

# What's goin' on?

*This report covers the violations of Freedom of Expression, Free Assembly and Peaceful Demonstrations in Turkey on October 2019.*

*It is prepared by Initiative for Freedom of Expression, in co-operation with "Human Rights Association" and with help of "Human Rights Foundation" documentation and publicized as a video conference of four reporters from Ankara, Diyarbakır, İstanbul and İzmir, on November 27, 2019. <https://www.dusun-think.net/en/turkey-today/the-mirror/whats-goin-on-november-2019/>*

## Introduction

The phrase Freedom of Expression covers almost all freedoms and all sorts of violations.

When people try to speak out the violations or ill treatment, they are subjected, or write or sing or with the help of drama or peaceful demonstrations, press declarations, this is the challenge they meet.

Monthly, we will publicize the violations of the last month as a video conference and transmit via Internet as well as in written form.

We receive reports from four regions: Ankara, İstanbul, İzmir and Diyarbakır live, from four regional reporters, and we will discuss on the common denominators and on the remedies, possibilities.

Reports are free to republish.

Thank you very much in advance for your interest.

## Reports form the Regions

### **İstanbul** (*Eren Keskin- Vice President of HRA*)

This month, Turkey started a military action in Northern Syria, and a great oppression on the "anti-war", - *in better words*- the "anti-occupation" dissidents.

The first attack was on the "Saturday Mothers" which is the most accepted civil disobedience action since 1995. For a long time, the traditional area "Galatasaray Square" is banned, the mothers meet in a narrow street, in front of the HRA Branch in İstanbul.

On October 12, police imposed a new ban, not the use the words "War", "Intervention" etc. People resisted and police attacked, 9 taken into custody, handcuffed, for long hours not given water, forbidden to go to WC; while trying to use their freedom of expression they have been victims of torture.

On this event, MP Sezgin Tanrikulu said *“This is a war against Kurds”*. A large lynch campaign started on the social media. I have also faced the same attacks on the media, due to a tweet of mine, and after journalist Nedim Şener’s provocation targeting me, police raided my apartment on October 23. I’m accused of terrorist organization’s propaganda.

One day ago, journalist Emre Oman was taken into custody due to his tweets. Lawyer Nurcan Kaya was detained at Istanbul Airport -due to her tweet- on October 27.

On Oct.17; in Istanbul-Esenyurt, police attacked the press declaration of HDP, many taken to custody, handcuffed, tortured.

This information and figures depend on the applications made to HRA only.

In addition to all, our “Commission Against Racism” has made two declarations of crime. One for an attack on an old person in Çanakkale, and the other about a poster placed at bus stops in Konya, targeting Jews.

### **Ankara** (*Osman İşçi- Gen. Secr. Of HRA*)

In Ankara, “assembly and demonstrations” is a problem for a long time.

On November 9, 2019 Ms. Nuriye Gülmen started a protest action, and others followed. At Yüksel street, in front of the Human Rights Monument, twice every day.

Due to yesterday, for 1107 days. With no exception, each day the police intervened. Custodies, arrests... also ill treatment, as a usual practice.

Protesters faced fine sentences, as well as criminal cases that might cause imprisonment. A large group was aiming to have the firing decisions *-due to the statutory decrees at State of Emergency period-* abolished.

October 23, 2019 the 17<sup>th</sup> hearing of the case against 72 KESK (Public Workers Union) members was held. Accusation: Being members of a terrorist organization. But the questions were about daily and usual activities of the union. The case which was opened in 2012. The duration of the case *-nearly 7 years-* commits a violation of the right of fair trial.

On the anniversary of Ankara Massacre (Oct.10,2015) police intervened the peaceful demonstration, many wounded, many custodies; but surely no investigation for committers, impunity.

How about the other provinces in the region? All the same.

In Eskişehir, 500 workers of ESPARK Mall started a tent action, because their wages were not paid. Police intervened on the 10<sup>th</sup> day. Not only violation of the right to assembly and demonstrate, but also the freedom of association.

The meeting titled “The Great Gathering of Statutory Decree Victims” to be held in Ankara on October 5 and 6 was banned by the Governor, only one day before the date. Police intervened the audience, also MP Ömer Faruk Gergerliođlu.

The conference titled “Kayseri and Environment: Social, Cultural and Economic History”, organized by Hrant Dink Foundation on October 18 and 19 was banned. The foundation turned the action to Mantı (Turkish Ravioli) Day and realized the following week.

In Ankara, as well as other provinces in the region, the old habit of “*Preventing all sorts of public meetings*” continues, mainly as arbitrary practice everywhere.

### **İzmir** (*Ahmet Çiçek- HRA Representative*)

In our region, İzmir, Balıkesir, Antalya, etc. we had an intensive oppression on declarations on Internet Sites, as well as the social media, and tweets, many investigations, arrests.

6 custodies in Aydın, on October 10 and 11 custodies in İzmir, 2 custodies in Denizli. The next day 18 custodies due to declarations against the “Peace Spring” (Military operation to Syria), one in Balıkesir, the next day, the same reason, another 55 custodies, in Antalya the following day,

On October 17, again for the same reason, 8 custodies in Denizli, on Oct. 22, 4 custodies, 1 arrest in Aydın, 3 custodies and 1 arrest in Kuşadası and 1 custody in Denizli, for insulting the President.

Totally, 55 custodies, 4 arrests in October 2019.

In addition, İzmir branch of (HDP/ People’s democratic Party) was not allowed to make an open-air meeting titled “We Gather for Democracy”. They wanted to do it in front of the branch building, but it was also banned by the Governance, depending on the demonstrations ban the Governance, itself.

On the same day, women organizations tried to make a demonstration titled “Women Want Peace”. It was also banned, they had to make it indoor.

Totally: 62 violations of “Right of assembly and demonstration” was recorded in October 2019.

What we simply call “Oppression on Social Media” is more than that. In practice, each of them means a police raid at home, late at night, terrorizing all, using extreme power.

### **Diyarbakır** (*Ezgi Sıla İpek – HRA representative*)

The cultural event organized by Cizre (Şırnak) Municipality titled “Mem û Zîn Festival of Youth, Culture and Arts” was banned, depending on the demonstration ban for 15 days, by the Governance.

In Yenişehir district, police banned the and the press declaration and signature campaign by the Municipality, to protest the “Trustee” practice in the region.

Also in Hakkari, all sort of demonstrations were banned by the Governance, for 30 days. The excuse: “... to protect the identities of the republic, the indivisible unity of the State with its nation and territory, national security and prevent any provocation... etc.”

We are forced to make press declarations only in front of the Association building, and in a limited part of the pavement at the entrance.

If I have to me summarize: During this period information about 25 violations could reach us.

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## Evaluation

*In this part, reporters will evaluate the events and try to find answers to the following questions:*

*What are the common denominators of violations?*

*Have you noticed any change, any concentration on a certain field?*

*What should and what can be done?*

### **İstanbul** (Eren Keskin- Vice President of HRA)

In Turkey, freedom of expression was always a problem. The State does not allow “The Red Lines” to be discussed. If you have a different opinion on the issues like “Kurdistan” problem, Armenian genocide, military bases in Cyprus, you are a “Criminal of thought”.

This is what we are living today. It is really ironic that the same practice goes on, on the days politicians speak about “The Justice Reform”(!) There are not many changes. Some acquittals followed the verdict of the Constitutional Court on Academics cases. But in the same time, accusations, investigations and custodies started for others who make similar statements. How can we trust?

### **Ankara** (Osman İşçi- Gen. Secr. Of HRA)

The records we were able to access is only a small part of the violations. Same for the events we were able to bring together and declare here, for October 2019.

In fact, freedom of expression is not a problem for Government supporters. It is a problem when those frames are exceeded. After October 9, the military operation to Syria, the oppression on dissidents increased.

Another fact, the suicide events -which went on at the beginning of November- showed us the economic background that made people lost all their hopes. Also, the bans on worker unions’

actions (*Workers in Eskişehir, miners in Soma*) and efforts to limit the right to assembly, shows the economic and social aspect of the oppression on the rights to assembly and demonstration.

### **İzmir** (*Ahmet Çiçek- HRA Representative*)

The Governance has a feeling that it is the only authority in the province. Despite legal right of assembly and demonstrations *-for individuals or organizations-* Governors are able to ban all demonstrations for a certain period. They used this authorization first at the “Trustees” period, then the “military operation to Syria”.

Using the word “Trustee” was banned, Using the word “War” was banned. An administration that bans the words in own language. Not only banned, those words have been also terrorized. During an *-allowed(!)-press declaration (usually very rare)* the police warns: *You will not use the words “War, Peace, Trustee”*. If you use a similar word, no problem. Because the order from the top is focused on those words.

When HDP MPs made a meeting, the police surrounded them also the people who wanted to participate. This time the people were pushed away by force. When we asked the police chief if the Governor banned, he answered *“No, this is my will”*. Everything is arbitrary. “I do not want. I will not let you speak here”. It was a very funny scene, tragic, in fact. MPs on one side, surrounded by police, and the audience on the other, around 100 meters away, also surrounded by police.

HDP is a legal political party and has equal rights with others.

In the period of “Trustees” all protests against them were totally forbidden.

They may partly allow the demonstrations on Women Rights, but when “War” is included, like “Women against war” STOP, forbidden.

I believe one of the most important things we have to concentrate on, is the Social Media.

If I will not be able to use this field to express myself, and I will be in danger of a police raid at home, very late at night, breaking my door using a battery ram... Unfortunately, this is the fact.

### **Diyarbakır** (*Ezgi Sıla İpek – HRA representative*)

We face a serious reaction, obstruction and arbitrary practice, especially on the rights of assembly and demonstration. The possibility to use these democratic rights are left to the mercy of Governors.

We also live the practices of State of Emergency, after it was ended on paper. In fact, the State of Emergency goes on. Barricades on the pavements, you can walk, stores are prevented to access. Why? Because there is a press declaration there, even permitted, the public area can be occupied. In order to access your home, workplace or school, you are obliged to follow the path they allow.

In Mardin, "The Women Platform" intended to make an action against violence against women and murders. The District Governor banned the press declaration, with the excuse that it was not found "appropriate". How can he? How can one decide what is appropriate, or not? All is totally absurd. Any opposite idea is banned, never allowed. They blockade buildings, hundreds of policemen sent to a press declaration of 15 people, terrorization all around.

The State says: you can express yourself only in the frames I draw. Violence, ill treatment and torture are always beside.

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The next report, containing the violations in November 2019 will be published at the first week of December.