**'You are losing Turkey to a monstrosity'**

Yavuz Baydar's speech for the conference titled 'Freedom of Expression: Still a precondition for Democracy', at the Council of Europe, Strasbourg; October 13, 2015.

Dear participants and guests, colleagues -

This one may be, and I certainly do hope not, our last outcry about the state of developments in Turkey and the direction it is in.

Let me begin by the state of the most basic freedoms.

The right to free speech, freedom of expression, freedom and the independence of the media, and as the latest heinous terror attack showed, the right to demonstrate and assembly is in grave danger. By and large, we are now at a stage, where the individual security of the citizens, each and every one of them, also is in grave danger.

Day after day, the media, the backbone of any democracy, whose social role is to report facts, inform and serve as a platform for a broad, diverse exchange of ideas, becomes paralysed, dysfunctional, due to an unbearable political and legal pressure from up above. Intolerance from top down has become the norm, and the debate in the public domain is now a swamp of hate speech and threats.

As the world watches, day after day, the media is being delivered blow after blow, its already weak independent backbone being broken by legal investigations into media outlets and journalists, prison sentences for “insulting the president” delivered en masse and colleagues sent to jail for expressing critical views.

We wake up every day to news that this or that colleague has been put under investigation for this or that critical view.

Most recently, two senior columnists were sentenced to 11 months of imprisonment each, and a day after, Bülent Keneş, the chief editor of a daily, Today's Zaman, a daily widely respected and regarded as a voice of reform and diversity abroad, in decision making circles wordwide, was detained due to a number of tweets, and last night I was delivered to the news that he was moved to the high security prison in Silivri, there he joins two other journalists, Hidayet Karaca and Mehmet Baransu, held now for more than nine months without any indictment. (Keneş was later released from prison.)

The number of jailed journalists, many of them Kurds, is more than 20. Firings have since Gezi protests have also turned into a shrewd punitive measure of silencing independent journalism. The bitter result is, that all the newsrooms in the so-called mainstream media are now open air prisons.

The methods of making the media proprietors dependent and obedient to the executive power, symbolized by a single person, has to a large extent created a genetically modified media. Its proprietors are held captive under carrots, namely public tenders; so they willingly act as vicious chief censors themselves, blocking their employees to fulfill their professional duties.

The chain of events in the past weeks also illustrate the systematic methods of suffocating our profession. A group of companies, Koza İpek, which owns critical media outlets, was subjected to police raids. The largest and most influential media group, Doğan, was constantly threatened, and lately attacked two nights in a row, by a mob led by a ruling party deputy. Weekly Nokta was blocked by police atb the printers, and prevented from distribution, simply because it had come out with a picture of the president, taking selfie before the coffins, intended for mockery. Journalist Ahmet Hakan, from Doğan group, was beaten severely by four thugs, two of whom were members of the ruling party. All except one were released days after. 7 TV channels were recently taken out by the digital platform, Digiturk, and yesterday, also from Turksat satellite.

I am afraid, even more severe measures are to follow. It seems very clear to me, that the top political authority in Turkey is decisive about annulling any oppositional voice, any critical view from primarily TV, because as UNESCO figures show, more than 85 % of Turkish people get the news and comments solely from that medium. Print and internet matter much less.

My concern about the future is largely because of the fact that the top court of Turkey, sadly, remain toothless at a high time it should be most pro-active and pre-emptive against oppressive measures. The less pro-freedom action, the higher the risk that the authoritarianism gains ground.

Turkey is becoming increasingly ungovernable.Its institutions are being deprived of their democratically existential, constitutional duties. In most of the public sector and even the private one, key positions have been given to people whose merits are judged by their loyalty to the president and the ruling party rather than professional skills.

Developments make it clear that the backbone of the judiciary has been seized by the executive powers and it has been acting as an extension of it.

The belief that most of the crimes and killings due to domestic political tension will be brought to court and accountability for those responsible will be given has vanished; it is now being replaced by anger and a sociology of outrage that has slowly turned public squares and streets into places of violent confrontations.

Parliament has been, since the June 7 poll, prevented from functioning properly, kept closed most of the time even when it needed to convene, due to tactical maneuvering by the same executive.

The separation of powers has melted down, raising fears that the destination of a “party state” is now at the horizon.

The media, thanks to which you are still able to read articles by independent, profoundly concerned minds like this one, is now standing on its last leg, with very bleak prospects to report the facts, convey diversity of opinions and continue to be a platform for fair debate.

As the world watches, day after day, the media is being delivered blow after blow, its already weak independent backbone being broken by legal investigations into media outlets and journalists, prison sentences for “insulting the president” delivered en masse and colleagues sent to jail for expressing critical views.

The detention of the editor-in-chief of this newspaper on Saturday is as disgraceful as it is significant in demonstrating that the suffocative measures towards journalists will escalate.

The warning by the detained editor, Bülent Keneş, is also significant for the fact that Turkey as of 2015, is no different from some Caucasian or Central Asian republics:

“I hope people who care about democracy, freedoms and the rule of law will hear this voice, support it and unify.”

His is just one alert about the immense ordeal in the country.

Even basic fact-sharing statements like, in international fora, this one is now at the radar of prosecutions.

All observers of Turkey should be aware:

The country is drifting towards an autocratic rule.

Everyone at home and abroad will pay a price once Turkey is lost to monstrosities.

Yet, this sheer fact is being ignored, sacrificed to what some see as “high politics” that we have been observing in the attitude of allies, whose priorities in combating the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) has meant that the strategic importance of keeping democracy in Turkey on track has been sacrificed. Put more simply, some allies seem insensitive -- and myopic -- enough to watch Turkey turn into a Central Asian-style, "ruled-with-an-iron-fist" republic, or even more simply, Pakistan.

Others leading the reasoning in the EU seem to be following the same line of “realpolitik,” eclipsed by 'bonne pour l'orient' ideas, and getting ready to swap the containment of refugees within Turkey's borders, with oppressive policies in Turkey, crushing all democratic dissent, opposition -- and dreams for a free and fair order,

This change of attitude and cynicism will end up as an insult to Turkish society, whose 13-year-long aspirations after the Justice and Development Party came to power are now fading.