

Commenting the Recent Elections in Turkey and Press Freedom Issues

by

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The result of November 1st elections ended with the landslide victory of the Justice Party. It secured a majority in the 550-seat Parliament with the win of a 317 seats, raising its overall votes to 49.4 per cent. Just five months after the general elections where the parties failed to form a government, the Justice Party's victory raised eyebrows in certain circles, terming the results as "Stockholm Syndrome". The results showed that the Parliament will still be composed by four parties, one of which is the Kurdish HD Party, which unlike five months ago, could only managed to obtain just over 10 percent of the votes to pass the electoral threshold.

The majority of the electors opted for the stability, it is the only explanation, most commentators stated. In the last five months, the Turkish media went under growing pressure going as far as physical attempts on journalists critical of the government and attacks on independent media outlets, premises like head offices, publishing houses. Another important factor was the news on the growing number of death tolls in the last five months from the southeast between the Turkish army and the illegal Kurdish PKK rebels, some argue. Many believed that could only be stopped by a stability of a single party rule.

During the period just before the elections, the public have witnessed two newspapers and two television channels (that belongs to the Akın İpek group) being seized by state institution-appointed trustees, the journalists and the staff being dragged out of the premises by police which later sprayed pepper gas on the group of supporters of the newspapers outside.

The Telecommunication Authority has banned a total of 12 internet web sites and blogs in four days, between the Oct.20 and Oct. 24, according to the October monthly report of the Press for Freedom project financed by the EU and carried out by the Journalist Association. This raises the total number of web sites access to which has so far were permanently or temporarily banned to 103.877.

Attempts to commemorate the 102 people perished in Ankara, on the Oct.9, twin blasts was banned by the authorities. The crowd mostly family members and friends who gathered three days after the bombings in front of the train station was dispersed as police sprayed tear gas and pressurized water from water-cannons. Four days later a news blackout on the media followed, banning all news comment and photographs concerning the incident. The blackout was lifted five days later. Number of people protesting the incident, in demonstrations held in several cities were taken under custody or charged with

“holding illegal demonstrations” under the new Domestic Security Law enacted in April 2015.

The last bitter note, a 15 year old boy in Kayseri was detained on charges of insult directed at the President. He was released after being kept in detention for a night.

Furthermore, a small statistical facts which I thought might be interesting.

We have just completed the monthly October report of the Press for Freedom project, in which you can find the number of legal acts against the media in one-month-period we compiled for you.

LEGAL ACTIONS

Investigations: 8

Cases opened: 5

Prison terms: 1

CENSORSHIP

Accreditation 5

Bans on publishing: 17

Access ban on social media: 36

Taken under custody: 6

ACT OF VIOLENCE

Verbal: 1

Physical: 6 (including 3 dead)

Forced to resign: 2

Terminate contract: 5

Resignation : 2