

An insistent effort by the Hrant Dink Foundation against hate speech in Turkey

P?nar Ensari and Funda Tekin explain the work of the Hrant Dink Foundation in countering hate speech in Turkey.

The Hrant Dink Foundation, named in honour of the late journalist and advocate of Turkish-Armenian reconciliation and human rights in Turkey, has been conducting a study titled Media Watch on Hate Speech since 2009.

This aim of this initiative is to draw attention to discriminatory discourse, particularly against ethnic and religious identities, sexist, homophobic and transphobic discourse, and news containing hate speech. The project aims to raise public awareness and reduce the use of hate speech in the media, to produce knowledge on the concept of hate speech, and create a space for discussion so as to promote a more respectful and informed language on human rights and minorities.

As part of this effort, all printed national newspapers and approximately 500 local newspapers are monitored on the basis of key words. These include, amongst others the words: Armenian, Christian, Muslim, Jew, British, Kurdish, Turkish, separatist, traitor, infidel, perverted, reactionary, and bigot. The Hrant Dink Foundation runs a media monitoring centre to identify news items containing derogatory statements. It also publishes reports on hate speech every four months and a sample of the collected data is uploaded weekly to the website, the analysis for which is then widely promoted through social media.

The Foundation is the only institution since 2009 which has published systematic and continuous studies about the media and discourse in Turkey, its work is therefore more comprehensive than other organisations which cover particular groups or for specific periods of time. Along with efforts by academics and civic initiatives, this has helped raise the profile of the debate concerning hate

speech in Turkey.

The media monitoring study has revealed a significant increase in hate speech in the printed press since 2009, which is even more widespread in social media. The most targeted groups have been non-Muslim minorities, Jews, Armenians, Greeks and Christians. Since 2014, Syrian refugees have increasingly been targeted. Indeed, in 2015, they were the third most targeted group after Jews and Armenians. There is a huge variation in the form this hate speech takes, with the mainstream media being more covert than some of the overtly nationalist and conservative publications.

The media monitoring work also reveals significant findings about how hate speech is disseminated. The time of the year and public agenda strongly influences which groups are targeted. Christians for example are targeted more often around Christmas; animosity against Armenians increases around the Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day in April, and antisemitism increases when the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more prominent in the news. The most targeted groups, Jews, Armenians and Christians, are however targeted irrespective of public events.

From 2013, the Foundation started publications on discrimination as well as hate speech. A different public issue is scrutinised every four months and a specific research methodology is developed for the topic to conduct a discriminatory discourse analysis. Case studies of published reports have been prepared on topics as varied as the 100th commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, the Gezi Park protests, Syrian refugees, and discriminatory language towards Jews in the media in light of Operation Israel launched against Gaza.

The Gezi Park report showed that all papers used discriminatory discourse surrounding different subjects and in different ways. Direct discriminatory discourse was more frequently observed in newspapers with a critical stance against the Gezi Park protests. A report on the representation of Alawites found that some newspapers would prefer to portray Alawites as “people who only protest and have a suspicious faith”. The report on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day meanwhile reflected how the topic has been used to reconstruct public perceptions on the Genocide as an apolitical “matter of condolences”. A report on the coverage of Jews indicated that examined news articles and columns largely blame Jews responsible for Israel’s foreign policy. The Foundation’s report on Syrian refugees found that media coverage reduced Syrians to a military and security problem, failing to consider the human rights of the refugees.

The Media Watch on Hate Speech initiative has continued to improve conceptually and methodologically because of the active participation and collaboration with university students, academics, media workers and civil society actors.

In 2013, a university syllabus, called Discrimination, Hate Speech and Media, was prepared with the help of consulted academics who work on hate speech and discrimination. The aim of this syllabus, intended to be taught over the course of one term, was to raise student awareness about hate speech in the media, strengthen their skills in analysing its content, and more importantly,

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assist them to develop awareness of discrimination in their professional lives. After the syllabus was produced, an edited volume was produced by Mahmut Ç?nar, called *Medya ve Nefret Söylemi: Kavramlar, Mecralar, Tart??malar* or *Media and Hate Speech: Concepts, Outlets, Discussions*, to engage and involve the general reader.

Since 2014, workshops have been organised at universities throughout Turkey to introduce this curriculum and develop cooperation with universities. In these workshops, the curriculum content and the book are introduced, the findings of the Media Watch project are shared and discussions are conducted between students of different disciplines. At the beginning of 2017, the course syllabus was being used by at least ten Turkish universities.

As part of the Media Watch on Hate Speech project, a collaboration has been developed with Istanbul Bilgi University Department of Communication since 2015. As part of this, university students taking the Independent Interdisciplinary Work (IIW) course contribute to the media monitoring work. These students attend a one-day training and workshop organised by the Hrant Dink Foundation, monitor printed newspapers and identify hate speech during the academic term. These sessions provided an opportunity for students and lecturers to collectively learn and practice how to strike a balance between freedom of speech and freedom from discrimination. At the end of the course, students had demonstrated notable improvements in and awareness of underlying media biases.

Another important part of the initiative was to organise regular training for volunteers who contributed to the media monitoring work. In 2016, 52 university students participated in these trainings. Meetings between the research team and volunteers provided an important opportunity to discuss content which repeated itself within the media. These trainings and meetings do not only provide students with the necessary conceptual and methodological skills to better analyse media content, transform their perception of the media and discourse and make them a partner in combatting discrimination, they also help the research team extend the discussions so as to include other viewpoints and contribute to the process through which conceptual knowledge about hate speech is produced. In other words, these meetings play an instructive and inspirational role for all participants. As a result of these discussions and learning, the initiative decided to organize a new form of public event, called the Interactive Workshops on Selected News Stories and Columns.

The systematic local and national media monitoring and other activities carried out by the initiative since 2009 has resulted in a significant accumulation of information and data on hate speech and discriminatory discourse. In light of this, ASULIS Discourse, Dialogue and Democracy Laboratory was founded in 2016 to work with the Hrant Dink Foundation and is the first specialised centre for discourse studies in Turkey.

ASULIS Laboratory aims to carry out studies on discourse and discrimination, function as a facilitator and intermediary to increase such initiatives, and to combat different types of discourse

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such as hate, discriminatory, and dangerous speech. The Foundation organised several panels and workshops in 2016 in various areas of life ranging from literature, education, environment, sports and imprisonment. The aim of ASULIS is to be a lasting and interactive platform in discourse studies and to include, among others, artists, scriptwriters, high school teachers and students, literary writers, sports people, environmentalists, and education analysts in these discussions.

The Media Watch on Hate Speech study has demonstrated the necessity of a comparative work which explores hate speech in different countries and political contexts. In light of this, the project team organised two panels and roundtable meetings in 2016 in order to familiarise itself with other projects and the activities in other countries and to look for the opportunity to implement a comparative discourse study between Germany and Turkey. Panels were organised on Intersecting Discourses, Creative Strategies: Practices of Combating Hate Speech and Anti-Semitism in Germany and A Comparative Perspective: Hate Speech and Discriminatory Discourse in Europe and Turkey.

In Turkey, as well as in the world, the discourse promoting racism, ethnic discrimination, antisemitism, homophobia and other forms of intolerance are on the rise. Hate speech and polarisation continue to influence lives of especially vulnerable groups together with the political and socio-economic developments, refugee crisis and immigration policies of the states, civil wars and armed clashes on multiple fronts as well as the rise of far-right and nationalist parties in many countries. Although targeted groups change according to different countries and socio-economic contexts, hate speech is a global problem. Hence, it is significant to monitor the repercussions of this racism, discrimination, xenophobia and prejudice in different contexts and to trace the latent connections with a global perspective. It is therefore of paramount significance to develop international collaborations that would include carrying out comparative discourse studies, learning from other experiences and creating common ground on which to devise novel and innovative forms and methods of combatting discrimination and hate speech worldwide.

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