

State of Emergency is Still Going on for LGBTI+’s!

Outcome Report of "How did the Diyanet's khutbah reflect on the media?" Workshop

October 22, 2020

As Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways Association and Kaos GL Association, we met in Istanbul between November 8-9 2019 at the 2 day Solidarity Keeps Alive Workshop in Istanbul to discuss how to fight together as feminists and LGBTI+ activists against right-wing conservative attacks that have become more and more organized over the recent years and describing itself as anti-gender movements.

We have organized the meeting, where we discussed topics such as media, law, activism, local politics/organization, academia/education, international advocacy, within the scope of the "One Day, One Struggle" campaign on November 9th; an international joint action day designated by The Coalition for Sexual and Bodily Rights in Muslim Societies (CSBR), of which both of our associations are members.

After this workshop, we continued our cooperation and solidarity as two associations in the workshop's thematic areas. We continued to say "Solidarity Keeps Us Alive" in line with the road map we created for ourselves in the workshop. One concrete example of this was the "How did the Diyanet's¹

¹ Presidency of Religious Affairs

khutbah reflect on the media?" workshop that we held on October 22. In this online workshop, 25 journalists, writers, feminists, and LGBTI+ activists discussed media reflections regarding the Diyanet's Friday khutbah, which targeted LGBTI+'s, people living with HIV and anyone who had extramarital sexual relationships, especially women.

In light of Kaos GL's report of the same name, prepared by Idil Engindeniz, we discussed the anti-LGBTI+ and misogynistic attitude of media, right-wing conservative and populist methods against gender equality, and what we can do against these methods. This report contains the abstract and recommendations prepared by the Women for Women's Human Rights - New Ways Association and Kaos GL regarding the discussions in the workshop.

Within the scope of the "How did the Diyanet's khutbah reflect on the media?" report, a month's review of national, local media and websites shows an average of 103 publications per day were made regarding the LGBTI+'s. In comparison with the numbers in Kaos GL's 2019 Media Report, which only examines national and local media, the daily numbers during this period were twentyfold of the average. The highlights of this process were the khutbah of Religious Affairs Administration Chairperson Ali Erbaş, who shows homosexuality, living with HIV and "adultery" as elements to be fought against, as well as the Love 101 series, which began to be aired on subscription-based streaming service ,Netflix, the Istanbul Convention and multiple bar associations discussions.

When we examine the news and columns published in this process, enmity strategy stands out, especially by the media close to the government. When we look at the articles, we see that the subject is discussed mainly in speculative, baseless sentences. Conspiracy theories about everything can be easily circulated around an artificial "enemy" and anyone connected to or allegedly connected to it. Rather than rationality, we see journalism that is

intended to create instant, negative, strong emotions. In the debate around the Istanbul Convention, it is also evident that a separate strategy has been developed in the media to show LGBTI+'s as hostile.

Opposition and hostility against LGBTI+'s in the media is not accidental or coincidental. Both in this report and in our other monitoring activities, we notice that the policies of enmity in the media have been put into effect very quickly in parallel with the statements of public authorities, ministers, the President and senior public officials against LGBTI+'s.

Among the most frequently used strategies to show LGBTI+'s as hostile are discrediting, showing LGBTI+ organizations and LGBTI+'s as "marginal" and "elements that are alien to society", marking LGBTI+ as "Western" to turn the issue into an external one, transforming LGBTI+'s into a polarization tool stand out. When considered together with the facts such as monopolization in the media, censorship and the arrest and trial of journalists; we face a bloc that has turned LGBTI + opposition into a publication policy. On the other hand, LGBTI+ s are not a part of the broadcasting policy in channels that protect LGBTI+ rights and equality. The tendency to report is stronger when the agenda imposes itself. The channels that care about LGBTI+ rights are insufficient in creating their own agenda. In most cases, a very limited publishing practice is being utilized with momentary, hot news and reviews in line with the determined agenda. The agendas and activities of the LGBTI+ movement can only take place in "alternative media" when they are targeted against.

In addition to all these problems, especially in recent years, abstract polarizations over the concepts of "family" and "religion" have been brought to the agenda by both the anti-LGBTI+ bloc media and the government on different occasions. LGBTI+'s and religion are presented as two separate contradictory phenomena. A similar approach emerges through the concept of

"family", especially in smear campaigns shaped around the Istanbul Convention. Following conclusions present themselves when we consider these smear campaigns together with the Government's practices and statements targeting the fundamental rights and freedoms of LGBTI+'s, the Governorships' bans on LGBTI+ Pride Week and Parades in various cities, the "indefinite LGBTI+ activity ban" in Ankara for three years:

*Media institutions that turn LGBTI+ opposition into a publishing policy deem it their duty to legitimize anti-LGBTI+ statements and practices of politicians and advise (!) politicians to make anti-LGBTI+ statements.

*In addition to public officials' statements and practices that aim to change the LGBTI+ perception in society, to spread LGBTI + hostility and hatred; Pro-government media organizations also organize systematic and organized smear campaigns. It is almost an ideological and political struggle against LGBTI+'s.

*In the face of such an environment, we cannot explain anti-LGBTI+ hate speech by lack of information or a mere mistake alone. Both media monitoring studies and state practices show that LGBTI+ opposition is a systematic approach as a part of a conscious and ideological attitude.

So, what is to be done?

Despite all this pessimistic outlook, we now come across news and columns that protect LGBTI+ rights in more and more media institutions, as a result of the years-long efforts of the LGBTI+ movement. We know and see that the LGBTI+ opposition they want to build is not a social consensus. The fact that different individuals and institutions are taking steps on the equality of LGBTI+'s every day, increasing number of those who see solidarity with the LGBTI+ movement as a necessity of the struggle for democracy and human rights especially after hate campaigns, the rise of voices from many cities

against the smear campaign that has peaked with The Diyanet's
hatespeech, is growing our hope that these voices will respond in the
media as well.

Together with this workshop, we had the opportunity to strengthen this hope
and to create a roadmap regarding the media in our struggle for equality and
freedom.

*We will continue to monitor the media, not only monitor it but also fight to
change and transform it by strengthening our existing tools and creating new
tools. Till the story being told becomes our own story, we will work to create
our own agenda with the awareness that each voice, every sound, is precious.

*On the one hand, we see the inclusion of LGBTI+'s in the political agenda as
a success of the LGBTI+ movement. The demand for justice of LGBTI+'s, who
are mocked, ridiculed and deprived of their power, is met both in politics and
in the media.

*We will continue to use both traditional media tools and social media in order
to strengthen alternative media against the unequal mechanisms of
heteronormativity and patriarchy, to make our voice and policies visible
without being limited to alternative media, and to spread our own atmosphere
and voice against the anti-LGBTI+ atmosphere that is intended to be created.

*By continuing to learn from the LGBTI+ movement and feminism, we see it
as one of our fundamental policies to call out to the society, to encourage
taking steps for equality against social inequalities. We will continue to
communicate so that ensuring LGBTI+ rights and equality becomes a media
policy.

We refuse to play this game of hostility in which the media plays an important
role, we disrupt this game and say that the story being told must be our own



story. We are once again shouting "Solidarity Keeps Us Alive" on the occasion of this workshop. Our lives do not fit into opposition and hostility!



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