

Defending LGBTI+ Rights in Turkey: “We are in the Same Storm but not in the Same Boat”

*“For in my day I have had many bitter and painful experiences in war
and on the stormy seas. So let this new disaster come.
It only makes one more.”*
-Homer, *The Odyssey*

Introduction

Turkey’s civic space has lately been shrinking due to the tense political climate and the deterioration of the democratic institutions. The climate of repression became more tangible during the state of emergency instituted just after the failed coup attempt in July 2016. According to Amnesty International’s report on Turkey¹, since the coup attempt, the government has suspended 160 media outlets and 370 NGOs, including three lawyers’ associations with a human rights focus, and women’s rights and humanitarian organizations in the southeast of the country. At the same time, Turkey has become the world’s biggest jail for journalists, with 175 journalists currently imprisoned², and many other media workers facing criminal charges.

During the state of emergency, the Turkish government succeeded, with narrow popular support, in changing the country’s constitution and replacing its parliamentary system with a presidential governance model, lacking democratic institutions and self-control mechanisms for abuse of executive power, many of the functions of the parliament being turned over to the president.

Using this growing stranglehold on the country, the ruling party repressed civil society leaders, civil society actors, and organizations which are part of Turkey’s democratic integrity and fighting against human rights violations in the country. Multiple reports from international and regional human rights bodies have expressed an extreme and growing concern regarding attacks on a range of human rights defenders (HRDs)³. The oppressive climate has greatly affected the rights of LGBTI+ people, human rights defenders and organizations working in the LGBTI+ rights field, who find themselves working in an increasingly conservative environment dominated by discrimination, bigotry, and hate. LGBTI+ organizations have been a target for the government, especially since the 2014 Istanbul Pride March when 100,000 people gathered in Istiklal Street and Taksim Square, following the Gezi Park protests when millions of people went out onto the streets to protest against the government’s authoritarian, anti-democratic and corrupted policies. While the crackdown on Turkey’s LGBTI+ movement began with the first ban on Istanbul Pride March in 2015, it became more concrete in 2017 with an indefinite ban on all LGBTI+ themed events in Ankara, the capital of Turkey, and the ensuing wave of bans happening around the country⁴. Ongoing state-wide demonizing and criminalizing policies resulted in an LGBTI+ ban phenomenon across the country by the local authorities and governorates, affecting pride marches and LGBTI+ themed events including workshops, film screenings, panel discussions, and press conferences which usually take place during the pride weeks. Right now, it is likely to be impossible to organize a public LGBTI+ themed event in Turkey.

The oppressive atmosphere adds to the already existing struggles of LGBTI+ organizations and activists. LGBTI+ organizations and rights defenders face different challenges and barriers under the new circumstances. These challenges and barriers can be listed as: limited room for activism, increasing hate speech and censorship, the

¹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/europe-and-central-asia/turkey/report-turkey/>

² <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/turkey>

³ European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs, Report on the 2018 Commission Report on Turkey, 26 Feb. 2019, p. 8. para. 9, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2019-0091_EN.pdf.

conditions under the current pandemic, organizational challenges, an unsustainable lack of financial and human resources and the lack of access to public services.

LGBTI+ Ban Phenomenon

The Governorship of Istanbul has been banning Istanbul Pride March since 2015, invoking respect for the holy month of Ramadan as a reason, in addition to public security reasons. In 2018, the Istanbul Pride Committee postponed the Pride March for one week to avoid the ban. However, the Governorship of Istanbul banned Istanbul Pride March again, referring to “public security risks”, “public morality”, and “social sensitivities” as justification. Various conservative and nationalist groups and political parties gave press statements demanding the pride marches be banned or they would take care of it on their own, which was a clear threat and call for violence. The pride event was organized, but police forces attacked the participants with tear gas, plastic bullets, and water cannon vehicles. Six LGBTI+ human rights defenders were taken into custody and their trials are still ongoing.

In November 2017, the Ankara Governor banned indefinitely all kinds of LGBTI+ themed events in the capital of Turkey, referring to "public morality", "social sensitivities" and "sensibilities" on the grounds of the Law on the State of Emergency. This incident stunned the community all around the country. The Governorship banned German LGBTI+ Film Days following some tweets posted with the hashtags #LGBTFilmGünleriİptalEdilsin (#MayLGBTFilmDaysBeCancelled) and #İstiklalimizeKaraLeke (#BlackMarkOnOurFreedom). Then the ban phenomenon spread to other cities such as Istanbul, Izmir, Bursa, and Mardin.

Kaos GL Association appealed against the ban. However, it was two years afterwards that the 12th Administrative Trial Court of the Ankara Regional Administrative Court removed the Governor-imposed ban on the LGBTI+ events in the capital. However, it was found out later that there was a second ban issued on the 3rd October 2018, invoking the Law on Provincial Administration⁵ and Law on Meetings and Demonstrations⁶.

Anti-Democratic Regulations on Civil Society

Under the state of emergency, the Turkish Government has instituted new amendments regarding civil society, the Law on Meetings and Protest, and the Law on Provincial Administration. In October 2018, the Ministry of Interior released a new amendment⁷ regarding civil society that requires organizations to submit identifying information to the Ministry of Interior’s system called DERBİS, concerning each membership which is approved or terminated within 30 days. It is foreseen that this new amendment will be a crackdown on mostly trans people and LGBTI+ people working in the state institutions. According to Kaos GL’s research on the Situation of LGBTI+ Employees in the Public Sector in Turkey in 2020⁸, 94% of LGBTI+ state workers do not feel secure enough to come out in their workplace, while 56.6% claimed that they have witnessed sexual orientation and gender identity based hate speech. In addition to that, 17.2% of them did not want to reveal which city they were living in. These rates clearly show that LGBTI+ state workers are forced to hide their identities to prevent any discrimination both in the recruitment process and daily work life. However, with this new amendment, LGBTI+ people who are engaging with LGBTI+ organizations would be an easy target for the authorities.

Turkey published new amendments to Law No. 2911, the Regulation on Implementation of the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations in 2015⁹. These amendments mostly describe new limits to the right to protest and flexible leverage given to the highest local authority to postpone or ban meetings and demonstrations. When it comes to the LGBTI+ community, the anti-democratic law has become more visible.

Lawyers working in the LGBTI+ rights field have said that in the member countries of the Council of Europe, there are other systems applied to meetings and demonstrations that are based on the giving of notice. The system of giving notice does not amount to an automatic violation of rights, however banning meetings or demonstrations

⁵ <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.3.5442.pdf>

⁶ <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.2911.pdf>

⁷ <https://bianet.org/english/society/202101-ministry-of-interior-to-collect-information-of-association-members>

⁸ <https://kaosgldernegi.org/images/library/kamu-c-alis-anlari-2020.pdf>

⁹ <http://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.2911.pdf>

only based on whether they have been notified or not in the countries that adopted this system is not lawful. These new regulations makes it difficult to exercise the right to protest peacefully and the right to association.

The Law for Provincial Administration, revised under the state of emergency, grants a broad authority to governorates. Article No. 11 and No. 42 respectively state that governorates and district governorates shall take the necessary precautions when needed. As a result, these offices cite “public morality”, “public health” and “public order” and take the necessary precautions by banning events and activities. This is used as a reference point to impose bans in Turkey. (Queer Olympix which is Turkey’s only LGBTI+ inclusive sports event was banned based upon Article No. 42 of The Law for Provincial Administration.)

In addition to these, the Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) revised the “Guidance for Prevention of Abuse of Non-Profit Organizations for Terrorist Financing” in June 2019. With the latest revisions, MASAK indicates that non-governmental organizations might be considered “potential terrorism supporters” if they get financial support solely from international organizations. Since NGOs and rights-based organizations with opposing ideologies have a distrust in the current government, these new revisions are seen as instruments to build more pressure on civil society and to criminalize human rights advocates on an additional, financial basis. Especially those LGBTI+ organizations which are turned into targets because they get financial support from European organizations, are among the most vulnerable rights groups through these regulations. These new regulations prevent LGBTI+ people from freely engaging in civic action, discourage LGBTI+ citizens from expressing their demands, and result in LGBTI+ organizations losing their dynamism.

Criminalizing and Demonizing Policies for LGBTI+ Human Rights Defenders

In October 2017, Osman Kavala, one of the most influential civil society leaders and founder of Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly and Anadolu Kültür Foundation, was taken under custody.¹⁰ Kavala had been in prison for more than three years and he was kept for more than a year without any charge or accusation. After 16 months’ imprisonment, an indictment of 657 pages long was released. According to this indictment, Osman Kavala and 15 other human rights defenders, civil society leaders and NGO workers were accused of “attempting to overthrow the government” through the Gezi Park Protests and receiving financial support from the Open Society Foundation. Eight LGBTI+ organizations were also mentioned as financially supported by the Open Society Foundation. Official notifications requested that all documents related to their financial relationship with the Open Society Foundation be sent by the organizations to the Ministry of Finance in April 2019. These selective governmental audits clearly aimed to create an oppressive environment for LGBTI+ organizations and to prevent them from carrying out their human rights work. The Kavala and Open Society Foundation case shows that donors supporting LGBTI+ organizations with financial support might be at risk as well, depending on how the government approaches the case.

On the 6th of June 2019, many fake accounts (they are called “troll accounts” and mostly used by pro-government think tanks to target people and/or organizations) started tweeting with the hashtag #OnurYürüyüşüYasaklansın (#PrideParadeShallBeBanned). After more than 4,000 tweets were published, the hashtag became a trending topic on Twitter in Turkey. On the same day, the pro-government newspaper, Yeni Akit, released an article about Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Week calling LGBTI+ people “perverts,” “faggots,” and “honorless.” Moreover, on the 7th of June 2019, Süleyman Soylu, the Interior Minister of Turkey, said that if Ekrem İmamoğlu, CHP’s candidate for the Istanbul municipal elections, were to win, terrorists and LGBTI+ people would take over the management of the municipality. Later, on the 21st of June, the minister would say that “LGBT people are a threat to Turkey” in a speech.¹¹

On the 5th of July 2019, the Chief of Religious Affairs, Prof. Dr. Ali Erbaş committed the crime of homophobia in a hate speech¹² at the 8th International Religious Services Conference held in Konya. In the conference’s opening speech which he delivered, Erbaş said “we see a number of perversions are put forward by means of certain mottos, such as ‘gender equality’, and a fuss is made over them,” and used homophobic hate speech by suggesting that “homosexuality is a perversion that is ‘against nature’”.

¹⁰ <https://www.osmankavala.org/en/judicial-process>

¹¹ <https://www.birgun.net/haber/soylu-kaftancioqlu-nu-hedef-aldi-258099>

¹² <https://kaosgl.org/paqe.php?id=28479>

On the 5th of August 2019, 19 LGBTI+ human rights defenders were informed that a criminal case had been opened against them, relating to charges of “participating in unlawful assembly” and “resisting despite warning,” for their participation in the peaceful LGBTI+ Pride March which took place inside the campus of Middle East Technical University (METU) in Ankara on 10th May 2019. The next hearing was due to be held on the 10th of December 2020, coincidentally on International Human Rights Day.

On the 20th of August 2019, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Süleyman Soylu, said that he didn’t approve of LGBTI+ people, as he saw LGBTI+ people as a threat to family values, religion and the traditions of the nation.¹³ At the very beginning of September, Minister Soylu again targeted LGBTI+ organizations and accused them of receiving financial support from the United States of America¹⁴.

On the 4th of October 2019, the final hearing of the Istanbul Pride trial took place. Four people were acquitted, and two people got suspended sentences of several months for "resisting a public servant" and "risking traffic safety". Lawyers were filing an appeal against the rulings¹⁵. It was the first time that LGBTI+ human rights defenders had faced criminal charges.

Boğaziçi Protests and Cruel Targeting of the Government Against the LGBTI+ Community

The rectors of Turkish universities used to be elected by the university lecturers, but with the new presidential election system that changed: now the president appoints all the rectors himself. In Boğaziçi University of Istanbul, one of the most respected and with the highest ratings at the international level, students including the LGBTI+ community have been protesting against the anti-democratic appointment of the university's new rector since the beginning of January 2021. There was an art exhibition as a part of the protests on campus, and one of the artworks reportedly depicted LGBTI+ rainbow symbols alongside the Kaaba, the building at the center of the Masjid al-Haram - the Great Mosque - in Mecca, Saudi Arabia, the most sacred site in Islam. There was also an image of the Shahmaran, a popular Middle Eastern mythical creature, half woman and half snake.

This artwork went viral on social media and four students were taken into custody, and the Minister of Internal Affairs targeted LGBTI+ people on Twitter saying "four LGBT perverts who showed disrespect to the Kaaba were detained at Boğaziçi University". Later on, the governor of Istanbul made a public announcement saying the artwork was an "ugly attack" that "mocked the religious beliefs" and the police raided the office of Boğaziçi LGBTI+ club and collected all the rainbow images. A representative of the governor’s office also said that "terrorism related books and images were found" in the same announcement.

İbrahim Kalın, the chief adviser to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, said "neither freedom of expression nor the right to protest" could defend the artwork, adding that the act would receive "the punishment it deserves before the law". The Chief of Religious Affairs also said that they would take legal action against the students. The rectorate of the university started an administrative investigation against those students. The Minister of Justice also stated that a judicial investigation would started against those who had shown disrespect.

There was a hashtag campaign against LGBTI+ people with the tag #BoğaziçinceLGBTRezaleti (#LGBTDisgraceatBoğaziçi) and #KabeKutsalımızdır (#KaabaOurSacred) and lots of hate speech shared on social media. The religiously affiliated union called Mil-Diyamet Sen stated that they would apply to the Ministry of Internal Affairs with a request for the immediate shut down of LGBTI+ associations from that Monday. After this nation-wide lynching campaign, even though several lawyers accompanied them all night long during the interrogation, two students were immediately arrested, and another two were subject to house arrest after their interrogation.

Within the same week, President Erdoğan said that "Our youth won't be LGBT youth" in his speech referring to the protests at Boğaziçi University. It was the first time that he had used the term "LGBT" in his political life.

A very religious group called Anadolu Gençlik (Anatolian Youth) organized a protest in Istanbul and targeted LGBTI+ people, chanting that they would die for Islam. The religiously affiliated union Mil-Diyamet Sen officially

¹³ <https://kaosgl.org/sayfa.php?id=28652>

¹⁴ <https://t24.com.tr/amp/haber/soylu-amerika-ankara-da-lgbt-ye-22-milyon-dolar-yardim-yapiyor,837850>

¹⁵ <https://twitter.com/istanbulpride/status/1180093722740043776>

applied to the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the request of the immediate shut down of LGBTI+ associations from that day onwards.

The dominant political discourse by the government and media targeting LGBTI+ organizations frequently results in actions by the state authorities to ban and/or restrict their operations and events. The indefinite ban in the capital of Turkey drastically impacted Ankara-based organizations and completely prevented them from operating actively. Organizations had to move all their events outside of Ankara due to the ban. Despite the many challenges, this change also brought with it new opportunities and new collaborations. Hate speech has been becoming more common in the pro-government media. Alongside this, the central administration has been putting pressure on LGBTI+ organizations via local authorities (in this case, district governorates and governorates) which harass them using financial audits.

Some of the common vulnerability factors accompanying being a member of the LGBTI+ community in Turkey were identified as: facing discrimination and stigmatization, denial of family rights, hate attacks, becoming a refugee, being a sexual violence survivor, being homeless, having chronic diseases such as HIV, and having a physical disability. In addition to these, some members of the LGBTI+ community face mental health issues caused by the hardships they are confronted with in their activism work. Despite this, the response capacity of LGBTI+ organizations is very limited, and only a few of them can provide mental health support to their volunteers and staff. In addition to that, specialized mental health services are generally poor in several cities, and organizations don't have good enough networking skills to reach unbiased mental health professionals.

LGBTI+ organizations can't access funding opportunities as easily as they used to before 2016. In the past few years, it has been observed that Embassies, which have been allies for the community in the past, are currently eager to support different areas rather than LGBTI+ rights. It is stated that this is also a result of the oppressive climate and the criminalization of LGBTI+ organizations. Most of the donors provide grants for project-based and activity-based events, while the biggest problem appears to be being unable to cover fundamental needs such as rent, bills, administrative and human resources expenses. As a result, many organizations suffer from a lack of professional staff and face the possibility of even losing their office.

Turkey's oppressive climate greatly affects LGBTI+ organizations in terms of human resources, and almost every organization which attended the assessment stated that they lack professional staff members and volunteers. Organizations can no longer organize public events due to the bans and security risks. Public invisibility sets barriers to reaching out to new people, and recruiting activists, as well as initiating fundraising events. As LGBTI+ organizations are being criminalized by the government, people think it might be dangerous for them to get involved. Staff and board members of LGBTI+ organizations mostly feel under threat while working, fear of being persecuted, and are concerned about police raids on their offices and hate attacks by civilians, which prevents them from carrying out their operational and administrative work. Hate propaganda by state institutions and representatives and the mainstream media might be triggering hate attacks on LGBTI+ individuals.

Some predictions among the LGBTI+ human rights defenders in Turkey and mostly those from the Eastern part of Turkey are that attacks against LGBTI+ organizations will continue. It is expected that there will be a judicial operation by the government targeting a group of LGBTI+ human rights defenders for their human rights work, in order to threaten other LGBTI+ organizations and rights defenders, following the same pattern as the Kavala case¹⁶. They assume that this oppressive climate will increasingly continue until LGBTI+ organizations will not be able to operate as they used to, similar to how Russian anti-gay propaganda law results, in practice.

In the Kurdish cities of Turkey such as Diyarbakır, Mardin, Batman, and Van where the HDP¹⁷ obtained the majority of votes in the last few local elections, the increasingly anti-democratic and security-centered policies of the Turkish government have been continuing since July 2015 when the breakdown of the peace process took place and armed conflict blew up between people affiliated to the armed PKK¹⁸ and the Turkish military. Turkey's

¹⁶ See Appendix 1 - *Criminalizing and Demonizing Policies on LGBTI+ HRDs*

¹⁷ The **Public's Democratic Party** - Pro-Kurdish Party (Turkish: Halkların Demokratik Partisi, **HDP**). The HDP is the only political party recognizing sexual orientation and gender identity in their written code. In the local elections in 2014, the HDP nominated many openly LGBTI+ candidates around Turkey, but unfortunately none of them entered the local councils.

¹⁸ The **Kurdistan Workers' Party** or **PKK** (Kurdish: Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) is a Kurdish far-left militant and political organization based in Turkey and Iraq. Since 1984 the PKK has been involved in an armed conflict with the Turkish state (with

perspective and policies became more security-centered in the region between the two elections of 2015, and the responses of the government to the demands of the Kurdish people were indefinite 24-hour curfews and carrying out heavily militarised security operations, which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of civilians and the forced displacement of thousands. Under the state of emergency, declared after the failed coup attempt in 2016, the human rights situation in the Kurdish region of Turkey became much worse. A series of executive decrees has all but eliminated opposition Kurdish voices, shutting down the media and NGOs¹⁹. The elected mayors of both metropolitan and small municipalities in the region, including those for Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van were replaced with government appointed trustees once more after the state of emergency period in 2016²⁰. Hundreds of NGOs across the region were shut down with vague reasons such as “links to terrorist organizations” or “threats to national security”. Under all these circumstances, in Kurdish cities, LGBTI+ organizations and human rights defenders have been greatly affected in a negative way. LGBTI+ organizations can no longer access support through the municipalities as they used to, due to the removal of the mayors. Many organizations have had to suspend operations (the Diyarbakır-based Heburn LGBTI+ is one of them) due to the limitations placed on the civic and democratic sphere. It is known that no single street event has been organized for four years in Diyarbakır, while almost all LGBTI+ human rights defenders feel under threat and worried about their physical security, and suffering from despair and burn-out. Many LGBTI+ human rights defenders have had to move to bigger cities like Istanbul, Ankara and İzmir.

Being LGBTI+ in Turkey during the Covid Pandemic

The pandemic has deeply affected the LGBTI+ community, which is already a fragile group in Turkey, to the same extent as in other countries. According the Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association’s (SPoD) pandemic report²¹ based on its hotline calls which have numbered more than 500 since March 2020, LGBTI+ people in Turkey during the COVID-19 pandemic, have gradually become a more vulnerable community and have experienced notably serious problems in accessing the right to live as well as the right to education, right to health, and right to labor. In addition to this, the rising hate speech directed towards LGBTI+ people and increasing domestic violence associated with being obliged to remain at home have also been observed. Related to staying at home during the pandemic, incidents particularly regarding domestic violence have doubled during the pandemic. In Yıldız Tar’s article *How Does COVID-19 Pandemic Affect LGBTI+ Community in Turkey*,²² it was mentioned that for many LGBTI+ people, staying at home raises domestic violence concerns. Already among the most vulnerable groups regarding access to employment, LGBTI+ individuals are now facing job and income losses. Moreover, the risk of discrimination in healthcare is higher for LGBTI+ individuals. To make matters worse, hate speech targeting the LGBTI+ community in the pretext of Covid-19 is on the rise.

It has also been observed that, because of the public agencies and institutions providing social services being far from accepting LGBTI+ inclusivity, LGBTI+ people often hesitate to apply for the services they are eligible for, and they are frequently uninformed about the available services. During the pandemic, the applications of LGBTI+ people for psychological support have remained at the high level they were before this period. Since the middle of March 2020, 82 people have applied for psychological support to SPoD. It has been observed that, due to the unemployment and financial difficulties that have increased with the pandemic, the need for free psychological counselling has also increased.

Since the very first days of the pandemic, LGBTI+ people have been systematically targeted by the discriminatory and demonizing statements of government officials and smear campaigns in media outlets and social media. The fact that has become most clear throughout SPoD’s legal counselling is the increase in physical violence against those who are openly or assumedly LGBTI+, especially after the statements targeting LGBTI+ people made by public officers, government officials and the president himself.

a two-year cease-fire during 2013–2015), with the initial aim of achieving an independent Kurdish state, later changing it to a demand for equal rights and Kurdish autonomy in Turkey.

¹⁹ <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2016/12/turkey-curfews-and-crackdown-force-hundreds-of-thousands-of-kurds-from-their-homes/>

²⁰ <http://bianet.org/english/politics/211823-metropolitan-mayors-of-diyarbakir-mardin-and-van-removed-from-office>

²¹ <http://spod.org.tr/SourceFiles/pdf-2020623151720.pdf>

²² <https://tr.boell.org/en/2020/04/17/how-does-covid-19-pandemic-affect-lgbti-community-turkey>

Conclusion

In such countries as Turkey, which is currently being classified as a competitive authoritarian regime, the pandemic conditions are an opportunity which can be easily used as a tool to oppress the democratic components of a country like civil society, democratic institutions, the media and activist citizens. Since COVID-19 emerged, the Turkish government has instituted a large number of restrictions in different areas, but these restrictions are mostly affecting freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and the right to association. For example, we see an inconsistent binary policy of the government for public events and assemblies. While President Erdoğan can organize a public rally, or thousands of people can join the opening ceremony of the Hagia Sophia Mosque without respecting social distancing rules, the protests and events of opponents are constantly being cancelled by the governors due to the COVID-19 restrictions. Also, the Ministry of Internal Affairs have been forbidding civil society organizations from holding their general assemblies since March 2020, and therefore civil society organizations are barely operational.

What is feared is that the Turkish government will benefit from the conditions of the pandemic and restrictions till the end of the crisis. It is foreseen that the government will continue restricting the activities of civil society organizations even though life goes back to normal. It is also concerning that the polarizing, demonizing and discriminative discourse is set to continue and the LGBTI+ community will face more violations in their daily life.

The trend of human rights has been losing its popularity at a global level, while populism and right-wing discourse have been rising at the same time and more populist leaders are being accepted and supported by their citizens now. In addition to that, the more the international community fails to respond efficiently to those human rights violations, the more that violations continue to take place. Even though it is a global challenge that we have been going through, this trend forms a bigger threat to human rights, democracy and the values of the EU, as the European Union is the last bastion that remains standing against human rights violators.

There are a large number of similarities between Vladimir Putin, Victor Orban, Andrzej Duda, the co-chairs of the AfD, Marine Le Pen and President Erdoğan. Those leaders need internal and external enemies in order to continue and justify their power in their countries, and the LGBTI+ community is mostly an easy target as an internal enemy in those countries. Whatever kinds of human rights violations happen in one of those countries encourages the others. Hate is contagious, in the same way as courage is. The propaganda ban in Russia encouraged the LGBTI+ free zones in Poland. The LGBTI+ free zones in Poland encouraged the ban on gender studies and the change in the transition law in Hungary. What happens in Hungary, Russia and Poland also encourages LGBTI+ bans and human rights violations of the LGBTI+ community in Turkey. If Hungary and Poland as EU member countries can violate the human rights of the LGBTI+ community, so why should Turkey not do the same?

This inevitable circle has to be stopped with uniting as of all the opponents, international solidarity and establish a common ground for dialogue for human rights, democracy and freedom of thoughts regardless of our political, identical and cultural differences and bearing the storm altogether.