



EU TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
TO CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS
IN THE WESTERN BALKANS AND TURKEY



COMMUNITY RESILIENCE FORUM 2021

Aslı Ece Koçak – Truth Justice Memory
Center, (Hafıza Merkezi) - Turkey

20-21 OCTOBER, 2021

BELGRADE, SERBIA



Defending human rights & building the capacity of CSOs in Turkey

- We monitor, report and support activities in response to increased crackdown on rights defenders and shrinking civil space in Turkey.
- Especially after the coup attempt which took place in 2016, many CSOs, human rights organizations, associations and media organs were shut down. The state of emergency and the consequent decrees caused the civil society to further shrink and paralyzed human rights defenders in Turkey.
- Büyükada and Gezi trials were two major attacks towards civil society which criminalized human rights advocacy and labeled it as “acts of terror”, “attempt to overthrow the constitutional order.”
- This is why Hafıza Merkezi’s concentration moved heavily towards this area and we launched a civil society support programme called **Haklara Destek** where we became the main contractor for EU funds and distributed it to 48 organizations across Turkey in cooperation with Heinrich Böll Stiftung. We have recently completed the first round of this programme.



Rights Defenders at Risk

KEEP THE VOLUME UP For Rights Defenders in Turkey

Rights Defenders at Risk

Support for Defenders

Useful Resources

News

Releases

About Us

EN / TR

Trial Calendar

October 2021						
M	T	W	T	F	S	S
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
				..		
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
				..		



Turkish Medical Association (TTB) Case
Şeyhmus Gökalp
on trial



Gezi Case
Mücella Yapıcı
on trial



Gezi Case
Yiğit Aksakoçlu
on trial



Osman Kavala
imprisoned



METU Pride Case
METU LGBT+ Solidarity
acquitted



Raci Bilici
sentenced

How COVID-19 measures impeded civil society

- Limitations to the right to association through continued postponement of legally registered associations' General Assembly meetings. This happened four times throughout the pandemic and this administrative measure included many other civil bodies such as Bar Associations, prevented Bar Associations from changing their executives at a turbulent time when the legislation regarding the constitution of bars was changed in Turkey).
- Limitations to the right to freedom of assembly and demonstration by bans issued by governors against pre-planned protests/demonstrations while allowing other crowded events to take place. (inspiring example: Mersin Women's Platform)
- Preventing international observers and journalists from attending hearings by violating the principle of publicity and hindering trial monitoring activities.



Moving the civil space to the digital realm

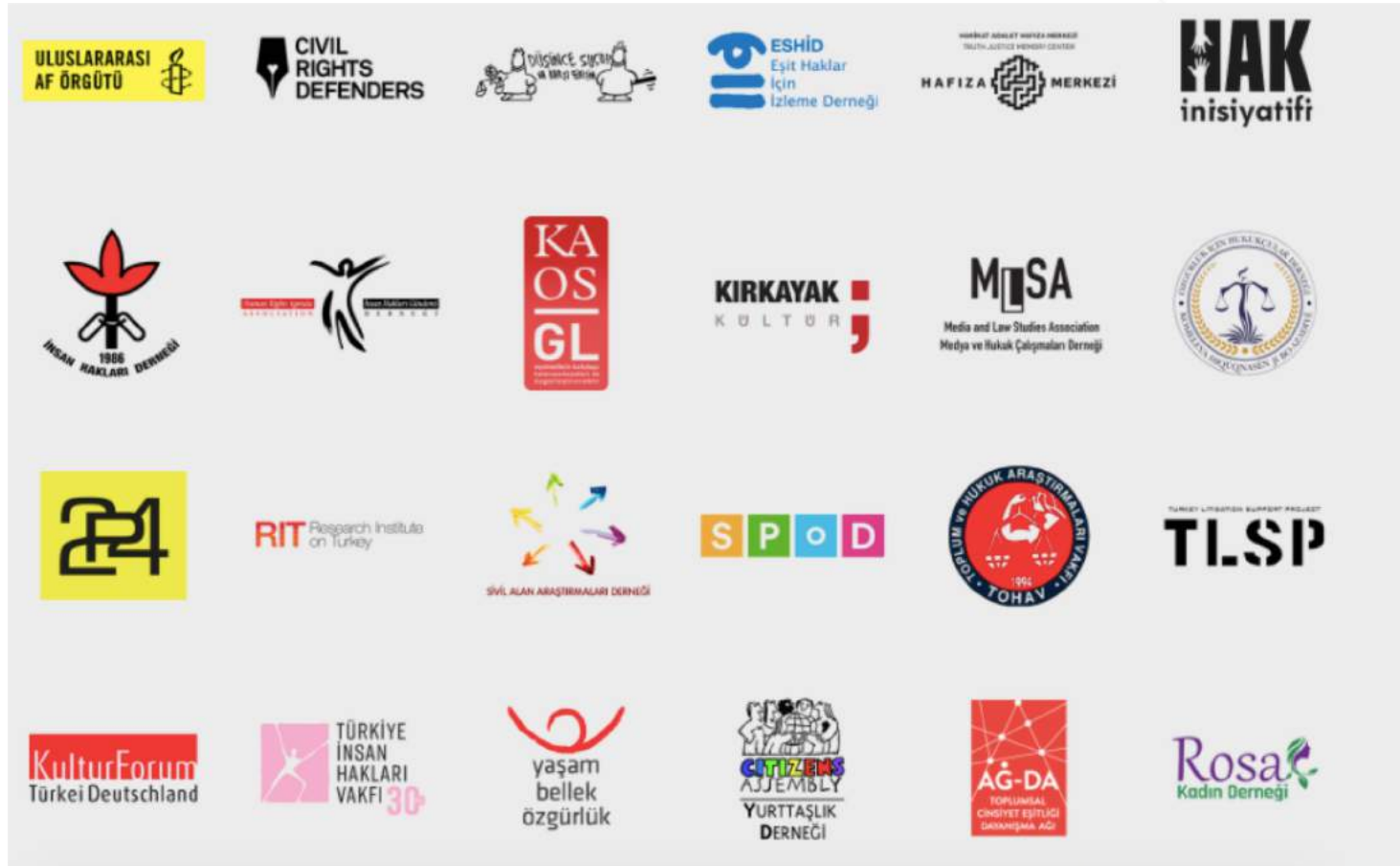
- Many organizations lacked the necessary digital infrastructure, especially those under precarious conditions could not risk investing in digital tools.
- Those who are institutionally more capable and perform advocacy on an international level were more prone to adapt to digitalization. (esp. LGBTI+ organizations with know-how dating back to 2015-6.)
- Some organizations did not have websites or social media accounts when the lockdown first started. Launching websites and building an online presence made them known on a national level.
- Technology literacy and familiarity with digital tools increased during this time.



Other institutional advantages and disadvantages experienced during the pandemic

- Prepared strategy plans and new policy papers by focusing on strengthening the institutional capacity:
 - Institutional policy papers on gender equality, mobbing, workplace ethics, communication and prevention of corruption.
- Encouraged grassroots CSOs to take part in national and international networks and platforms in order to increase their outreach.
- Decreased visibility, refrained from media coverage, especially those who work with refugees and asylum seekers, due to safety concerns.
- Since many activities had to be canceled, budgets had to be revised and new activities had to be envisioned.
- Fieldwork was impeded, organizations who collect data could not access to healthy information.
- Already existing social injustices have become more visible, organizations who work with vulnerable groups moved towards increasing awareness on poverty and access to health services.
- While meetings were canceled and travel expenses were not made, new human resources needs arose as well and organizations required more funds.

Solidarity Network for Human Rights Defenders



- Gross human rights violations such as torture, violence of the right to life, forced disappearances
- Strategic litigation
- LGBTI+ rights
- Women's rights
- Memorialization and peace building
- Refugees and asylum-seekers
- Freedom of speech and press freedom

Solidarity Network for Human Rights Defenders

- Solidarity Network for Human Rights Defenders was launched on February 27, 2019 following a press conference organized by a group of human rights organizations which came together to address the need to regularly act on protection of human rights defenders in Turkey.
- One of the events that triggered the launch of the network was an indictment drafted against civil society members in 2019, six years after the Gezi protests. It claimed that these civil society members organized the protests with the objective “to overthrow the government.”
- Expansion and increased productivity by online meetings: Although we used to meet in person before the pandemic, COVID-19 allowed us to meet online and helped us expand the network while recruiting more members who are based in various cities inside and outside Turkey.
- International advocacy: As a Network, we were able to report to international bodies. Specifically, we drafted letters to UN bodies regarding:
 - hate speech towards the LGBTI+ community,
 - police violence and legal harassment towards Boğaziçi University students,
 - the criminal lawsuit against Saturday Mothers/People