

Freedom of Expression, Media and Information in Cyprus

With regard to the implementation of the freedom of press, comprising the right to receive news and to acquire knowledge, certain violations are being encountered in the South, as well as in the North of Cyprus. Although many of these violations have disappeared owing to the reaction emanating from public opinion in both communities, non-governmental organisations, various states and international organisations, certain ongoing practices in the south of Cyprus are still violating the Turkish Cypriot's rights on freedom of press.

For example, nearly 5 months ago, the Cyprus Broadcasting Cooperation (PIK), official broadcasting institution of the "Republic of Cyprus", has changed the broadcasting frequency of TV channels. As a result, several Turkish and Turkish Cypriot TV channels are no more able to broadcast in North Cyprus. It is very clear that this action prevents Turkish Cypriot people from enjoying their freedom of getting knowledge and information.

There are two other examples that violate freedom of expression, media and information in Cyprus. For example, since 23rd April 2003, when free movement of people to and from both sides started, we witnessed the first of these violations when the Greek press refused to publish advertisements of enterprises operating in the North. An investigation into the reason of this refusal, which was also reported in the annual human rights reports of the US Foreign Office between the years 2004 and 2007, the first that comes to one's mind will be the pressure exerted by the Greek Cypriot Administration on the Cyprus Greek press not to publish the advertisements. If one bears in mind that newspapers can only carry on their publications through sale and income derived from notices and advertisements, not publishing advertisements from Turkish Cypriot enterprises means serious losses of income and it is not possible to attribute this to anything else other than the pressure exerted by the Greek Cypriot Administration.

Another chronic problem concerns the case of journalists who comes from non European Union (EU) countries operating in North Cyprus and who are denied permission to cross over

to the South. The reason given by the Greek Cypriot Administration being that the journalists had entered Cyprus “through prohibited ports” or by “unlawful means”.

An important development in this aspect happened on the eve of the first round of the presidential elections that took place in South Cyprus on the 17th February 2008. In examining the applications of Turkish journalists, who work in the North part of Cyprus, the Press and Information Office of the Greek Cypriot Administration, stated that in accordance with the Green Line Regulation of 29th April 2008, they were bound to obtain visas for the “Republic of Cyprus” and that it was imperative for them to enter Cyprus through the ports in the South. Consequently, the Turkish journalists’ entry was blocked.

This action of the Greek Cypriot Administration is not only a hindrance put in the way of reaching the source of information, but also brings up the subject of a wrong interpretation of the Green Line Regulation on the part of the Greek Cypriot Administration. According to this interpretation, access by the Turkish journalists to the South is conditional to their obtaining the necessary visa and entering Cyprus through ports in the South. The mentality behind all these lies in equating an entry from North Cyprus with the use of “prohibited ports” or “unlawful means”. There are no such conditions in article 2/3 of the Regulation that rules entry by European Union and third world country citizens through the Green Line from North to South Cyprus.

Turkish journalists are therefore, under no obligation to enter South Cyprus through ports in the South. Obstacles put to the journalists’ entry to the South are thus based on political rather than legal grounds and discriminates these journalists simply for being Turkish citizens.

We believe that the following recommendations will help to improve the freedom of media in Cyprus.

- We encourage the OSCE Representative on Freedom of Media to take necessary steps and to pressure the government of the “Republic of Cyprus” in order to deal with the issues listed above;
- In addition we encourage the OSCE/ODIHR to establish official contacts with the “Republic of Cyprus” government in order to remove the isolations which violate the basic human rights of Turkish Cypriots. Because, human rights issues as these are not

to be under a conditionality associating the recognition or not recognition of a state.
Human rights are universal and derive from the nature of being human beings.

Asst. Prof. Dr. Ali DAYIOĞLU

Member of the Board of Trustees of the
Turkish Cypriot Humans Rights Foundation

Sami ÖZUSLU

Member of Board of the Turkish Cypriot Journalists' Union