggle against violence against women and gender discrimination be entered into different budgets such as those of the Ministries of Justice and National Education and the Presidency of Religious Affairs; and although it appears as a topic of debate of the most recent period, their realization that state hospitals had stopped performing abortions; the description by Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister at the time, of abortion as murder; and Mor Çatı receiving invitations to less meetings than before.

The most evident step backwards taken with the State of Emergency has been the closing of women's institutions either through KHKs/state decrees or municipalities where kayyums/state trustees have been appointed in place of the democratically elected chairs:

We don't carry out any political activity in the sense they perceive it, we were involved in a joint theoretical struggle on women's issues with the closed women's organizations. With the closures, our strength as women has diminished. Many of the counselling centers for women have had to close down, and there are no longer any places in those regions where we can refer women to. Following the appointment of kayyums/state trustees serious differences have begun to emerge since it is impossible to transfer that knowledge. If you cannot benefit from that accumulation of knowledge, you go backwards.⁴⁷

As an institution that focuses on women and their needs, Mor Çatı has to have ties with all municipalities as well as kayyum/state trustee-appointed municipalities, governor-

45 Gülsun Kanat Dinç, personal interview, Istanbul, 17 June 2019.

46 Gongo, or "Government Organised Non Governmental Organisation".

47 Gülsun Kanat Dinç, personal interview, Istanbul, 17 June 2019.

ates and the ministry. Although these ties have weakened in recent times against their preference, they do remain. For instance, for the Assembly on Women's Shelter and Solidarity Centres they issue calls to all provincial directorates as they do every year. Although some directors do not even notify their employees, it should be considered promising that some employees, who know the worth of the assembly and what it can add to those in the field, use their days on leave to take part.

As Hate Speech Becomes "Organized"

Founded in 1994 with the motto, "The emancipation of homosexuals will also liberate heterosexuals", Kaos GL organizes campaigns against discrimination and lobbying activities, has published periodicals from the very start, runs a rights-based news web site, organizes cultural activities and provides consultancy services on various topics to the LGBTI+ community.

Murat Köylü has been a part of the movement since 2009, and after working at Pozitif Yaşam Derneği/Association of Positive Life has been a full-time member of the Kaos GL team since 2012. Having focused on legislative advocacy from 2013 to 2015, he worked for Kaos GL in the preparation of bills of law and parliamentary questions. We met with Köylü immediately after the obstruction of the 2019 Pride Parade.⁴⁸ Köylü stated that the real break for Kaos GL took place not in 2015 when such rallies and the March on 17 May, the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia were obstructed; but in 2013, after Gezi, when also their visibility increased.

Köylü states that previously they had established relationships with the Ombudsman Institution and the Human Rights Institution of the period, that speakers from these institutions attended their conferences and that it was possible to co-organize workshops. In 2015, the AK Parti member of parliament Nursuna Memecan took part in an European Parliament conference on LGBTI+ rights. There was participation by official appointment in their activities from the Human Rights Commission and Committee on Equal Opportunity for Women and Men. Yet since 2015, they cannot even receive answers for invitations they send out. In fact, at the symposia of - under its new name - the Turkey Human Rights and Equality Institution, openly homophobic speeches are made, and the institution itself backs such discourse used in these speeches on social media.

With Gezi, the doors closed. A much harder, antagonistic, demonizing discourse against civil society began to be disseminated by government representatives in person. After that period, our communication with both the parliament and with public institutions was reduced to almost nothing. An important aspect of 2015 was the [black] propaganda Erdoğan initiated towards an openly homosexual candidate, nominated for the first time by the HDP.⁴⁹

Once this discourse was reflected in pro-government media, they began to face "organized" hate speech, to use Köylü's expression. At this point, their new strategy was to return to society and social structures, since they deemed it ineffective to pay constant interest to everyday politics. At times, they come together with other LGBTI+

⁴⁸ Murat Köylü, Skype interview, Ankara, 2 July 2019.

⁴⁹ Murat Köylü, Skype interview, Ankara, 2 July 2019.

organizations to jointly carry out activities such as, establishing relationships with unions, municipalities and bar associations, developing LGBTI+ human rights reports, striving to establish more effective contact with national and international partners, increasing access to mechanisms especially like the EU and the European Council, and working with health workers, social services specialist and teachers on the well-being of LGBTI+ people.

They took the Yeni Akit newspaper's systematic hate speech to court, including the Constitutional Court (AYM), however all their attempts over the years were left fruitless. The 2014 Constitutional Court verdict that ruled that describing homosexuals as "perverts" was hate speech had been deemed very important by LGBTI+ organizations. However, another Constitutional Court verdict, more recently in 2018, included the term "pervert" within the scope of freedom of expression. This raised the bar of hatred further in pro-government media, paving the way for headlines and reports where the word "ibne [faggot]" could be used.

We felt a sense of despair, of uselessness, as if we were not going to achieve anything without recourse to the ECtHR. We were no longer able to decide whether we should take every single one of them to court. Ending up in a state where you can't do anything else, it doesn't feel effective. With all your partners, you prepare legislation about hate crimes, which would be wonderful if passed into law, and you ask for a view from the AKP, too, and from academics and international institutions. And only because of the arithmetical balance in Parliament, and the customary practice of rejecting all legislative proposals from the opposition, your work of months and even years goes straight to the waste bin. This is not only the case for our work, the entire Parliament operates like this. That creates true exasperation.⁵⁰

A Feeling of Wheels Spinning

Yeni Akit's language of hate is mentioned in our interview with Mor Çatı as well. Gülsun Kanat Dinç describes a similar feeling as "wheels spinning, in the same place". Exhaustion is mentioned in both interviews:

We get really exhausted. Just when you think you have gained something on a certain matter and say, let's develop it by doing this, suddenly you have to go back to square one and try to protect it. That creates terrible disappointment. All the women at Mor Çatı, we all want to work in a more democratic country and want that to spread to include everyone. We don't want it to be so difficult to achieve what we demand; we expect a supportive attitude. Yet, what has built up further after 2015 is the aggression in what Yeni Akit writes about us. Recently, they mentioned us again in their news on alimony payments. We feel incredible exhaustion as we have to deal with all this on the one hand, and the real issue of alimony payments on the other. It is an emotional challenge, but that is how it is to be in the women's movement, to be political. We are in this struggle for the long haul. We know well how patriarchal viewpoints can dominate that government or this social democrat structure.⁵¹

Kaos GL faced another incident that increased the number of difficulties they faced during this period: In 2016, according to a document which was "leaked from military

50 Murat Köylü, Skype interview, Ankara, 2 July 2019.

51 Gülsun Kanat Dinç, personal interview, Istanbul, 17 June 2019.

intelligence” their name was on ISIS’s list of targets. This, naturally, created great fear; and although they closed down their office with an open address and a rainbow flag hanging from its window and moved to a new place, their anxiety continued. That no official protection was provided to them during this period must go down as an important indicator of the state’s failure to fulfil its responsibility. Köylü adds that they did not receive much support from the civil society community during those days, either. Under those circumstances, they cancelled their cultural centre activities. They announced some of their activities on their web site only after they had completed them. Although no one left the team, the number of their volunteers dropped. In fact, some people demanded that their reports/articles be removed from the web site.

You can put up a struggle for what you love. Personally, if Turkey is going to be this kind of a country, I have begun to think, “am I going to spend my life like this?” I was afraid to switch on the television. I didn’t follow social media at night because there were so many bad things happening all the time, I couldn’t sleep. I knew I wasn’t the only one who felt like this. I saw it as a form of evil, evil with civilian support. I felt very alienated. I received psychological support, too. When this was happening to me, and even worse to others, seeing that the government had constant electoral support, meant that I had to fight the hate that could amass within me. That’s what we worked on with the psychologist, too. I always used to say that I shouldn’t hate. I can say that I am feeling better than before now. If I wasn’t at Kaos GL, I would definitely have lost my path.⁵²

The operation targeting human rights defenders at a workshop at Büyükada also created anxiety at both institutions. Especially the arrest of İlknur Üstün and Nalan Erkem from the women’s movement, and later, the imprisonment of Ayşe Düzkan, also from the movement, for her post as guest-editor-in-chief of Özgür Gündem newspaper in solidarity, had an adverse effect on the psychological state of women at Mor Çatı.

Thresholds Crossed

According to the report prepared by the We Will Stop Femicides Platform, during the State of Emergency period, from 20 July 2016 to June 2017, 372 women lost their lives because of male violence. The platform pointed out the fact that the social atmosphere created by the State of Emergency fanned the flames of violence. The report prepared by DİSK [The Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey] titled A Balance Sheet of Women’s Rights Violations during the State of Emergency Period, drew attention, beside the increase in number, also to the change of character in women’s murders, underlining the torture and “savage dimension” added to the intention to kill. Gülsun Kanat Dinç from Mor Çatı states that they do not accept the effort to explain the reason of the violence, but says that it is possible to speak about the grounds for murder with more scientific data. There is another point she would like to draw attention to regarding this period:

What we are seeing in the most recent period is an increase in the number of applications from young women whose families want to take them out of school, who abstain from going home and who suffer violence from their families because of

⁵² Murat Köylü, Skype interview, Ankara, 2 July 2019.

conservative attitudes. We used to get this kind of application in the past as well, but we witnessed more cases from women who had first got married, as families prefer, who then came to us. Now we see that young women, rather than escaping the family home by getting married, or choosing the unknown on the streets, have begun to seek their rights. And this shows us that solidarity is an effective solution method in our struggle.⁵³

Among all the cases of regression in the field of civil society, there are also a few positive developments mentioned by Murat Köylü from Kaos GL: The stand-out was the series of open celebratory social media messages from many municipalities and institutions for 2019 Pride Week. According to Köylü, this was because LGBTI+ rights are now gradually being perceived as an equal citizenship matter, because institutions feel the need to take a stance and display their will as the issue becomes politicized and finally because a threshold has been crossed. He nevertheless thinks that we are at a point that is incomparable to 20 years ago. Köylü refers to the most recent report of the Kadir Has University Gender and Women's Studies Research Centre,⁵⁴ where, to the sentence, "Gay, lesbian and trans individuals must have equal rights in society", in interviews conducted in 2016, 33% voiced approval, and in interviews conducted in 2017, this figure climbed to 48%. Although organized hate speech that increased after this period created a negative effect, "Despite everything, all the negative campaigning, the silencing of LGBTI+ organizations and the state of [mainstream] media, it is encouraging that those who approve is around 40%," says Köylü.⁵⁵

Kaos GL has for a long time received support from the Sweden International Development Collaboration Agency and from various EU funds. In the past, the institution used to organize activities in more than 40 cities, but now the number has dropped to 15-16. However, this is not because of financial difficulties but rather because of the unsuitability of political and social conditions. Mor Çatı, on the other hand, has a series of principles it meticulously implements regarding individual donors and the grants it benefits from. The period we are focusing on has not led to any changes in this.

On 16 February 2018, 91 women's and LGBTI+ organizations made a statement⁵⁶ against the planned extension of the State of Emergency and initiated a petition. They demanded the lifting of the State of Emergency, and the cancellation of non-democratic regulations implemented during this period, with the KHKs/state decrees first and foremost among them, and stated, "We will not get used to the State of Emergency becoming ordinary!". These institutions, today still, both continue to strive to repair the damage caused by the normalized State of Emergency, and seek progress in a much deeper-rooted issue as well.

53 Gülsun Kanat Dinç, personal interview, Istanbul, 17 June 2019.

54 <https://www.khas.edu.tr/uploads/pdf-doc-vb/toplumsal-cinsiyet-ve-kadin-algisi-arastirma-si-2019-sonuclari-2.pdf> <https://gender.khas.edu.tr/en>

55 Murat Köylü, Skype interview, Ankara, 2 July 2019.

Being an International Institution

133 foreign civil society institutions are active in Turkey.⁵⁶ 85 of them began work after 2010. Among these institutions, the high number of those active in the field of education, and especially regarding those founded after 2010, of those active in the field of humanitarian aid, is striking. This increase can be read as an indicator of the expansion of civic space in recent years towards the field of humanitarian aid. The greatest factor in this expansion is the war in Syria. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' data, Turkey hosts the highest refugee population in the world with 4 million people, and 3,6 million of them are those who were forced to migrate because of the war in Syria.⁵⁷ The 2015 report of the World Bank⁵⁸ reveals that civil society organizations play an important role in meeting the needs of Syrian refugees.

However, the number of international NGOs active in the field of human rights that have an office in Turkey is quite low. For this part of the report we met with senior representatives of two institutions that have been active in Turkey for many years. Both institutions carry out research and advocacy on an international scale; one specifically describes itself as an "institution that produces campaigns". Although one of the institutions bears the name of an international organization, since it is not legally the branch of a general headquarters, it is not included on the list of foreign institutions we referred to in the beginning.

⁵⁶ See https://www.siviltoplum.gov.tr/kurumlar/siviltoplum.gov.tr/istatistikler/YabanciSTK/izin_verilen_listesi_tr.pdf

⁵⁷ See UNHCR, Turkey Fact Sheet, October 2019.

⁵⁸ Turkey's Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis and the Road Ahead, December 2015.

International civil society institutions begin their operations when there is a country-specific demand, and when an interest and initiative develops for institutional activity in that country. Whether there is a hierarchical structure between country branches and the secretariat, and their decision-making mechanisms varies according to the organization. At both institutions we met with, the initiative of rights' defenders in Turkey was instrumental in the institution beginning its actions in Turkey. It would be appropriate, at this point, to mention the memorandum published by TÜSEV in 2016 on the registration processes of NGOs in Turkey. According to this comparative research which was carried out in different countries, Turkey, "is the country that demands the highest number of documents from foreign NGOs for registration, it demands different criteria than national NGOs both during the registration process and for the assessment of registration applications, and it is also the only country that seeks the approval of a higher authority for registration, and does not determine an official assessment period for the assessment of the application."⁵⁹ Although the operation of foreign institutions in Turkey has been made difficult through bureaucratic obstacles, they try to overcome this by trying different methods; and even, in some cases, choose not to initiate legal institutionalization in Turkey, or to found, instead of a branch, an association that is legally independent of the main secretariat. An institution representative that we interviewed stated that their relationship with the main secretariat was of a hierarchical nature, while the representative of the other institution said that they had a more horizontal organization. However, in both cases, they experience the changing effects of being part of an international organizational structure acting under the same name.

Both institutions carry out advocacy activities in the international field. One of the representatives we interviewed said this: "No doubt there are Europe-centred institutions that the secretariat can access more effectively than us, and it is the secretariat that carries out advocacy with those institutions." Not only in terms of advocacy, but in terms of providing information regarding developments in Turkey in general, too, international institutions have the upper hand:

We learn a lot, and we have networks where we can express ourselves. We find it very important that our reports and comments on certain issues can reach any part of the world the moment we share them, and can be met with interest in a country difficult to access and initiate a new communication. Especially in cases when we think differently to the general view that has emerged abroad, we have the chance to share aspects of the issue which the international public has not taken into account.⁶⁰

Having such an impact in the international field has different implications under different political conditions. Organizations that seek to activate a mechanism of international pressure regarding problems experienced by civil society actors in Turkey can face even greater pressure and be perceived as threats.

59 TÜSEV, *Örgütlenme Özgürlüğü Açısından Yabancı STK'ların Kayıt Süreçleri/Registration Processes of Foreign CSOs in Turkey under Freedom of Association*, 2016.

60 Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 June 2019.

On the other hand, one may think that being part of an international network and bearing the title of an organization recognized at international level would protect institutions from pressure on a national level. However, in Turkey, there have been cases where such a protection mechanism did not operate at all. The Turkey Office of Amnesty International became the first country office among Amnesty organizations across the world to have both its chairperson and its director imprisoned at the same time.

The Büyükada Case

Amnesty International Turkey Branch Chairperson Taner Kılıç was detained on 6 June 2017 and later arrested on charges of being a "member of the Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization (FETÖ)". A month later, on 5 July 2017, nine rights defenders including Amnesty International Turkey Branch Director İdil Eser, were detained on Büyükada, where they were attending an educational workshop titled "The Protection of Human Rights Defenders and Digital Security". After 14 days in detention, the rights defenders were brought before a prosecutor on 18 July 2017, and their arrest was requested on allegations of "committing a crime on behalf of an organization while not a member" and "membership of an armed terrorist organization". On 4 October 2017, Taner Kılıç, too, was added as a suspect to the bill of indictment. A smear campaign was carried out by the pro-government media against the rights defenders during the time they remained under arrest. Describing them as "secret agents", "spies" and "chaos managers", news reports were made including speculation on the rights defenders' "ties with terrorist organizations". At the first hearing on 25 October 2017, the eight people in pre-trial arrest including İdil Eser were released. Taner Kılıç was released on 15 August 2018 after more than 14 months of imprisonment. The case continues.⁶¹

Even though its protective influence may be restricted, institutions within a global network can learn a lot from each other's experiences. Civic space is under threat not only in Turkey; in many different countries right-wing populist governments implement state policies aimed at narrowing this field and suffocating political voices using different methods, and with a certain level of public support. International institutions can draw up comparative analyses of such different experiences and provide support for each other:

Collaboration, information and experience transfer are very important. Acting collectively rather than alone is more effective in countries that are experiencing such polarization. In regional meetings, for instance, the Hungary branch and Ukraine branch shared their experiences with us. And we shared our experiences and the strategies we follow with them.⁶²

The representative of the other institution we interviewed is also able to make a comparison between different regions. This representative states that it would be wrong to think that Turkey displayed completely unique attributes, but that it nevertheless did not fit with most of the familiar regional patterns of the EU or other international

61 For more detailed information about the Büyükada case see <https://www.amnesty.org.tr/icerik/turkiye-hak-savunuculari-davasi-hakkinda-bilmeniz-gerken-8-sey>, Process of Investigations and Arrests Targeting Rights Defenders: A Report of Information and Assessment, Free Rights Defenders; Keep the Volume Up for Rights Defenders in Turkey <https://www.sessizkalma.org/defender/taner-kilic/>

62 Skype interview, Istanbul, 3 July 2019.

institutions. This representative also underlines that it is necessary to distinguish Turkey from certain Central Asian, Middle Eastern or African countries defined as dictatorships. In these countries, the institutionalization and systematization of oppressive mechanisms at dictatorship level, on the one hand, reduces the decisive means of the struggle, while the fact that the rules are set, enables institutions to be prepared for risks.⁶³ While in countries like Turkey, civil society actors continue the struggle in a state of great uncertainty and unpredictability.

Difficulties Experienced in Accessing Decision-Makers

International institutions, too, like institutions that operate on a national level –or even more than them– aim to establish relationships at different levels of bureaucracy. Carrying out lobbying activities in the international field, adopting this as a global method might lead establishing a constant relationship with government officials and mid-level bureaucrats on a local level.

An institution representative who said that they carried out work on different countries at the Turkey offices described their relationship with the government in the following words:

We carry out work on human rights issues significant on a world-scale, like issues in Egypt, Palestine, Myanmar and China. For instance, the government in Turkey adopted our advice on Palestine and Myanmar. Therefore, we could say that we have a different relationship with the state. We do not share the same opinion with the government on some topics, and on some other topics we work closely with the state of Turkey, with ministries.⁶⁴

Their reporting on Turkey has, at times, been met with reaction, and smear campaigns in the media. The representative tells how they worked under very difficult circumstances following the coup attempt, adding that they were also criticized for not doing enough:

There was a difficult period after the coup attempt. We work in the field of human rights and democracy. We condemned the incidents of violence that took place after the coup, but we were also frequently criticized by the state: what they said was, why didn't you condemn it in a stronger manner, you didn't support our struggle for democracy... After we published our report on torture after the coup, we received criticism and a refutation from the President's Office. After our reports on curfews and enforced migration, a minister had made a statement saying, they supported the coup anyway, there are FETÖists among them.⁶⁵

In the most recent period, it has become difficult to carry out effective initiatives towards change by performing advocacy to decision makers. Let alone having any influence over decision-making processes, even criticism of decisions that have been made cannot be freely shared. Another institution representative spoke of how activities and reports on public-private partnership policies drew as much –or rather,

63 Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 June 2019.

64 Skype interview, Istanbul, 3 July 2019.

65 Skype interview, Istanbul, 3 July 2019.

more- reaction than reporting or monitoring activities on public policies: "There is a stronger reaction against studies that seek to analyse the financing of politics, to analyse political economy."⁶⁶

International Institutions, Local Partners

Under the circumstances of the new period, such as the central government almost completely closing its doors to civil society institutions; public institutions themselves becoming less functional by the day; and limited reforms –if any- that have been introduced remaining on paper and the failure to supervise or observe their implementation, civil society seeks different levels at which it can create an impact. As one of the institution representatives we interviewed persistently underlined, working with local administrations at a local scale is one of the new methods applied with the goals of feasibility and success. International institutions, in order to cope with the narrowing of the field, include local planes more in their work at global and national scale. Even if their work has begun "in places where they share similar principles and values at certain levels", it is a very important step to "see concrete changes taking place on local level that motivate them, to make them feel the exhilaration they need". Another problem international institutions can encounter is that they are sometimes not perceived to be "from around here":

The widespread perception of thinking, "they aren't from around here", expressed regarding international movements must have had an impact on our failure to establish certain contacts with public institutions, and the fact that our contacts with a part of civil society not being at the level we desire. We form our discourse here, we take all our financial and administrative decisions here, but not everyone is aware of that, and we are perceived as not being from around here.⁶⁷

However, despite all the issues, they do not perceive it as an insurmountable challenge.

The establishment of platforms for institutions to act together has emerged as a method of struggle along with the narrowing in the field of civil society in the recent period. It is important that international institutions join such platforms since their resources, capacity and fields of access are broader. The institution representative says, "I have added goals involving the establishment of non-official coalitions, platforms bringing together different civil society institutions to every project I have written in the past few years", stating that functions that such platforms should have, and how they should act needs to be considered:

I think that meetings where institutions that already meet regularly get together under a new name and expect a different result may be creating a somewhat vicious cycle. It is not for me to give advice to civil society. (...) We, who practice civil-societism professionally, having turned it into a bit of a career, could perhaps focus on setting the table, but not sitting at the table but on the side, to listen to them in order to reconstruct our own discourse, to learn from them and to have them debate to gain results.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 June 2019.

⁶⁷ Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 June 2019.

⁶⁸ Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 June 2019.

Volunteer Work

The professionalization of the field of civil society is much more distinct and visible in international institutions. Some of these institutions are criticized for their bureaucratization on a global scale, and the lack of connection with their members. In such institutions, the roles and responsibilities of various positions like membership, paid employeeship and volunteer support are all defined professionally. We observed two different approaches regarding volunteerism in the institutions we interviewed. One institution, in addition to project obligations and periodical work related to the international movement, also carries out some activities without funding, through volunteer work. The representative we spoke to states that, thanks to this, even at times when there have been problems related to projects and funding resources, they have continued such activities under all circumstances.⁶⁹ The other institution representative does not use the term "volunteerism" but underlines the overtime work, the work on the week-end, they have had to put in when they were under threat on an institutional level. The representative states that an extra effort is necessary to prevent such occurrences. The same institution representative explains that there was a period when they had difficulty finding staff: "We had five vacant positions, one or two people had resigned because they found it too risky to work with us. During that period, we couldn't fill those positions, people did not want to work with us at a human rights institution."⁷⁰ Professionalization and volunteer activity remain issues that need to be reviewed and reconsidered in the light of current developments. Such problems are emphasized not only by institutions active in the international field but also by the other actors of the field of civil society.

The moral motivation support provided by those working in this field to each other is perhaps more important now than ever. Especially those who do not have to suffer the direct results of oppression, those who have not been detained or tried, and those who do not feel the direct everyday threat of punishment, may trivialize or disregard the problems they are experiencing in person. However, as people we have met with have said, based on their own personal conditions, everyone is, to some extent, affected by this transformation. It is important to be aware of this and not underestimate the gravity of the situation one is experiencing.

69 Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 June 2019.

70 Skype interview, Istanbul, 3 July 2019.

Diyarbakır, Narrowed down by Conflict

With a population of 1 million 700 thousand, Diyarbakır has always been a political and religious centre for Kurds in Turkey. The city has experienced the gravest impact of the clashes that have continued for 35 years along the axis of the Kurdish conflict, and the city's civil society has also been formed under the influence of the conflict. Some institutions act to find solutions to problems directly caused by the conflict, or in order to contribute to the democratic solution of the Kurdish conflict. Language rights, enforced migration and its repercussions, impoverishment, cultural rights, and most recently, the refugee issue are leading agenda items. Although they may not act in matters directly related to the conflict, Kurdish identity and its consequences determine the context of the whole of civil society. In Nurcan Baysal and Şeyhmus Diken's work titled *Kürdistan'da Sivil Toplum/Civil Society in Kurdistan*, it is underlined that "almost all NGOs in Kurdistan side with a Kurdistanian viewpoint, and fearlessly express aloud that they are on the side of the Kurds' struggle for rights".⁷¹ The people of Diyarbakır constantly experience the impact of conflict in their everyday life, and have been politicized under the influence of this experience, and naturally, this has a decisive impact on the field of civil society in Diyarbakır.

For this study, we met with representatives of three institutions active in Diyarbakır. One of them is Vahap Coşkun, from the Diyarbakır Political and Social Research Institute (DİSA) founded in 2010 in Diyarbakır in order to carry out work on Turkey's economic, social, political and cultural problems, with the Kurdish issue first and foremost among them.⁷² The second person we met with is a representative of a research centre that carries out field research and reporting on political, social and economic topics. And the last person we interviewed is the representative of a rights organization that works more with conservative circles. All three people that we interviewed, independently of their current positions, have been involved for many years in the rights struggle as part of different institutions and organizations, and know Diyarbakır and

⁷¹ Şeyhmus Diken and Nurcan Baysal, *Kürdistan'da Sivil Toplum [Civil Society in Kurdistan]*, İletişim Yayınları, 2015.

⁷² Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 13 September 2019.

the region very well. Of course, Diyarbakır is a city that hosts institutions that carry out work in many different fields. Many institutions, from those working in the struggle against gender-based discrimination to those in the field of artistic freedom and freedom of expression, have been affected in different ways from the shrinkage experienced in the most recent period. Because of the necessity to limit our study, within the scope of this report, in Diyarbakır we only interviewed institutions involved in the struggle for human rights and produced knowledge, and carried out advocacy work.

When we asked the persons we interviewed to first describe in general outline the civil society institutions and actors that carry out rights-based struggles in Diyarbakır, all three first underlined the issue of extreme polarization. Institutions known for their proximity to the Kurdish movement, and Islamic conservative civil society institutions are the two main groups on the basis of their general political engagements. Especially since 2002, when the AK Parti came to power with the support of different Islamic and conservative circles, the political field in the region is dominated by the AK Parti and HDP (previously HADEP, DEHAP, DTP, BDP). It was an important theme that was accentuated in the interviews that if not the whole but a great part of civil society had disconnected from each other on the basis of these two political positions, and that the voices of the two poles of civil society often did not reach each other. With the intensification of the conflict in the most recent period, the chasm between the two poles of civil society deepened further, creating a situation where it became difficult for these two groups to get together even for practical purposes. Precisely at this point, let us underline that all institutions we interviewed described themselves as “independent”. However, as it was emphasized in one interview, “sometimes what matters is not how you define yourself, but on which side others see you”. A civil society representative working with conservative circles, underlined the fact that a new diversification among Islamic, conservative civil society had also begun to emerge following the divergence within the AK Parti in the most recent period.⁷³

Another noteworthy point in our discussion of the current situation of civil society in Diyarbakır – determined by Kurdish identity, over-politicized in general, and defined mainly by the two main paths of politics – was that the Gezi actions, mentioned in most of the other interviews, were not referenced at all. Although, with reference to the 1990s, our interviewees reminded us that the region was never a zone of freedoms, the period after the summer of 2015 and the end of the resolution process, is defined as the period when civic space began to contract.

The Possibilities Created by the Resolution Process and After

Society as a whole was paralyzed when in July 2015 the resolution process was effectively ended, clashes recommenced this time in urban areas, and security policies were increased with curfews implemented in the entire region. Curfews continue to this day although they are not as intense as they were during 2015 and 2016. According to the data of the TİHV Documentation Centre, in the period between 16 August 2015 and 1 July 2019, in 11 provinces, at least 51 districts a total of 369 official curfews were

⁷³ Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 14 September 2019.

declared. Diyarbakır is the province where the highest number of curfews have been implemented (214).⁷⁴ During the period of curfews, a high number of people lost their lives, the language of peace was swiftly abandoned, and the boundaries of what was previously possible to talk about and express were suddenly narrowed. It was precisely during this period, when the language of conflict dominated, that Tahir Elçi, Chair of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, was first targeted because he refused to describe the PKK as a “terrorist organization”, and then murdered during a press statement.

Tahir Elçi, the Chairperson of the Diyarbakır Bar Association, was murdered on 28 November 2015, as he was holding a press statement in front of Dört Ayaklı Minare [the Four-Legged Minaret of Sheikh Matar Mosque] which had been damaged during the clashes, in the Sur district of Diyarbakır. Tahir Elçi was an esteemed lawyer and human rights defender who was the bar chairperson, a member of İHD/Human Rights Association, a member of the Bar Associations Union of Turkey Human Rights Centre Scientific Advisory Board and a member of the TİHV Founders’ Committee. A criminal suit had been filed against him after he stated, on a television program titled Tarafsız Bölge [lit. “Neutral Zone”] broadcast on the television channel CNN Türk on 15 October 2015, that he did not define the PKK as a terrorist organization, and he had been made into a target on mainstream media channels. Since Elçi’s murder, a court case has still not been filed on the grounds that it has not been possible to determine the suspects. A report prepared by the London-based Forensic Architecture team in February 2019 and presented to the Diyarbakır Chief Prosecutor’s Office, proposes that the police officers on the scene be assessed and investigated as suspects.⁷⁵ Almost a year after the report was presented, three police officers were formally identified as suspects, and on 9 and 10 October 2020, the investigating prosecutor took their statements. The investigation continues.

The Murder of Tahir Elçi

The name of Tahir Elçi who for many years carried out a struggle for justice and human rights and always retained his principled stance is kept alive in the Tahir Elçi Human Rights Foundation, established in Diyarbakır in 2019. The Foundation follows the path laid by Elçi to continue its activities in the fields of human rights and peace.

After the force of curfews which narrowed civic space by the use of arms, the declaration of a State of Emergency following the coup attempt that took place in the summer of 2016 meant that a new method was adopted, and this time, by closing civil society institutions and imposing restrictions on all types of political activity, the circumstances deteriorated to an even higher state of crisis. An assessment of the number of associations closed during the State of Emergency declared after the July 15 coup attempt reveals that Diyarbakır comes fourth after the 3 large cities of Turkey.⁷⁶ (You can find data related to closed civil society institutions in this report’s section titled “Doors Closed, Doors Opened”).

⁷⁴ See <https://tihv.org.tr/16-agustos-2015-1-temmuz-2019-tarihleri-arasinda-ilan-edilen-sokaga-cikma-yasaklari/>

⁷⁵ See <https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-killing-of-tahir-elci>

⁷⁶ See http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Ola%C4%9Fan%C3%BC-st%C3%BC-Hal_17042018.pdf

Diyarbakır's civil society is used to restrictions imposed by the state. However, actors that were further empowered through means created by the resolution process, first experienced what the process could offer on hand, yet with the recommencement of the conflict, felt the impact of narrowing in a much graver manner. Diken and Baysal's work mentions how the field of civil society had broadened compared to the past, and how things that could not be discussed in the past could be talked about, describing the year 2014 when the research was carried out as a period of "healing".⁷⁷ Again, to use the words of the authors, wounds that "had not fully healed" began to bleed again in the post-2015 period. DİSA Chairperson Vahap Coşkun explains the impact of the end of the resolution process, and the influence of the previous period in the following words:

The most important development is the ending of the resolution process. If, despite all the turmoil, Turkey had been able to sustain the process and progress along the platform of democratic politics, then, civil society could also have continued to develop and contribute to the solution. In the context of civil society, the resolution process had two significant features. First, the peaceful and democratic environment encouraged civil society; matters that could not be discussed at all, or were only whispered, were brought out onto the agenda, and civil society organizations found the means to say more. The second is that the intense debates continuing in public space helped distil and mature the idea of peace.⁷⁸

Taking to the Streets

People we interviewed stated that the part of democratic struggle and civil society activities that spilled out onto the street has been almost entirely suppressed in Diyarbakır, too, as across Turkey in general. Civil society actors, as always, continue to act by taking certain risks on a personal level. However, this perception of risk and threat has spread across the whole of society today:

There is a sense that the field of threat has grown excessively. (...) And when you ask them, what are you doing, they respond, I don't actually have to do anything to feel threatened. Nowadays, the excessively violent interventions targeting street actions can result in people preferring to stay back. The plane of anxiety that has emerged regarding people constructing their own future is quite prominent.⁷⁹

The increase in the risks individuals take when participating in all types of democratic protest action or expressing their views, or the "emerging plane of anxiety" is also related, according to a civil society representative we met with, to Kurdish society becoming an "intra-system" society.

Three years ago, if, as a teacher, you took to the street and marched, the worst that could happen was that you would be tear-gassed; now, you are either detained for a long period, or you lose your livelihood. Detention now also means that you are subjected to recorded profiling, and that is how the lists for expulsions are drawn up. Or, you are detained and there is the possibility that you will be imprisoned for 500 days without seeing a judge, just like Osman Kavala. You may spend a year in

77 Şeyhmus Diken and Nurcan Baysal, *Kürdistan'da Sivil Toplum [Civil Society in Kurdistan]*, İletişim Yayınları, 2015: 19.

78 Vahap Coşkun, personal interview, Diyarbakır, 13 September 2019.

79 Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 13 September 2019.

prison and be released at the first hearing. Kurds are no longer a community outside of the system: they are public servants, they are shopkeepers, they have families and children. In other words, the price of taking to the streets has increased and the interest in street actions has dropped, the state has succeeded in criminalizing street actions.⁸⁰

The civil society representative that made this comment said that, precisely for this reason, they preferred to act as a smaller-scale group rather than a democratic mass organization. Not only street actions, but entering into a relationship via membership is perceived as a risk. Those who have the means prefer to support institutions by making material donations without becoming a member. As the representative of another institution that carries out reporting stated, cases where report writers have asked for their names not to be revealed have become more frequent.

A Change in the Law on Associations

According to the Regulation to Amend the Associations' Regulation, which was published in the Official Gazette to come into force on 1 September 2018, the names and surnames, Republic of Turkey identity numbers, profession and education statuses, date of acceptance to and leave/expulsion from membership and information related to all legal personalities have to be notified via the Associations Information System within 30 days of the date of the relevant procedure. This change was perceived as a breach of the Law on the Protection of Personal Data, while it was also interpreted as the profiling of association members.⁸¹ At the time of the writing of this report, a change to the Law on Associations no.5253 is being debated at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, which would provide legal basis for this practice. The Directorate General of Relations with Civil Society published a statement when the proposal to amend the law was met with reaction, defending the change on the grounds that it was necessary to prevent memberships not in the knowledge of citizens and fulfil the requirements of participatory democracy.⁸²

The visible presence in everyday urban life of armoured vehicles, armed army and police units which you come across at every step in Diyarbakır pose a threat in themselves to civic space. According to the Research Report on Violations of the Right to Life That Took Place by Armoured Vehicle Crashes in the Years 2008-2018 in the East and Southeast Anatolian Region published by the İHD Diyarbakır Branch in July 2019, in the last decade, at least 63 armoured vehicle crashes took place, and 36 people, 16 of them children, lost their lives. After Şırnak, Diyarbakır is the city where the most incidents took place, and 30 of the 36 people that passed away lost their lives in incidents that took place after 2016.⁸³ This "armoured presence" which causes violations of the right to life is completed by the presence of security forces. In Diyarbakır, police and the army are everywhere. There is considerable intervention to meetings organized by institutions or organizations.

80 Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 14 September 2019.

81 See <http://www.sivilsayfalar.org/2018/12/27/sivil-toplum-fisleniyor-mu/>

82 For the statement of the Directorate General of Relations with Civil Society see <https://www.sivil-toplum.gov.tr/basin-aciklamasi-22-11-2019>

83 <https://www.ihddiyarbakir.org/Content/uploads/b1043412-4f2d-4ba4-968f-d595de2d989e.pdf>

You organize a human rights school, a load of people who never took part in any civil society activity turn up. But when the police comes through the door and asks, "What are you doing here?" even if you manage to smooth things over, for some who are there, this causes anxiety because of the sense, "Why did the police come here?" Or the Saturday Mothers... They cannot take step outside the door of the İHD building. In İstanbul, at least they can go out onto the street. That has changed, too, in the recent period: In the past, you may not have been able to leave the İHD in İstanbul, but here, at Diyarbakır İHD, you would not have been able to push people in. Now, the state suppresses resistance easier here. You cannot carry out a single action on the street.⁸⁴

At the end of the 2000s, the Saturday People/Mothers took their struggle against enforced disappearances outside İstanbul. The action held by the İHD Diyarbakır Commission for the Disappeared at Koşuyolu Park every Saturday was banned on its 499th week. Since the 500th week they have realized their actions inside the İHD Diyarbakır Branch. At the time when we held the interviews, the actions of families claiming that their children had been kidnapped by the PKK had begun in front of the HDP building. The media was showing considerable interest in these actions, and some artists travelled to Diyarbakır and took part in the actions in support. The civil society representative we interviewed discusses this situation as an indicator of the dividedness of civic space:

The state's job is to not discriminate between protestors, it is to provide them with equal opportunities. You have several [rights'] mechanisms operate for the mothers sitting in front of the HDP, while other mothers sit, not in front of a political party building but in a park, but you won't let them outside the door. We used to write reports on the period of conflict, yet since the declaration of the State of Emergency, we no longer can – we haven't been able to go to Nusaybin, for instance. We could not write curfew reports during the State of Emergency. As far as I can see, the state is insisting, thinking, "I have suppressed civil society, that's where they can stay, best if they don't raise their heads". That's why it doesn't allow your field to develop.⁸⁵

Changing Fields of Work

With the declaration of the State of Emergency, in the recent period, in addition to the closing of associations, resourcing problems also began to appear for projects carried out with financial support. While there was a serious flow of funding that allowed the establishment of many professional institutions in Diyarbakır, generally during the 2000s and specifically during the resolution process, it is now being said that these funds, although not cut off completely, are being reoriented towards different fields of support.

If the project you present has a political nature and touches upon the position of the current government, in recent times, that kind of project has not received funding. Providing funding to more sterile, less critical projects that do not include political arguments is easier for these types of bodies. After the declaration of the State of Emergency, organizations operating with funding faced serious difficulties. Some changed their content, focused on child development for instance, or with women's issues, but never including a single political suggestion. Yet both the child and the woman are political subjects, too.⁸⁶

84 Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 14 September 2019.

85 Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 14 September 2019.

86 Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 13 September 2019.

Vahap Coşkun, too, said that although they were independent from states, international funders did take the sensitivities of states into consideration, and operated in a manner that would not expose themselves to danger. He described the narrowing in the field of subjects that could be studied in the following words:

The possibility of working freely, on a subject of your choice, is narrowed down. This is because even the stronger funding institutions, in order not to draw the ire of the government, act in an overly cautious manner, and prefer to work on subjects that won't cause trouble. For instance, they stay away from issues directly related to the Kurdish problem, but prefer projects that focus on the problems of migrants and refugees, and especially the integration of Syrians. In other words, international funding institutions, in order not to become a target, turn towards issues prioritized on the government's agenda, like supporting housewives.⁸⁷

The increase in projects aimed at housewives was the first example that came to mind of all three people we met with in Diyarbakır when we were discussing changing fields of work. They said that this kind of project could be meaningful, and serve a good purpose by bringing together women from different ethnic belongings and identities. However, it was added that this work, too, was not spread across society, and that neither information about the initial organization nor the outcome of such projects was shared with the public. According to the people we interviewed, this is both because the performance of activities in fields that do not intersect in the now more prominent climate of polarization in Diyarbakır, and the dwindling effort shown by institutions working with funding to promote their work. This narrowing in the fields of work was a subject underlined in other sections, too, however, the fact that the Kurdish issue is considered particularly "dangerous" has of course affected actors in Diyarbakır that will inevitably touch upon this issue a lot more. The closure by State of Emergency KHKs/state decrees of associations that work in the field of humanitarian aid, and often with municipalities, indicates the boundaries of being considered "dangerous". In Batman, the Association for Sustainable Development and the Struggle Against Impoverishment, in Diyarbakır, the Sarmaşık Association for Sustainable Development and the Struggle Against Impoverishment and the Rojava Association for Cooperation and Solidarity, in Siirt, the Thousand Hopes Association for Sustainable Development and the Struggle Against Impoverishment and in Van, the Association for Sustainable Development and the Struggle Against Impoverishment were all closed by KHKs/state decrees. The fact that the vacuum felt after the closing of the Sarmaşık Association in Diyarbakır was highly tangible was a matter also voiced in our interviews.

After the Appointment of Kayyums/State-Trustees

As we have stated in different chapters of this report, the impact of civil society organizations active in Turkey on local or central decision makers is quite restricted. Recent state policies have further cemented this situation. In the specific case of Diyarbakır, although it has been stated that municipalities under the administration of the HDP and its antecedents have been more open to civil society representatives,

87 Vahap Coşkun, personal interview, Diyarbakır, 13 September 2019.

the appointment of kayyums/state trustees has closed that field as well. 94 of the 99 municipalities to which kayyums/state trustees were appointed in the period from 21 July 2016 to 20 March 2018, were municipalities under the administration of the DBP/ Democratic Regions Party [a fraternal party of the HDP]. In addition to the municipalities themselves, on 27 January 2017, a kayyum/state trustee was also appointed to the Southeastern Anatolia Region Municipalities Union.⁸⁸ An institution representative explained the deficiency in civil society access to the government precisely by emphasizing this point:

What executive power does the local authority have? For instance, municipalities have a field where they can produce policies that could solve many women's problems in the area through women's work, the appointment of kayyums/state trustees disqualifies such practices.⁸⁹

Likewise, Vahap Coşkun from DİSA states that, although he has recently finished a work that directly targeted municipalities, the appointment of kayyums/state trustees has rendered his work meaningless:

We, for instance, carried out a study on the civilian inspection of local administrations and the reflection of social demands at the level of local administrations. We prepared a report that analysed the work of Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality and DİSKİ (Diyarbakır Water and Sewerage Administration General Directorate) within this scope. Our aim was to collectively discuss this report with local administrators and civil society representatives and then present it to the public. However, just as we were organizing these meetings, a kayyum/state trustee was appointed and the entire report was wasted. Because, before all else, this new situation created a problem about which authority to address.⁹⁰

The Importance of Getting Together

Today, in order to close the gap caused not only by state pressure but also by polarization in society, there are efforts to bring people together around themes such as identity-based rights, or certain themes specific to Diyarbakır.

In such a difficult time, even coming together for its own sake is very important. But we used to get together with a focus on peace, the resolution process, etc. Yet we have also seen the drawbacks of that. After a certain point, actors, rather than disseminating their own institutional stance, began to criticize the opposite side. (...) The issue quickly evolves into an argument over political positions. Or they just don't come when they are invited. So it is more meaningful to gather Islamist NGOs, understand their problem, and then gradually organize the get-togethers.⁹¹

DİSA began to organize intellectual debates rather than discussions over recent politics:

We do not want to organize work that is entirely locked in on politics and current political developments. We strive to organize events that would help us understand

88 http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Ola%C4%9Fan%C3%BC-st%C3%BC-Hal_17042018.pdf

89 Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 13 September 2019.

90 Vahap Coşkun, personal interview, Diyarbakır, 13 September 2019.

91 Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 14 September 2019.

different themes, the historical background in all its dimensions and actors. For instance, we discussed "The Republic's Construction of Identity in Diyarbakır" with Ercan Çağlayan, Diyarbakır's architecture and urbanization with Mehmet Atlı and Kurdish literature with Selim Temo. These activities drew and formed their own audience; a part of this audience is closely interested in politics while another part keep their distance to political issues.⁹²

It was stated that the fact that despite being a metropolitan municipality, the smaller population of Diyarbakır when compared to Istanbul, meant that its field of civil society was narrower, and that this prevented the deepening of the gap between individuals and institutions:

Although ruptures develop rapidly, in terms of civil society actors, the fact that people in the region personally know each other and have previously worked together, prevents institutional structures from completely losing their ties, even if it is via personal links, or weaker links. And that is how they can come together when there is a possibility to discuss solutions. But only when there is the suitable environment for it...⁹³

92 Vahap Coşkun, personal interview, Diyarbakır, 13 September 2019.

93 Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 13 September 2019.

As the Field for All Kinds of “Expression” Narrows...

In the period that began with the bomb attack targeting a public rally of the HDP in Diyarbakır, two days before the 7 June 2015 General Election and lasted until the 1 November (2015) elections, massacres in different places like Suruç, Ankara and Sultanahmet that resulted in massive losses of life and the return of daily clashes with the collapse of the resolution process created the tendency to stay away from crowded public spaces. Both this anxiety, and in some cases, a period of mourning, meant that various culture and art activities were either cancelled or postponed. The incident that had an even deeper impact on the world of culture and art was the State of Emergency declared following the failed coup attempt that took place on 15 July 2016. Article 11 of the Law on State of Emergency,⁹⁴ dated 1983, contains provisions that enables the suspension of individual rights and freedoms, and thus creates various negative outcomes for many institutions and activities in the field of culture and art.

The first KHK/state decree was issued on 23 July 2016, and with KHKs many institutions of culture and art were closed, periodicals were either withdrawn from sale or their printing was obstructed. Many artists and writers who also worked in academia and had signed the petition titled “We will not be a party to this crime!” were discharged from their positions; with the removal of academics deemed critical of the government, the teaching staff at relevant departments changed in character. Along with many publishing houses, the journals Evrensel Kültür, Tiroj and Özgürlük Dünyası

94 For the Law on State of Emergency no.2935 <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.2935.pdf>
For English <http://www.judiciaryofturkey.gov.tr/English-version-of-State-of-Emergency-Law-available-on-our-website>

were also closed. The Antakya and İzmir Ayışığı Art Centres and the İzmir Yenikapı Theatre⁹⁵ were temporarily closed by KHK/state decree. writer Aslı Erdoğan and linguist Necmiye Alpay, members of the Özgür Gündem Newspaper Advisory Board were arrested. Writer and journalist Ahmet Altan, who was arrested within the scope of the investigation of the 15 July coup attempt, remained in prison as this report was being prepared.

Other than instances when the State of Emergency Law was directly applied, the aforementioned period was also the scene of arbitrary practices on the pretext of the State of Emergency, and decisions that amounted to self-censorship, fuelled by the general social and political climate. Many activities like concerts, plays, panels and festivals planned at universities were prevented by administrative decisions. The atmosphere of political repression also egged on "civilian" lynching, like raids on publishing houses, beatings of writers and meat cleaver attacks on concert venues. The pro-government media made reports that directly targeted certain artists with opposition views.

The Kurdish provinces felt the repression in a much more devastating manner in this field as well. The closing through KHKs/State Decrees of, in addition to magazines, newspapers and periodicals, also of institutions such as culture and art centres, the changing of activity programs at municipalities where kayyums/state trustees have been appointed, cancellations through governorate decrees have all led to cultural desertification and the withdrawal of the Kurdish language from public space. Even the Kurdish children's television channel Zarok TV received a fine from the Supreme Board of Radio and Television for broadcasting two Kurdish songs.⁹⁶

SUSMA, the Platform Against Censorship and Self-Censorship was founded on 1 September 2016. With the support it has received, first from the MATRA programme provided by the government of Netherlands, and since 1 December 2017, under the joint-execution of the P24 and Article 19 associations and within the framework of the European Commission's Support to Civil Society Networks and Platforms Program, SUSMA archives freedom of expression violations in the field of culture and arts. Cases SUSMA compiles from open sources have been published as reports for the periods December 2016-17⁹⁷ and December 2017-18.⁹⁸ The end of the State of Emergency has led to a slight decrease in density, however interventions to this field through legal, administrative or arbitrary practices continue today.

Films with a High Potential of "Undesirability"

This year, the 12th edition of the Documentarist Istanbul Documentary Days is being organized, and since the organization focuses on the kind of documentary with a high-

95 Nazlı Masatçı, an actress at Yenikapı Theatre, was arrested on 30 January 2019 on charges of "propaganda of a terrorist organization".

96 The Supreme Board of Radio and Television gave Zarok TV a monetary fine that corresponded to 2%-5% of its advertisement income, and a broadcast suspension for five programs for violating the principle that broadcast "cannot praise or encourage terrorism, cannot make terrorist organizations appear powerful or in the right, or cannot reflect the forbidding or deterrent aspects of terrorist organizations".

97 http://susma24.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Tu_rkiye_de_Sansu_r_-ve_Otosansur_ENG.pdf

98 http://susma24.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/susma_rapor_en_2018.pdf

er potential of “undesirability”, it constitutes a good example to take a closer look at the field of film where censorship and repression are most experienced and visible. The Avrasya Art Collective Association that realized the festival in 2008 for the first time with a program that was merely a quarter in capacity of what it is today, and at a single venue, also organizes, other than Documentarist, the Which Human Rights? Film Festival and Saturdox.

We spoke to Necati Sönmez, who is a founder of Documentarist, and part of the small team that continues to organize the festival. Although they were financially supported by the Directorate General of Cinema at the Ministry of Culture during their first year, when they had no experience at all, he finds it telling that all their applications after that were rejected.⁹⁹ “The increasing partisanship at the Ministry of Culture leaves an organization like ours standing absolutely no chance,” says Sönmez, adding that they gave up on filing applications at their seventh year. Since they have no regular supporter, they commit a great part of their energy to look for funds from scratch every year. They first apply to embassies of the countries of the films they screen. For the last two years, they had received support from the Open Society Foundation, so the withdrawal of the foundation from Turkey naturally had a negative effect. For instance, when we held our interview, there were three weeks left for the festival to begin, but as they were still waiting for answers for their funding applications, Sönmez could not be sure whether they would be able to screen the program they had already announced. Then, they did receive a positive response from the European Endowment for Democracy (EED) and the festival went ahead. When this state of uncertainty, to which they have been forced to get used to over the years, combines with other challenges caused by increasing political oppression in recent years, it has become even more difficult to realize the festival. The second significant problem is the decrease in the number of movie theatres to screen films. The cause for this is not only the neoliberal facts of the industry that allows only theatres that screen popular films the right to survival, but also the political concerns of certain movie theatre owners. Another issue is the “depressive atmosphere” brought on by the general political atmosphere, and the viewer that has “withdrawn”:

In the last four or five years we have witnessed how an atmosphere of fear has dominated the cultural market. The documentary films we screen, and especially those from Turkey, touch upon a number of sensitive issues. We screen films that other festivals would not dare to screen. While the dispute over the Eser İşletme Belgesi/ Intellectual Work Operation and Distribution License continues, we did not lay that down as a condition. Screening films that had not been “filtered” could strike fear in theatre owners. We have also come across similar reservations in public spaces or social democrat municipalities; we have witnessed how certain criteria imposed by the government have spread to such areas as well. Some private venues where we wanted to hang our posters were scared. There have been other cases in which institutions that provided financial support before have given up for the same reason. Since Gezi, such cases have gradually increased.¹⁰⁰

99 Necati Sönmez, personal interview, Istanbul, 21 May 2019.

100 Necati Sönmez, personal interview, Istanbul, 21 May 2019.

For every work of music and cinema to be registered at the Directorate General of Intellectual Rights at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and receive an Intellectual Work Operation and Distribution License is in fact a requirement brought to protect the rights of the producer. However, the imposition of this document to documentary films, which have no commercial screenings, too, and to form, in this way, a controlling structure, unfortunately was also adopted, over time, by many festivals as well. The transformation of an assurance of rights into a censorship mechanism did actually begin before the period we focus on in this report, however, during this period it increased its impact by almost becoming the rule. So much so that, although this condition has been removed from the new law, some festivals still require it as a "cautionary" prerequisite. Besides, with this law¹⁰¹ that came into force on 30 January 2019, it is quite possible to operate the power given to the Cinema Films Classification and Assessment Council as a vehicle of censorship. The council will assess the films produced within the country or imported before they are entered into commercial circulation or presented for screening. And this means that the council can not only determine the age classification for the audience, but also prevent the screening of films not deemed "suitable".

Directors on Trial

Following the narrowing of the field of freedom of expression in recent years, some directors have faced court cases related to their films. Documentarist has dared, under the heading "Censored Films" to screen both these films and films that have failed to receive Intellectual Work Operation and Distribution Licenses, and for them, Bakur has a special place. The documentary directed by Çayan Demirel and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu was shot during the resolution process, however, with the recommencement in 2015 of clashes, a case involving an accusation of "terrorist propaganda" was filed against the directors in 2015. Demirel and Mavioğlu were sentenced to 4 years and 6 months imprisonment each in July 2019.

The screening of Bakur within the scope of Documentarist took place a week after the June 7 election, and therefore, at a time "when the optimistic mood due to the election results continued", at the Şişli Kent Movie Theatre. The film had been removed at the last moment from the program of the Istanbul Film Festival, because of an official note from the Ministry of Culture and Tourism General Directorate of Cinema to the Istanbul Foundation for Culture and Arts "reminding" the foundation of the necessity of an Intellectual Work Operation and Distribution License for the films they were to screen, and this had been met with a great reaction from the public. Sönmez states that they considered not the possibilities like a ban on the highly-popular screening within the scope of Documentarist, the obstruction of the screening, or the detention of the festival team, but the possibility of a provocation. "If it were today, we would have thought of all of that. Because all of it did actually happen later," he adds.¹⁰² In fact, more happened. For instance, along with Veysi Altay, the director of the documentary Nû Jîn, which tells

101 To use its full name, the "Law on the Amendment of the Law on the Assessment and Classification and Support of Cinema Films".

102 Necati Sönmez, personal interview, Istanbul, 21 May 2019.

the story of three women who fought against ISIS in Kobani, Dicle Anter, a director of the Yılmaz Güney Theatre Hall in Batman where the film was screened, was also tried. Anter was sentenced to 2 years and 1 month imprisonment, and Altay to 2 years 6 months imprisonment. The trials of Kazım Öz, director of *Zer*; of Özyay Şahin, who is accused, among other accusations, for being the cinematographer of the documentary *I Flew, You Stayed*; and of Kutbettin Cebe, director of *Roza, The Country of Two Rivers*, continue.

The whole process also brought us a new source that follows such cases. Founded in 2001, *Altyazı* is one of the oldest film magazines in Turkey, and when it lost an individual source of support it had received since its foundation, it took a brief intermission and in March 2019 made the decision to continue as the *Altyazı Cinema Association*. The international funds they benefit from as an association both provided financial sustainability and enabled them to expand their fields of activity in a way that they can problematize the challenges they have faced. In addition to organizing activities that “develop thought on cinema” at the association centre, such as panels, seminars and film screenings, they also began to prepare a publication that focuses solely on the field of freedom of expression in cinema. Supported by EED, and distributed with *Altyazı* free of charge at many cinema venues, *Fasikül: Özgür Sinema*¹⁰³ aims to “bring visibility to critical cinema practices and especially documentary cinema which has faced significant restriction on its access to audiences in recent years, and to contribute to the dissemination of the voice, critical practices and problems of filmmakers and collectives that continue to work under risk and have been condemned to invisibility in the mainstream media”.¹⁰⁴

According to the report¹⁰⁵ dated 20 March 2018 of the Human Rights Joint Platform, at least 199 media, print and distribution companies have been closed by KHKs/state decrees issued during the State of Emergency. Only 25 of these decrees were lifted later. During the same period, 20 periodicals and 30 print-houses/distribution companies have been closed down, and with KHK/state decree no. 675, a publishing house was seized. In their report that examines the extent of shrinking of the field of expression, that had begun to narrow after Gezi in 2013, in the aftermath of July 15 [2016], Yaman Akdeniz and Kerem Altıparmak¹⁰⁶ stated that “penal law has turned into the fundamental device of silencing expression in Turkey”.¹⁰⁷ Legal experts revealed that a similar systematic approach was in operation in the violations of “the right to express and disseminate thoughts and opinions”, “freedom of the press and information” and “freedom of science and arts” rights, all under constitutional protection.

103 <http://fasikul.altyazi.net>

104 Necati Sönmez, personal interview, Istanbul, 21 May 2019.

105 http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SoE_17042018.pdf

106 Association of Freedom of Expression was founded in 2017 with the initiative of Yaman Akdeniz and Kerem Altıparmak. The association aims to provide legal assistance to those whose freedom of expression has been violated or is threatened, and for this end, to carry out work including research, training, national and international collaboration and to stand in solidarity. For their 2018 report revealing the perilous state regarding internet censorship see https://privacy.cyber-rights.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/EngelliWeb_2018.pdf

107 Full title of the report prepared for English PEN: Turkey: Freedom of Expression in Jeopardy/Violations of the rights of authors, publishers and academics under the State of Emergency. https://www.englishpen.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Turkey_Freedom_of_Expression_in_Jeopardy_TUR.pdf

Economic Crisis Added on to Political Repression

When we add to this picture about “expression” in the general sense, the structural problems of the industry and the economic crisis, it is clear that independent publishing, whether as print press or as an internet medium, has become even more difficult in recent years. The number of media that enable their economic sustainability through national and international funds, like *Altyazı*, *Bianet* and *Medyascope*, have increased. The team we interviewed for this report¹⁰⁸ has published, since the mid-1990s, politically-focused weekly or monthly periodicals, or magazines that have taken a political view of music, culture and art. It is possible to make a series of points regarding the decline of print publishing across the world, however a drop from 15 thousand readers in the 1990s to around three thousand now, also shows us that the publishing of periodicals requires persistence in the face of great challenges.

In their long past of publication, these periodicals also faced court cases especially for articles on the Kurdish issue. The persons responsible have been detained, they have received delayed prison sentences or pecuniary penalties. They summarized their view of this as the price paid for “not being Kurdophobic”; but they also express that neither then nor now, they do not think about such a price when they work.¹⁰⁹

The shrinking and metamorphosis of mainstream media in Turkey, the unjust distribution network that has resulted in the closure of many independent magazines, and the unsustainability of internet publishing were already problems in the field of the press. At no stage of their publishing life did the core staff manage to make a living only from publishing a magazine. Earning an income from other work was a precondition to sustain the magazines. The economic pressure that has increased with the recent crisis has now begun to create even more difficulty than political pressure for magazines. Paper and printing press expenses are foreign currency indexed, and they say that this makes sustainable journalism an even greater mystery for them.

The solution they came up with at this point was to form an association, to apply to and benefit from certain funds, and by this way, secure a position that enabled them to pay royalties to writers and thus enter into solidarity with journalists that could not remain in the mainstream. The use of funding becoming an issue in itself may seem secondary, however, the fact that independent publishing or culture and art activities now require “funding” has become an important heading of the most recent period, and especially among more politically-oriented groups.¹¹⁰ The magazine team we interviewed summarizes the debate as follows:

For cultural, ideological and ontological reasons, we did not want to hold back from our publishing activities, but we could no longer bring out the magazine. The only reason we began to look for funding was to keep the production running. During the

108 Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 May 2019.

109 Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 May 2019.

110 A similar mood can be observed in the statements of civil society organization representatives in the 6th chapter, focusing on “forced migration”, these institutions continued their activities under a new name after being closed by KHK/state decree. For them, too, using funds was the “most troubling aspect of the State of Emergency period”.

liberal years when relationships with the EU were widespread we didn't have such intentions, we didn't prefer it. We were accused for this as well; this is perceived as a crime by the left in Turkey. The independence of our word comes first. If the funding you receive determines your ideological stance, or what you have to say, then that is problematic. This hasn't changed, it was so then, and it is the same now. Our publication is for the public, our content includes unions, resisting workers, the women's struggle and the LGBTI movement. It is, of course, important, which fund you choose.¹¹¹

They see the EED funding they currently prefer to benefit from as the public money of the EU, the "money of the European working class". They also describe the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which has organic ties to Die Linke, a left-wing party in Germany, as an "institution with longstanding intellectual ties".

Chess Moves, Risk Calculations

Both for Documentarist and the periodicals we interviewed, the ability to carry on their activities is now their main focus. They spend the greatest part of their energy to find financial resources, and learning and sustaining its bureaucratic aspects. At the same time, they have to continue without forgetting about political pressure. The magazine's editorial team mentions another skill that they had to develop at this stage: risk calculation.

If even Twitter users are anxious, we can't say there is no risk. We have never been interested in mere propaganda. And although we do not hold back from the subject matter we will present, we know that we live in a country where raids are carried out on 17-year-olds homes because of what they have written on Twitter. We wouldn't want to hurl ourselves into the lap of some prosecutor. We have to calculate what risk to take. Back in the day we made an Erdoğan-Gülen cover. We know that this cannot be done today.¹¹²

Necati Sönmez thinks that the film industry has not stood the test well during this period, and he explains the similar process they experienced by comparing it to chess moves:

What has happened has not changed our criteria for choosing films, and especially not regarding Turkey. We haven't left a single film out of our program saying "This will get us into trouble". I don't know whether this qualifies as self-censorship, but this has happened: After we prepared our program, we have calculated which specific venue would cope with screening which film, and we have changed venues according to that. We treated this as a kind of chess game we were playing in order to screen the film. But of course, there is a limit to that as well.¹¹³

111 Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 May 2019.

112 Personal interview, Istanbul, 28 May 2019.

113 Necati Sönmez, personal interview, Istanbul, 21 May 2019.

Doors Closed, Doors Opened

The 12 September 1980 military coup, with its impact on society that has continued since and the difficult-to-repair damage it has caused, remains a dark stain in the history of Turkey. Although it is difficult to access, even today, official figures pertaining to that period, there is a “civilian” record of policies targeting the prevention of all manners of political activities and social participation. During the coup period, 650 thousand people were detained, in 210 thousand filed court cases, 230 thousand people were tried, 30 thousand people were discharged from their jobs for being “undesirable”, unions were closed, their properties were seized and the activities of 23 thousand 677 associations were halted. This meant almost all existing associations at the time.

The State of Emergency declared after the coup attempt on 15 July 2016 set the scene for interventions towards civil society that sought to emulate 12 September. With KHKs/state decrees, 1767 associations, foundations, unions and federations were closed.¹¹⁴ According to the 31 August 2017 dated report prepared by the Human Rights Joint Platform, following appeals, for only 88 of the closed 1600 associations the ruling was lifted.¹¹⁵ In the updated version of the report published on 20 March 2018, the number of associations that remained closed was 1419.¹¹⁶ The same report stated that with the KHK/state decree no.667 dated 23 July 2017¹¹⁷, 1125 associations were closed

114 For a news report assessing the two years following the coup attempt prepared on the basis of the Official Gazette: <https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-44799489>

115 http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/OHAL-Durum-Raporu_31Agustos-2017.pdf

116 http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SoE_17042018.pdf

117 “Private or foundation-linked health institutions, private education institutions and private dormitories, foundations, associations, foundation-linked higher education institutions, unions, federations and con-

for ties with “FETÖ/Parallel State Structure”, and that later closing decisions by KHK/state decree mostly targeted rights-based associations working in the fields of human rights, women and children.¹¹⁸ Kurdish institutions working in different areas, from impoverishment to cultural heritage, form a significant part of closed institutions. The closing of, for instance, institutions like the Human Rights Research Centre, the Progressive Lawyers Association, the Mesopotamia Lawyers Association, the Van Women’s Association, the Kurdish Institute and Sarmaşık Association (lit. “Ivy”, Association for the Struggle Against Impoverishment and Sustainable Development) creates the impression that the coup attempt has been used as an opportunity to intervene in the activity of organizations that had already been deemed “undesirable” from various viewpoints in the eyes of the government.

The impact of this political intervention on associations, and their short- and mid-term strategies for the future have been different. Perhaps because they work in the field of children’s rights, which may appear unrelated, first the halting of the activities by the Ministry of Interior of Gündem Children’s Association along with 370 other associations within the scope of the State of Emergency Law in November 2016, followed by its closure with KHK/State Decree no.677 on 22 November, created amazement in some circles.

A Different View of Children’s Rights

Ezgi Koman, as founder and board member of Gündem Children’s Association that began its activities in 2005 in Ankara, says that their different viewpoint regarding children brought them together at this association. The fact that - when carrying out lobbying activities in order to influence public policy, our field research, or preparing reports - they treated every issue related to children within a political framework meant that they stood at a different point regarding children’s rights in general as well:

We had a perception that set us apart, especially regarding our approach to conflict periods. That was our greatest source of motivation, because it influenced not only our view of children’s rights violations in conflict areas, but our view of the subject as a whole.¹¹⁹

This had various outcomes. For instance, when, regarding the incidents that took place on 28-31 March 2006 in Diyarbakır, their press statement titled “We Are on the Side of Children, We Are the Third Side” was deemed not to be sufficiently on the side of the state, they were excluded from certain networks.

Koman refers to the period until 2015 as years when they could work comfortably, because they could carry out projects both with different NGOs and with the public administration, and also because civil society was developing in the general sense:

federations, not included on the appended list, with membership, connection or contact with structures, formations or groups that are determined to constitute a threat to national security or with terrorist organizations are closed by the proposal of the commission to be formed by the Minister at relevant Ministries and the ratification of the Minister. Provisions of sub-article 2 are also applied to institutions closed within this scope”. Article 2 of the State of Emergency decree dated 23 July 2016 no.667.

118 http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SoE_17042018.pdf

119 Ezgi Koman, Skype interview, Ankara, 11 October 2019.

Today, by coincidence, I was given the notes of a meeting I attended in 2012. The directors of a lot of prisons were there, and I was the only civil society representative. And we spoke so much... About Pozanti, about torture... Yes, there was still some resistance on their part, but it was possible to speak, and to reach conclusions. Today, of course, that kind of relationship no longer exists, you can't even sit at the same table.¹²⁰

During the Gezi resistance, Gündem Çocuk had prepared materials to inform children both about their rights and what they should look out for regarding the actions. And during the resolution process, with the motto "If a true peace is to be built, children must be part of it", they tried to imagine how children could take part in the process, both with the Kurdish Movement and other NGOs. The association took part in the Democracy and Peace Conference,¹²¹ and organized workshops with children. Then, the association wanted to prepare a report in Van by interviewing children both from families in the Kurdish movement and families who had lost a relative who was military personnel. However, they were not able to interview children from military families. In 2015, the Peace for Children Initiative, of which the association was a coordinator, was signed by more than 100 civil society organizations, from Çağdaş Yaşamı Destekleme Derneği [Association for the Support of Contemporary Living] to KESK [Confederation of Public Workers' Unions].

When in the summer of 2015, the political climate changed rapidly, the Peace for Children Initiative was among the first who went to Diyarbakır, where clashes had begun. "There was such diversity, on the one hand, they were very difficult times, but we felt very powerful on the other hand," is how Koman describes those days.¹²²

Different Moods Brought on by the Closing of Institutions

In addition to their intervention in cases like the child abuse case in Karaman,¹²³ and the Peace for Children Initiative, another activity that they consider to have led to the order for their association to be closed down, was the Cizre Report. In the report that they prepared with İHD, TİHV, the Trade Union of Employees in Health and Social Services (SES) and the Diyarbakır Bar Association during the period of curfews, they took on the responsibility of preparing the section on children.¹²⁴ After the report was published, they found out that the General Staff had issued a complaint against them along with the other human rights organizations; as for the inspection initiated by the Interior Ministry, it was cut short with the declaration of a State of Emergency, because the inspectors had also been expelled. Before the second team of inspectors could complete its report, the ruling for closure arrived.

120 Ezgi Koman, Skype interview, Ankara, 11 October 2019.

121 The aim of the Democracy and Peace Conference, the first of which was held on 25-26 May 2013, was to observe the resolution process, and to include in the process the ideas and proposals of organizations from different sections of society so that the negotiations commenced between the state and the PKK could be successful. The second conference was held in October 2014. The third conference was held in September 2015, when the conflict had recommenced, and the conference issued a call for peace.

122 Ezgi Koman, Skype interview, Ankara, 11 October 2019.

123 At the first hearing held on 20 April 2016, 54-year-old class teacher Muharrem Büyüktürk charged with the abuse of ten male students at student dormitories of the Ensar Foundation in Karaman, was sentenced to 508-years-and-3-months imprisonment.

124 See <https://en.tihv.org.tr/79-day-curfew-cizre-field-report/>

We were so intensely busy during that period that even though we were considering possibilities, we hadn't actually assessed what closure exactly was. Then we realized. Once your legal entity is seized, your wings are clipped. For more than a decade, you have an instrument, an association, a clear discourse, style and method, then suddenly, you cannot use them anymore. You have to develop new tools, and you have to be fast. We are still assessing it now, we were unable to act fast, we failed to draw a common trajectory. Everyone felt the impact in a different way, on the Board, or among member friends. I know some other institutions that were closed, they were able to rapidly form a new structure. We failed. During the toughest period we felt at our strongest, yet with the closing, a new, grave period began. Not only from our viewpoint, it also weakened the movement. There is something else I should add. This was, to some extent, the way the West was affected. After the clashes ended, today, for instance, a very powerful children's rights movement has formed in Diyarbakır. They have carried out work towards healing, aimed at trauma treatment. I don't know if it is right to divide the movement into two like this, but perhaps it is, because this was what we experienced.¹²⁵

Following the closing of the institution, all their work was left unfinished, including a long-term-project to be carried out within the scope of the protocol they had signed with the Ministry of National Education. The severe impact experienced at a personal level made it impossible to carry out collective work anew, yet they did not stop. The core team, and many individuals from their close circles continued to work in the field. An empowering solidarity which Koman finds very important was formed. For instance, they continued reporting under the roof of TİHV;¹²⁶ İHD opened its administrative boards to them; and for their currently-continuing legal procedures they received support from lawyers' groups. Despite all this, Koman can't help but mention the NGOs that erased their names from various networks after they were closed, and stopped consulting their expertise.

Koman believes that this solidarity is linked to the experience of human rights organizations, their "political" treatment of matters, and the fact that "this was not the first time they met difficulty". She also thinks that the way certain associations experienced being closed down was determined by these factors:

Organizations that have a political mind-set, or are already part of political networks got over being closed easier. Smaller organizations with a smaller number of staff, when they faced force, they dispersed easily. Then there is this: Civil society is perceived as a thing for milder times, milder climates. The experience accumulated by human rights organizations has not been transmitted to the other side. We were like that, too. We hadn't thought what it would mean to defend children during difficult times. We had no knowledge, or preparation for an emergency.¹²⁷

Koman states that she has no desire to continue activities as Gündem Çocuk if circumstances were to change, and that personally, she perceives Gündem Çocuk not as an aim but as an instrument. She adds that she has the motivation to establish the

125 Ezgi Koman, Skype interview, Ankara, 11 October 2019.

126 The title of this extensive memorandum that serves as a report was: "Gündem Children's Association Was Closed 365 Days. Children's Rights Violations in Turkey Continue!" #365Gün365İhlal. <https://tihv.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/365Gunde365İhlal.pdf>

127 Ezgi Koman, Skype interview, Ankara, 11 October 2019.

systematic structure she finds important and needs, and that they are already working towards this.

Swift Alternative Creation

As the story of the closing of the Gündem Children's Association happened in this manner, there were others who experienced the same decree in different ways. For instance, Özgürlükçü Hukukçular Derneği/Association of Lawyers for Freedom and Mezopotamya Hukukçular Derneği/Mesopotamia Association of Lawyers decided to continue their legal struggle as the Platform of Lawyers for Freedom. Çağdaş Hukukçular Derneği/ Association of Contemporary Lawyers made an application to the Provincial Directorate of Associations and regained its legal entity in October 2019. Many women's institutions like Van Kadın Derneği/Van Women's Association and Muş Kadın Çatısı Derneği/Muş Women's Roof Association could not return to their interrupted activities.¹²⁸

It is important to take a closer look at the story of an association, as Ezgi Koman stated that acted swiftly, set itself a new path, and looked at its activities and existence from a more political framework. This association was closed with the same KHK/state decree, and was founded in the late 1990s when there was intense migration to Kurdish provinces due to forced village evacuations, by a group formed mostly of victims of forced migration. The primary aim of these associations, founded in different cities to meet under the same roof, was to create a network of cooperation and solidarity. Over the years, this aim expanded to include activating national and international mechanisms regarding any issue related to forced migration, carrying out academic studies and gathering data. In the early 2000s, there were cases where they were tried for their activities; they took a case where they were sentenced to the ECtHR and won. Generally, they define the period from 2004 to 2015 as a period when they could carry out visits to Parliament and work in the field. They weren't too surprised to be closed by KHK/State decree, and in a short period of time they were able to file an application to open an association under a new name. Although they were not a continuation of the old association in the legal sense, this was an alternative solution to continue work.

The association representative we met with was also a victim of forced migration and has worked at the institution for three years. The representative thinks that, in the acceptance of their new applications during the State of Emergency at a speed that surprised them too, their choice to express their topic as "migration" rather than "forced migration" must have played a role. In general, migration, because of the Syrian population in Turkey, during the period we discussed the narrowing of civil society, remained a field less affected.

To work by following the path of a closed association, if not in the legal but in the actual sense, and with the influence of past experiences of civil society organizations focusing on the Kurdish issue, necessitated that they worked in consideration of the

¹²⁸ How gender-focused civil society organizations have been affected by the post-2015 narrowing of the space of civil society is explained in detail in the chapter titled, "From a Gender Perspective".

possibility of being closed again. The association representative states that they see it as a further form of resistance to predict problems that may arise and "find ways to wander around the back". The representative describes working conditions that force them to become migrants themselves as they work on migration:

For instance, when we carried out field work in Cizre, we didn't wear the same clothes for two days in succession. We didn't visit the same neighbourhood on following days. Once we heard they had asked after us in a certain neighbourhood, we didn't go out for two days. We entered our records into the computer at once and sent them away. The reason we did not get caught was because we played hide-and-seeK. In other words, we are aware of the conditions. We work on migration; we live as migrants ourselves. We do not even keep printed reports and books at the association. Like turtles, we carry the association on our backs to keep it alive.¹²⁹

Working in a "Mine Field"

They hand-distributed a book they prepared, without entering any networks of distribution. They refused all proposals for news reports, interviews and television programs, too, because they preferred not to be visible during that period. Although the institution has been through very challenging periods in the political and social sense, the association employee nevertheless describes the period from 2016 to 2019 as exceptionally "problematic". However, the political culture they are rooted in prevents them from treating this as a grievance on an individual level.

We work as if we are walking across a mine field. From the outside, it may appear as if we are under conditions that psychologically suppress us, yet the depth of the pain in the field we work reduces the significance of our own psychology to meaninglessness. We were born into this political atmosphere after all, we were shaped by it. Perhaps, what was actually exceptional for us was the period from 2004 to 2015. In fact, our work narrowed during that period. We did not know what to do when there was no mechanism of oppression, when we didn't feel suffocated. It may sound strange but it is true...¹³⁰

Apart from the threat of being closed or facing prosecution again, another issue they faced difficulties in during this period was using funding. The association survived through volunteer work from the very start, but after it was closed, it began to benefit from EU funds and grant programs on a project basis to continue its activities. They are currently using EU funding for a project they began in 2017 and will end in 2020. The association representative states that the debate they had both among themselves and in their close circle has been the "issue that psychologically affected us more than anything else during the State of Emergency", adding that they will decide later whether they will apply again for the period after 2020.

What matters more than the institutions that provide funding is our own limitations. We are talking about an association that didn't operate with funding or grant support for twenty years, carried out its activities without any support; and now we are suffering the pangs of this transition, or this process of failing in this transition. When

129 Personal interview, Istanbul, 31 May 2019.

130 Personal interview, Istanbul, 31 May 2019.

you receive funding, you have to carry out, at least some of your work, with a different perspective. You have to write reports, you have to keep accounts accordingly, there are certain procedures. But this period stands out especially for the chasm it has opened up in terms of the viewpoint. We are, after all, a Kurdish institution; yes, there are other Kurdish institutions, but those other than us do not work with funding. Funding and grants may have enriched our field of work, but it has also created an imbalance between institutions. We are now suffering from that imbalance. The professional work of some may come to mean others working less willingly.¹³¹

131 Personal interview, Istanbul, 31 May 2019.

Foreign Funding Institutions and Partner Institutions

There are different bodies that financially support civil society activities in Turkey. The largest and best-known is the European Union. Since 1999, when Turkey was officially recognized as a candidate for full membership to the European Union, the relationship between the government in Turkey and Brussels has been managed by the European Union Delegation to Turkey. One of the significant priorities among financial aid during the accession period to the EU is aid to civil society. In addition to financial funding before accession, there are other support programs including EU programs that aim to increase communication between EU member states and candidates, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights program and Sivil Düşün for which the Delegation is directly responsible. Other than these, foundations linked to political parties in Europe with office in Turkey or not, Embassies-Consulates and foundations linked to private persons or companies with centres in different countries are among institutions that provide financial support to the field of civil society.¹³² While some of these institutions only provide financial support, some others act in partnership with institutions in many different ways, from running programs to providing specialist sup-

¹³² For a guide book containing detailed information about funding institutions prepared by the Civil Society Development Centre, see http://panel.stgm.org.tr/vera/app/var/files/t/u/turkiye_deki_stk_lar_icin_fon_rehberi.pdf

port. These support mechanisms also serve to establish links between civil society actors in Turkey with international institutions and related individuals.

All these institutions, regardless of their legal status and the call methods they employ, first determine their priority fields of work. In interviews with different actors from civil society, criticism that was frequently voiced included the power of funding institutions to determine the agenda of the field of civil society, the distance they kept to politically “sensitive” issues and procedural difficulties in the functioning of support mechanisms. We spoke with individuals working at institutions that support civil society activities in Turkey as donors or foreign partners both about this criticism and the unique difficulties of their position. Within the scope of this section, we met with six individuals from five different institutions. One of these institutions was selected from within the support programs developed by the European Union, one of them is a Brussels-centred independent funding institution, another was selected from within German foundations linked to political parties. One of the last two institutions is a private company foundation, while the other is a foundation that provides specialist support in conflict resolution along with financial support.

In this section, we wanted to present the experience of civil society actors in Turkey in the most recent period through the observations of foreign actors, and understand how foreign institutions themselves were affected by this environment of oppression, and how they coped with the narrowing of civic space in the more general sense.

Losing Partners

The experience of civil society actors in recent times also has a direct impact on employees of partner institutions that provide funding. A fund director we interviewed described the direct reflection of the period on their activities in the following words:

An organization we provided an aid/grant to, which I was working with, was closed after the declaration of the State of Emergency. We very clearly felt the impact in our work, too. Just a week ago, a project coordinator informed us that s/he may go abroad any minute now. (...) We received a lot of demands for extension especially after the State of Emergency. Some project coordinators were detained, and they remained in detention for some time, some project activities had to be suspended. (...) For instance, for a certain period, it was impossible to implement any project in and around Diyarbakır, there were some institutions that wanted to move their activities to other cities.¹³³

Another person we interviewed described the outcome of the pressure of the recent period a “losing your partners”.

More and more people lost their jobs at universities or at other public institutions, some like Osman (Kavala) are in prison, so in fact we lose our partners. Not only in civil society, in other parts of cooperation as well. Suddenly, people from Turkey could no longer travel abroad to come to conferences we organized. It is so easy to destroy these international networks via such measures.¹³⁴

133 Skype interview, Ankara, 19 June 2019.

134 Skype interview, Stuttgart, 5 July 2019.

Osman Kavala, who took part in the founding of many associations and organizations, who has been active for many years in civil society in the fields of democracy, human rights and multiculturalism, and who has worked hard for these institutions, was detained on 18 October 2017 and after a 14-day detention period, was arrested on charges of "directing the Gezi actions" and "participating in the 15 July coup attempt". Following a year that passed without a bill of indictment, 13 academics and rights defenders, including employees of Anadolu Kültür, chaired by Kavala, were also detained. Yiğit Aksakoğlu was arrested, the others were released.

The bill of indictment was published in February 2019, and it linked Osman Kavala to the crimes of financing and organizing the Gezi protests, and in this way, attempting to overthrow the government. Along with Osman Kavala, lawsuits were brought against the suspects named along him, namely Ali Hakan Altınay, Ayşe Mücella Yapıcı, Ayşe Pınar Alabora, Can Dündar, Çiğdem Mater Utku, Gökçe Yılmaz (Tüylüoğlu), Handan Meltem Arıkan, Hanzade Hikmet Germiyanoğlu, İnanç Ekmekçi, Memet Ali Alabora, Mine Özerden, Şerafettin Can Atalay, Tayfun Kahraman, Yiğit Aksakoğlu and Yiğit Ali Ekmekçi. At the first hearing of the case held on 24-25 June 2019 at Silivri, Yiğit Aksakoğlu was released. On 10 December 2019, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled that Osman Kavala had been placed under arrest without reasonable suspicion and for political reasons, adding that his continued detention constituted a violation of his rights and ordered his immediate release. On the final hearing of the case held on 18 February 2020, Osman Kavala and the other eight defendants were acquitted. However, as Kavala was about to be released, he was detained once again on charges of "attempting by force and violence to overthrow the constitutional order of the Republic of Turkey" within the scope of the July 15 coup attempt investigation and he was formally arrested the next day.

The Gezi Case, on the one hand, tries to criminalize the greatest civilian uprising in Turkey in recent times, while on the other hand it has become a case where the internationally accepted positions, activities, financial assets and even project management methods of civil society institutions are questioned. With its indictment mostly made up of unlawfully recorded telephone conversations, the course of the trial process and the long detention period, this case constitutes an example of the use of the judiciary to suppress civic space. Osman Kavala is renowned for the contribution he has made to the field of civil society over the years, and depriving him of his freedom exemplifies the persistence to sustain this policy of suppression. The ECtHR, too, in its violation ruling underlines the fact that Kavala's continuing detention aims to silence him, and that his actions are the normal actions of a human rights defender.

The Gezi Case

People we interviewed at foreign funding institutions very frequently mentioned how the generally narrowing field of freedoms reflected upon universities, and from there onto the field of civil society. The Academics for Peace were made into targets for signing the petition titled "We will not be a party to this crime!", they were dismissed from their positions after investigations were opened against them, some were detained, then, following the declaration of State of Emergency many lost their jobs with KHKs/state decrees:¹³⁵ They

135 For detailed information regarding this matter see <http://bianet.org/system/uploads/1/files/>

constitute the most concrete example of the narrowing of the field of academic freedoms and freedom of expression in Turkey. The situation that emerged in our interviews showed the direct impact of the narrowing in this field upon the field of work of civil society institutions. The failure of universities in Turkey to provide job security for academic production, and the intensification of pressure and restrictions on academic work and university employees resulted in an increase in the number of applications made to funding institutions by academics who now design their research as fundable projects.

The Open Society Foundation established in Istanbul in 2008 had actually begun its activities in Turkey in 2001 as the Open Society Institute. In November 2018, the Foundation, stating that the groundless and excessive speculation in the media during that period made it impossible for them to continue its work, took the decision to end its activities in Turkey. Their statement read, "It has been observed that there are efforts, through newly-opened investigations, to establish links between the Open Society Foundation and the Gezi events in 2013. These efforts are not new, and they are unsubstantial". Gökçe Tüylüoğlu, the Turkey Director General of the Open Society Foundation, was a defendant in the Gezi Case, and at the final hearing of the case held on 18 February 2020, the decision was made to continue the adjudication of the defendants abroad, including Tüylüoğlu, as a separate case, on the grounds that their statements had not been taken. The impact of the Open Society Foundation ceasing its activities in Turkey has been voiced by many institution representatives we interviewed for this section of the report; and they underlined the fact that this situation led to a great increase in the number of applications they received. During the same period, the Open Society Foundations also closed their Budapest office, from where they used to carry out their international operations, and moved their headquarters to Berlin; a statement was made explaining that the increasingly oppressive political and legal atmosphere in Hungary was the reason behind this decision. What the foundation, both widely commended and criticized for its existence in the field of civil society on the world-scale, and its founder George Soros have experienced during the recent period, and the reaction they have developed against it, are used as a main reference to explain the narrowing in the field.

Direct Threat: Accusation of Operating as a Foreign Agent

The most frequent accusation faced by foreign foundations and funding institutions – other than states, or international institutions like EU and UN - carrying out activities related to Turkey is "being foreign agents". An institution employee we interviewed stated that throughout the institution's history they faced threats and smear campaigns very frequently:

We worked a lot on taboo subjects: LGBTI, militarism, the Kurdish issue, religion-democracy. We would be accused of being foreign agents in the press for the work we did. There were very frequent reports on how we directly invested money in the PKK. We also received threats over the telephone regarding our activities.¹³⁶

attachments/000/002/418/original/Bar%C4%B1%C5%9F_%C4%B0%C3%A7in_Akademisyenler_Vakas%C4%B1n%C4%B1n_K%C4%B1sa_Tarihi_-_T%C4%B0HV_Akademi.pdf?1547210293
136 Personal interview, Istanbul, 25 May 2019.

Such threats are voiced mostly by state officials or pro-government media channels. Turkey does not have a law like Russia has,¹³⁷ which openly defines as a “foreign agent” any institution that receives financial support from foreign institutions to carry out political activities. However, a representative we interviewed said that the absence of such a legal basis alone was not enough:

If you blame civil society as enemies of the country, then you don't need laws anymore. That's precisely what some politicians did in Turkey: They call them foreign agents, they claim that NGOs want to destroy Turkey. (...) It makes no difference whether it is German donor institutions, or a US institution, or institutions of the Gülen community. The story is simple to tell. In this way, it became much harder for our partners to collaborate with us.¹³⁸

A defendant in the Büyükada Case, which we have frequently referred to throughout this report, Peter Steudtner, too, was accused by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of being a German agent immediately after he was detained. Not only civil society institutions, but single individuals, too, can easily become targets of this type of accusation. This arrest that led to a diplomatic crisis between the countries, and the statements made, remained in the news for a long time. Germany-centred institutions in Turkey, too, were affected by this situation. The narrowing or widening of the space of these institutions is generally linked to the relationship between the countries:

Many things depend much more on the bilateral relationship between Turkey and Germany than they depend on domestic situation here in Turkey. For instance, today the situation is relatively fine, while 2017 was really tough. We were directly targeted because there was an issue between the countries. Now, they found kind of a modus vivendi, not everything is extremely fine, but there aren't campaigns against us like there were back then. This might change again, and that is precisely why our situation is different compared to local actors in Turkey.¹³⁹

The decisiveness of the relations between countries was voiced by a representative of another Germany-based institution. For many different historical reasons, bilateral relations between the two countries are assessed to be both very close, and subject to tensions. This representative proposed different ways so that solidarity or support efforts that may be established in the field of civil society are not abandoned to the mercy of diplomatic relations between the two countries:

The President of Turkey is always blaming Germany. Politicians in Turkey try to posit Germany as an enemy, yet that is so meaningless. The two countries have very strong ties. One could propose not to have bilateral German-Turkish discussions around it but to make it multilateral, e.g. in the EU. I think foundations can display more solidarity with institutions in Turkey, however, not as German foundations but together with European foundations to show it is not Germany against Turkey, but Europe as a common house of values where Turkey is a member from the very beginning.¹⁴⁰

137 For the press statement of organizations in Russia regarding the law linking organizations to accusations of “foreign agency” see <https://eu-russia-csf.org/wp-content/uploads/statements/en/Statement-ForeignAgents20.01.2015.pdf>

138 Skype interview, Stuttgart, 5 July 2019.

139 Personal interview, Istanbul, 24 May 2019.

140 Skype interview, Stuttgart, 5 July 2019.

The support from states or international institutions other than private institutions and foundations is even more conditional on diplomatic relations. The continuity of support from the European Union will be determined by the EU membership process itself. None of the individuals we met for the report and specifically asked this question expected an outright change in relationships with the EU in the short term:

I don't expect Turkey to become fully closed to foreign institutions, but it is not off the table that it can get much more difficult for international donors to support actors in Turkey. It is not on the horizon yet. We should, nevertheless, take certain precautions and closely follow developments. Currently there is more funding for Turkish civil society than there has been previously.¹⁴¹

At private institutions and foundations, too, it can make a difference whether the company is attached to a person or a company, and from where the financial resources originate. This connection is decisive, for instance, in how foundations linked to private companies act, and what decisions they take.

Dialogues and Meetings

Some foreign institutions, via their country headquarters and their network across Europe, have the means to carry out lobbying activities regarding developments in the field of civil society in Turkey. The representative of the foundation that has an office in Turkey via its political party connection in Turkey, described their position and its limitations in the following manner:

In Germany, you have access to everywhere, that creates an advantage for political foundations. There are many actors that carry out lobbying activities for institutions in Turkey. However, it is very difficult to have any influence if you are not organizing a seriously comprehensive campaign. It has to be a campaign coupled with a lot of media attention. The Deniz Yücel campaign was very effective because he had the backing of his friends working in the media, however, the situation regarding other people currently in prison is much more difficult.¹⁴²

The other representative who says that they have had to change their lobbying activities of this kind both within and outside Turkey, and their target of contacting politicians, adds the following:

In the past there were targets such as influencing policy-makers, conveying work that has been done and establishing contact with the EU, whereas now we have set even the meeting and debating of civil society as a target. It is impossible to hold meetings open to the public, for instance, and that continues to be the case in Diyarbakır and its environs...¹⁴³

The representative of the foundation active in the field of conflict resolution, on the other hand, states that their main target is to bring together people from different political circles; and since they have failed to achieve that, they have begun to question the meaning of carrying out activities in Turkey, and to consider the alternative of leaving Turkey.¹⁴⁴

141 Skype interview, Brussels, 25 July 2019.

142 Personal interview, Istanbul, 24 May 2019.

143 Personal interview, Istanbul, 25 May 2019.

144 Personal interview, Berlin, 18 August 2019.

Understanding Turkey

Understanding Turkey's specific situation, and what kind of problems the actors here experience is highly important in determining the method, scope and priority areas of the support to be given, comprehending the limitations of institutions and actors and deciding on suitable strategies. The primary instrument, for funding institutions, in developing such an in-depth vision of a country is the local actors they work with. The organization structures of these institutions can also complicate the formation of such in-depth knowledge. Therefore, the employees from Turkey of institutions with offices in Turkey play quite an influential role.

However, the institution director is often someone appointed by and from the headquarters of the foundation. How much these individuals want to form a relationship with the agenda in Turkey and on what kind of a plane they meet with local actors exceedingly determines to what extent they can assess requirements unique to Turkey. When the Turkey office is made up only of staff appointed by central office, then it is even more difficult to establish a relationship. Regarding the internal structure of central offices, when the person responsible of Turkey has to also attend to other countries, and if these countries form groups that are not necessarily very connected, it makes it difficult to focus on a certain country and understand its dynamics. In the same way, the frequency of rotation within central office can have a negative affect on focusing, and specialization that is required at a certain level.

The representative of an institution that does not have an office in Turkey and describes itself as a funding institution through and through, states that they work with local consultants in the country and that not being physically present in Turkey can provide different advantages:

Not being in Turkey is also an advantage. You develop a different perspective by being further away. You aren't trapped within daily crises and struggles. You can, perhaps, be a bit more strategic and perhaps even make better assessments. I frequently travel to Turkey, I worked in Turkey for many years. We also have local consultants. All these elements are crucial. As soon as you are abroad, you're not as able to follow all the small developments, which all become part of the very important implicit knowledge about a place. Being very removed is not ideal. The consultants do outreach, they provide up-to-date information related to developments that I might not come across through my own channels and they assist applicants in designing their projects. They don't have a role in the decision making on grants. It's the executive committee that makes the final decision. (...) In order to have a productive relationship with applicants and grantees, one has to establish a real relationship, there has to be mutual trust, and both sides have to understand each other's logic of work, and concerns etc. We are quiet privileged in that regard; we are able to allocate a large budget for human resources. A person working on a certain country can continue to work for the same country for many years. One does not work one year on Turkey and the next on Ghana.¹⁴⁵

The absence of an office and employees in Turkey can create a situation that protects the institution as a whole. A representative of a foundation in the same situation expresses the risks and advantages of this particular position:

¹⁴⁵ Skype interview, Brussels, 25 July 2019.

If you have staff on the ground and if they are citizens of that country, you have to take that into consideration. These individuals may be tracked by the police or the intelligence service. Our situation is easier. You can't kick us out of the country.¹⁴⁶

Other Support That Could be Given to Civil Society Actors

It is important for all institutions to secure the continuity of financial aid to civil society institutions in Turkey, and to sustain it with meaningful support. Everyone we met with emphasized that they constantly worked on developing new strategies on the method of this support. Although these institutions position themselves as part of civil society in the broadest sense, they do nevertheless accept that they are actors from "outside" for civil society in Turkey.

The method developed against the criticism that civil society institutions cannot progress with short term projects with an expectation of immediate impact, is to support the institutions themselves. An institution representative we met with explained this situation as follows:

We are trying to give priority to core funding, especially in the media sector. (...) In the case of Turkey, it is very important to provide institutional support to civil society. This is not the case for every country, in some countries, for instance, there is considerable institutional support already, but the support for grassroots organizations is lacking. There are many important civil society institutions in Turkey, the very existence of which makes a huge difference.¹⁴⁷

As we stated above, with whatever method they distribute support, these institutions have their own political priorities, and they may vary from one period to the next. Sometimes a call for projects in line with these priorities are made to collect applications, and sometimes, they keep the access channels of institutions open all the time, and take applications without restricting the agenda. As an institution representative who implements these two methods together mentioned, to accept applications by these two methods at the same time if possible, because of their distinct advantages, increases the possibility of providing meaningful support. However, the same institution representative says that self-censorship is practiced by everyone:

Being open to applications from third parties means being flexible and looking for something new and unexpected. This is great. (...) In open calls, you have an idea and a strong framework, and that makes it easier for people to apply. If you are big enough as an institution you should retain both options. Self-censorship on the NGO side could be also a self-censorship on our side. Therefore, the calls we make today are very different compared to those five years ago. Avoiding the hot and burning topics, like free elections and human rights. We have to be careful about a change of this nature.¹⁴⁸

Financial support is of course only one part of what can be done. After all, the borders of this field are not only drawn by financial resources and institutions that carry out work through projects. In previous sections of this report we touched upon the

¹⁴⁶ Skype interview, Stuttgart, 5 July 2019.

¹⁴⁷ Skype interview, Brussels, 25 July 2019.

¹⁴⁸ Skype interview, Stuttgart, 5 July 2019.

advantages and disadvantages of receiving financial support and the significance of institutions developing different approaches regarding receiving financial support to act together. The questions as to what other kind of support funding institutions can provide, when one of their main roles is providing financial support, and where they can position themselves for civil society institutions to overcome the problems they experience retain their importance. As an example to methods they develop for this end, people we interviewed expressed the following thoughts:

We always try to find a niche topic. We have to rethink everything we have done so far. At the end of the day, financial support weakens us. Therefore, we have to find completely new approaches to support civil society in Turkey. (...) We have to think about support mechanisms, beyond target groups, beyond financial resources. For instance, capacity building: Not only providing financial support, but providing training as well. Or, networking. We have a very extensive network made up of our partner institutions, we can use that network for experience sharing.¹⁴⁹

We are not an advocacy organization, but we use the platform we have to amplify the voices and concerns of our grantees. We have a strong reputation in Brussels and also in EU member states and countries we are active in. We have access to many European governments, and we can facilitate meetings between our grantees and the authorities, if needed. We also collaborate with many different institutions and organize events together. And we are members of the network of donors.¹⁵⁰

The European Union is the largest institution that financially supports civil society work in Turkey. However, both the application process, and the implementation process of project, requires a lot of professional knowledge. Besides, the length of the assessment periods for applications collected through calls, especially in a place like Turkey where the political agenda changes swiftly, are often criticized by civil society institutions. Taking into consideration this type of criticism, the EU Turkey Delegation formed mechanisms unique to Turkey, one of them being the Sivil Düşün [lit. "Think Civilian", uses the Turkish title across all languages] program, and the other, the sub-grant program titled "Financial Support to Third Parties Program". The main target of the Sivil Düşün program is to create a more flexible and inclusive grant program. The Financial Support to Third Parties Program aims to benefit from the experience and connections of intermediary civil society institutions that will redistribute micro-sub-grants.

In addition to this, European Endowment for Democracy, the independent grant-making program founded by the European Union and EU member states, acts with the target of playing a complementary role to EU programs. The aim is to reach individuals and institutions that face difficulty in accessing EU resources. By providing funding to European institutions like EED, the EU seeks to provide a more flexible support to civil society in Turkey.

Such programs are also related to the diversification of actors in civic space, and an increase in the need and demand for such resources. Observing how support programs have diversified alone can help us see the new dynamics of this field.

149 Skype interview, Stuttgart, 5 July 2019.

150 Skype interview, Brussels, 25 July 2019.

Conclusion and Proposals

The primary reality presented to us by this report, in which we have tried to take a closer look on the impact on civil society of the changing political climate in Turkey in recent years, was the scale of the damage in diverse fields. Prohibition and the forced prevention of activity directly brings about a shrinkage, a downsizing. As for the many civil society organizations that are not within that circle of prohibition, a state of continuing to work under the threat of closure, detention and arrest is imposed. As our interviews also reveal, this imposition has necessitated strategic changes on the institutional level. A narrowing is expected in the general sense, however, quite to the contrary, this can end up in growth, or a diversification of the field of activities and goals in some institutions. The increase and diversification in violations, the effort to create new fields of movement, and the obligation of institutions to also struggle against direct threats to them and their members/employees are the primary factors for this expansion.

With the intensification of human rights violations, deeply-rooted and broadly-experienced institutions like İHD and TİHV chose to protect and even, persistently expand the field. This recalls a line of struggle that does not give up its belief or courage even when faced with all types of repression. “We do not allow our concerns to bring us to the point where we cannot do our work. We may, at times, change our method, but we do not forget our responsibilities. We do not fall silent, because every moment you remain silent you weaken the field and the struggle,” says Gülseren Yoleri of İHD.¹⁵¹ TİHV, during the same period, followed a path of solidarity, and claiming the field, by including certain institutions that had been closed and certain academics that had been expelled into their structure. They chose to accelerate the process for TİHV Akademi, which had been in the making for five years already and which aimed to train human

¹⁵¹ Gülseren Yoleri, personal interview, Istanbul, 13 June 2019.

rights activists and specialists to carry out scientific research in Diyarbakır, İzmir and Istanbul, and make it operational. During this period, TİHV Akademi has been one of the most concrete outcomes of the orientation towards the field of human rights of expelled academics.

This change of strategy - at a period when hate speech targeting LGBTI+ people became systematic, starting with the highest level of government, when the struggle against such hate speech proved in vain, and when the movement was threatened by ISIS itself - meant for Kaos GL, realizing the fruitlessness in the short term of paying attention to everyday politics, and rather, focusing their attention on working with social structures more than usual. They turned towards bar associations, municipalities and unions open to working with them.

Hafıza Merkezi/Truth, Justice and Memory Center has added the narrowing of the space of civil society among the subjects they focus on, since it is a phenomenon they are directly affected by. Murat Çelikkan, a representative of the centre, proposed, as an institution that prioritizes documentation, systematically documenting tendencies and policies in the narrowing civil space, and within this framework, to establish both local and international collaborations. In addition to state-imposed obstacles before the socialization and expansion of human rights movements, Çelikkan emphasized the importance of the movement to remedy its own deficiencies, and of the movement taking a look at itself to understand why, while the second half of the 20th century was a period when international human rights displayed an improvement, there is now, in the 21st century, a decline. Such periods of repression can also be periods when institutions and movements reassess themselves.

The change in strategy applied by institutions in Diyarbakır, where the polarization is most emphasized and where a highly politicized field of civil society divided roughly between pro-government organizations and opposition Kurdish institutions and/or organizations is visible, has been to bring together these sections that no longer want to even meet within a framework of partnerships, even if it is not around matters of dispute. DİSA seeks to do this by organizing intellectual debates rather than everyday political discussions. Another proposal is to bring together smaller groups and gradually build mutual trust.

The matter of strategy change, as a result of the spirit of the period, was not always mentioned in the positive sense. We were told in interviews that, as issues became more caustic, priorities of both civil society organizations and funding institutions can change. This was stated with a negative emphasis, and explained as a way of distancing themselves from undesirable topics. The fact that it has become increasingly difficult to discuss and work on the Kurdish issue has had an even deeper affect on civil society in Diyarbakır. A representative of an institution that provides funding support to civil society institutions candidly expressed this reservation, and talked about the risks of institutions applying "self-censorship" mechanisms by stating that they, too, stay away from certain topics. This individual also underlined the necessity to always remain on guard against self-censorship.

In Diyarbakır, people mentioned that, from a civil society viewpoint, not only fields of work, but also the city itself had physically shrunk as a result of security policies. The metaphorical narrowing we discuss in the whole of this report points towards the narrowing of spaces in real life, exemplified in the officially sealed doors of associations, periodicals without offices, film festivals without halls to screen their films at and women deprived of their counselling centres; and in fact, it was evident that the two types of narrowing amplified each other.

The individuals and institutions we interviewed were given the initiative to reveal their identity or not. What this first experience has shown us is that more participants than we expected were happy to make their identity known, and despite security risks that, under the circumstances, would not be considered a figment of paranoid imagination, wanted to tell their story without remaining anonymous. We had the impression that those who preferred to keep their identity known perceived this as part of their resistance, as a part of defending the meaning of what they were doing, as part of solidarity. In comparison, we can underline the wish of people working in international institutions, and even some who do not live in Turkey to remain anonymous, and the caution in their statements despite remaining so. This is caused to some extent by operations directly targeting the field of civil society, and the general incitement in this country of an antagonistic perception of foreigners. Such expansion of the field of risk can increase the anxiety of representation individuals feel especially when they speak on behalf of large institutions.

As a fact imposed by the period, we heard from almost everyone, from rights defenders to funding institution representatives, an owning-up about self-censorship. They try to resist it, or to come to terms with the extent they are forced to practice self-censorship. "To calculate risks", "to play hide-and-see" or "to think about the next move, just like a chess game" were different expressions used to explain the same difficulty. This was what an institution representative we met with in Diyarbakır had to say:

We are no Don Quixote. We have to constantly make our own calculations. (...) I should not constantly invite evil from the source of evil onto me. But I should act with the knowledge that I might get myself into trouble for doing what I am doing, I should do it if it is possible, I should dare to do it.¹⁵²

In many of our interviews we heard this word: Solidarity. Some spoke of solidarity as a factor that provided the strength to carry on under these tough circumstances, some complained of the lack of it and others stated that solidarity had to grow when asked for their proposals for the future. In many personal accounts, during such a physically and psychologically challenging period, the value of staying close, and opening up empowering spaces for each other was mentioned. Observing that solidarity had come to mean more than what was done together also revealed that individuals were also experiencing an anxiety of isolation within their own community during this period. There is criticism today, too, that work in Turkey in the field of civil society addresses a very limited section of society, and that perhaps not all but many institutions prefer

152 Personal interview, Diyarbakır, 14 September 2019.

to carry out similar work separately rather than together and in partnership, and often unaware of each other. However, increasing repression has forced institutions to stand together, and institutions have become closer to each other. We observed that these circumstances in Turkey have encouraged funding institutions working in Turkey to develop new strategies. Not only has the support they provide to projects developed in partnership increased, but they, too, have deemed it more effective to progress by establishing new networks among themselves.

It was important how, Ezgi Koman from the closed Gündem Children's Association, spoke of experience-sharing as a form of solidarity in the current atmosphere. Koman presented as self-criticism the lack of contemplation on "civil society in difficult times" and carrying out mental or practical preparation. She added, as a wish for the future, the transfer of experience from institutions that view matters from a more political perspective, and are not being tested by "difficulties" for the first time. Koman's proposal regarding funding institutions must also be recorded here. She wanted to make sure that the relevant institutions understood that it was very important that "their doors remained open" during periods of intensified political repression, and that undue pressure from funding bureaucracy during this process had a debilitating effect. Murat Köylü from Kaos GL, too, reminded funding institutions of the need for work to be carried out for the employees of organizations who barely remained standing in both the physical and the psychological sense, and their well-being.

Most of the funding organizations we met with within the scope of this research were aware of this demand and need. The European Union, in order to provide such flexibility, initiates the establishment of such independent institutions, or by funding third parties, provides such support through intermediaries. However, the failure to provide such flexibility in projects it conducts itself vindicates the criticism. Besides, it is clear that the "impact assessment" procedures valid for all funding providers must be reformulated according to the needs of the recent period. On the other hand, during such a period when foreign support is criminalized, another criticism was the way in which certain funding institutions demanded that their position as supporters was emphasized. A representative of an institution that carried out work especially for more conservative sections of society, stated that this was one of the main problems they faced, underlining that funders should not be persistent about their public appearance.

During such periods, the failure on the part of funding institutions to comprehend the legal, political and social congestion and wheel-spinning especially regarding relevant matters, also leads to the possibility of failure to meet the impact and change expectations of such institutions and therefore, the severance of support. Certain funding institutions that specialize in certain fields of work, and act with state resources of the country they are established in, provide support via projects they have developed in partnership with institutions in Turkey. When no progress is registered and no results are accomplished in their primary fields of works these institutions can, therefore, also take the decision to move out of Turkey. A representative of an institution that specializes in conflict resolution has stated that such a decision is currently on the table.

He explained this by saying that their impact is limited under political circumstances where no possibility of a solution is discussed regarding the Kurdish issue, and that sometimes, bringing a halt to their actions can be meaningful "in order not to continue as if everything is fine".¹⁵³

At a point when restrictions imposed upon the freedoms of expression and the press converge with a grave economic crisis, it has also been confirmed with these interviews that there is an observed increase in support received from international funds for independent publishing and culture and arts activities. The change in the majority shareholders of mainstream media, the constantly growing, overwhelming share of media close to the government which forms the majority, drives independent print, visual and digital media institutions towards this method. In fact, this trend displays similar and different qualities with a trend observed on a global scale, where unions, bar associations and even ministries have turned towards funded projects. As the traditional absence of public funding for such activities in Turkey is combined with the specific conditions of the period, we witnessed how support from international funds, in some cases, became the sine qua non of "existence". We also saw, in a few of our meetings, how the transition to this working model and sustaining these new modus operandi led to discussions particularly in bodies with political perspectives.

We listened to cases where the general environment of repression and anxiety imposed the need to receive psychological support on a personal level; and cases where personal suffering was trivialized because of the gravity of the field the person focused on. "Hope" was a concept referred to in many interviews. The periodical magazine team that continues its independent publishing by founding an association, said that they did not feel helpless despite their prediction that the level of repression would increase. Their proposal was to take part in organizations that contained even the slightest glimmer of hope, and to continue the work they were engaged with. We heard in other interviews as well that continuing to work and keeping the structure standing itself was a source of resistance and hope. Necati Sönmez, from the Documentarist Documentary Film Festival team, who for the last seven years has lived in Egypt as well as Turkey, and has witnessed the day-to-day destruction of civil society there, shuns shallow optimism, but speaks of the hope provided by keeping the festival alive, by "refusing to abandon positions". The words of Sönmez, "to hope for the better, since there is no option but hope" also reflects a general mood. Despite an oft-mentioned great exhaustion, to witness someone active in the field not speaking with intense despair or burnout, and that during one of the most challenging periods in the history of Turkey, to see that belief and courage have not drained away, infused us with inspiration as we prepared this report.

¹⁵³ Personal interview, Berlin, 18 August 2019.

Satranç, Saklambaç ve İnat

Zor Zamanlarda Sivil Toplum

Chess, Hide-and-Seek and Determination

Civil Society in Difficult Times

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