

# **HATE SPEECH AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN ERDOĞAN'S TURKEY**



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## *About Stockholm Center for Freedom*

*Stockholm Center for Freedom (SCF) is an advocacy organization that promotes the rule of law, democracy and fundamental rights and freedoms with a special focus on Turkey, a nation of 80 million that is facing significant backsliding in its parliamentary democracy under its autocratic leaders.*

*SCF, a non-profit organization, was set up by a group of journalists who have been forced to live in self-exile in Sweden against the backdrop of a massive crackdown on press freedom in Turkey .*

*SCF is committed to serving as a reference source by providing a broader picture of rights violations in Turkey, monitoring daily developments on fact-based investigative journalism and documenting individual cases of the infringement of fundamental rights. The founders of SCF are top-notch journalists who had managed national dailies in Turkey and worked for leading media outlets before they were forced to leave. They have the expertise, human resources and network on the ground to track events in Turkey despite serious challenges.*

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# Hate Speech Against Christians In Erdoğan's Turkey

## INTRODUCTION

Turkey has seen an unprecedented rise in xenophobic, intolerant and hateful speech by the nation's political rulers, driven primarily by the outspoken president of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who uses incessant and vile speech inciting hostility, deepening divisions and expanding polarization in the 80-million-strong nation for short-term political gains.

This has negatively impacted the social cohesiveness, pluralism and integrity in Turkish society, threatened fundamental human rights and liberties and politicized state institutions, including the judiciary. Today, invoking hate speech that stigmatizes millions among vulnerable social groups, minorities and others represents an important routine on the part of the autocratic regime of President Erdoğan.

Unfortunately, many opposition parties in Turkey either go along with the divisive ideology of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) and President Erdoğan and parrot the same line, or display no political will to challenge and combat intolerant and hateful speech as well as discriminatory actions that undermine democracy.

Moreover, this alarming pattern of hatred among the leadership has expanded and is further amplified by government-directed or controlled media outlets, NGOs and educational institutions sowing intolerant ideas across all segments of society.

This is not only a threat to Turkey but also carries the risk of spillover elsewhere, already witnessed in many countries, especially in Europe, where sizable Turkish communities exist. President Erdoğan's vile, nonstop remarks bashing his domestic critics and opponents such as members of the Gülen movement, Alevis and Kurds extend beyond Turkish borders. The West in general and Christians and Jews in particular have not at times been spared the hateful speech of Turkey's leaders, either.

The Stockholm Center for Freedom, a monitoring group that tracks rights violations in Turkey, has been documenting cases of hate speech and hate crime that represent a threat to diversity and pluralism in Turkey. As a case study in this report, SCF picked Erdoğan and his associates' hate speech patterns demonizing Christians in Turkey and abroad. The alarming situation in Turkey amounts to violation of freedom of thought, conscience and religion and thereby puts Turkey in breach of its commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)

This report follows SCF's May 2017 report on hate speech against members of the Gülen movement, who has borne the brunt of incessant vicious attacks by Erdoğan and his circles in government that resulted in a mass persecution and witch-hunt, unparalleled by anything in modern Turkish history.

The campaign of hatred by Erdoğan and his Islamist associates has been so severe that even the opposition parties have at times adopted the oppressors' language instead of defying and resisting it, in the hope of deflecting Erdoğan's wrath and partially shifting the blame to the victims. Although



**Erdoğan has been fueling anti-Christian sentiment in Turkey with his vitriolic speech he delivers in public rallies across Turkey.**

Catholics and Orthodox have been the main targets of this relentless campaign, Protestants and other groups have received their fair share of stigmatization in Turkey. This hate campaign has resulted in real policy and legal actions, landing one US pastor in jail while barring another from entering into country on grounds of national security.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of hate speech, there are a number of guidelines that Turkey should and must follow, such as those issued by Council of Europe bodies. In fact, to a certain extent, Turkey has already done so by criminalizing hate speech, in 2014. However, the application has been quite disappointing, to say the least, because in many cases prosecutors simply decline to pursue criminal complaints, especially when filed against government officials, particularly Erdoğan, and in some cases have turned the complaints into fresh probes into plaintiffs and victims.

Erdoğan, who consolidated his grip on the judiciary with the constitutional amendments of April 16 that gave him the ultimate power to effectively shape the top judicial bodies, enjoys absolute immunity when using incessant hate speech against his critics and opponents. On the other hand, Erdoğan's lawyers bring thousands of defamation cases against people who have legitimately criticized the president, slapping critics with hefty fines and jail sentences.

That pattern confirms the view that simple criminalization of hate speech did not provide the solution in the Turkish case as the real problem originates from the lack of respect for equality, diversity and pluralism in the true sense among the current cadre of Turkish leaders, whose ideology is rooted in xenophobic Islamism and nationalism. Adding insult to injury, Erdoğan and other leaders in Turkey go further by encouraging hate speech, disregard human rights and fundamental problems and revise educational and social policies to institutionalize this dangerously combustible, hateful narrative.

By doing so, however, Turkey has been violating first and foremost the articles of the ECHR, which are binding on Turkey. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has clearly stated that "tolerance and respect for the equal dignity of all human beings constitute the foundations of a dem-





**Erdoğan often salutes masses in Turkey with his own special “rabia” sign that was borrowed from Egypt’s protests as a symbol of defiance.**

ocratic, pluralistic society. That being the case, as a matter of principle it may be considered necessary in certain democratic societies to sanction or even prevent all forms of expression that spread, incite, promote or justify hatred based on intolerance.”<sup>1</sup>

Article 9 of the ECHR, which protects freedom of thought, conscience and religion, is considered one of the foundations of a democratic and pluralist society. Limitations on the exercise of freedom of religion must be restricted to those prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society.

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) also laid out the guidelines on combatting hate speech in its general policy recommendation No.15, which was adopted on December 8, 2015.<sup>2</sup> In that, the ECRI acknowledged that politicians and other leaders “have a particularly important responsibility” in preventing hate speech “because of their capacity to exercise influence over a wide audience.”

In the Turkish case, Erdoğan is doing the complete opposite. As a result, what the ECRI warned about in saying “the use of hate speech may be intended to incite, or reasonably expected to have the effect of inciting others to commit, acts of violence, intimidation, hostility or discrimination against those who are targeted by it and that this is an especially serious form of such speech” has come to pass in Turkey. Discrimination systematically ignores all human rights of particular people or groups because of their identity or beliefs. Discrimination may even allow the victim to be cruelly treated since it sees the person as an object, not as a human being.<sup>3</sup>

The harassment of tourists who are believed to be Christians by people on the street in Turkey and the indifference of authorities in dealing with such cases are the result of this incitement and hateful narrative by the leaders of Turkey. The government-controlled media’s unrelenting defamation campaign targeting a wrongfully jailed American Protestant pastor in İzmir further fuels such

1] *Erbakan v. Turkey*, (2006, July 6), [http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{“itemid”: \[“001-76232”\]}](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{“itemid”: [“001-76232”]})

2] ECRI General Policy Recommendation no. 15 on Combating Hate Speech, CRI(2016)15, (2015, December 8), [http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/GPR/EN/Recommendation\\_N15/REC-15-2016-015-ENG.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/activities/GPR/EN/Recommendation_N15/REC-15-2016-015-ENG.pdf)

3] See. “Nefret Suçlarıyla Mücadele Konferansları Konuşma Metinleri”, [http://www.rightsagenda.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=657:nefret-suclaryla-muecadele-konferanslar-konuma-metinleri&catid=53:takmaelkitaplari&Itemid=92](http://www.rightsagenda.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=657:nefret-suclaryla-muecadele-konferanslar-konuma-metinleri&catid=53:takmaelkitaplari&Itemid=92)

acts of hostility. Constant bashing of the Vatican and the pope by Erdoğan and others in public speeches and the widespread smear tactics in Erdoğan's media defaming the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul have carried hate speech to a new level.

With this pattern of behavior, Turkey's leaders appear to be in breach of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, which it finally ratified in 2002, 30 years after it was signed. Turkey will most likely be cited to that effect in the upcoming reports by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which monitors the implementation of the convention. Similarly, as a member of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Turkey agreed in Copenhagen in 1990 that participating states should "guarantee to all persons equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground."<sup>4</sup>

The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR) monitors Turkey on hate crimes. Yet, the office itself came under an unwarranted attack by Erdoğan during and after the campaign for the April 16 referendum, which boosted the president's powers without checks and balances in what was considered to be an unfair and unfree campaign. Erdoğan called the OSCE election observers "terrorists," vowed not to recognize their reports and directed his media to run a smear campaign against individual observers by plastering their pictures on the front pages of pro-government dailies.

As Swedish lawmaker Jonas Gunnarsson made clear in his 2014 report titled "A strategy to prevent racism and intolerance in Europe," which was approved by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), politicians bear a special responsibility to remain vigilant in the face of rising hate speech, urging them to firmly reject racism, hatred and violence. "Unfortunately, all too often, politicians indulge in populist and intolerant discourse, even when they are from mainstream parties," he concluded.<sup>5</sup> That is especially true in Erdoğan's case.

In this research study, the decoded hate speech template Erdoğan used against Christians is very much the same, although to a lesser degree, to the one he has been using against members of the Gülen movement. They are not mutually exclusive, either, as Erdoğan hurls insults and invokes similar hate speech narratives to smear both collectively or interchangeably.

This template of behavior can also be applied to others in varying degrees and intensity, including at one time or another the Kurdish political movement and Alevis as well as intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union and the International Monetary Fund, and individual countries such as the United States, Germany and the Netherlands.

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4] Bias against other groups, <http://hatecrime.osce.org/what-hate-crime/bias-against-other-groups>

5] A strategy to prevent racism and intolerance in Europe, (January 13, 2014), <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/Xref-XML2HTML-en.asp?fileid=20337&lang=en>

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Throughout history, there has never been a shortage of hate speech stigmatizing Christians in Turkey, with 99 percent of its population being Muslim. It has been kept alive in the fringe media all the time but made little incursion into the mainstream media for decades. Certainly, Turkey's leaders have avoided making nasty public remarks stigmatizing Christians as a whole, albeit with some exceptions. In the last couple of years, however, the hate speech targeting Christians has gained speed, intensity and violence. In particular, the excesses reflected in the rhetoric of Erdoğan and members of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) government, who came from political Islamist roots and recently reverted to an extreme political Islamist diatribe, have become the main driving factor in spreading anti-Christian rhetoric in Turkey.

Hostility against Christians and Christianity has become one of the most important instruments in the toolbox for the ruling AKP and Erdoğan, who has increasingly resorted to populism for political calculations. Even more, Erdoğan and the AKP have frequently invoked hate speech against Christians and Christianity just to discredit and slander Muslim political opponents and critics within the country in the eyes of their Muslim supporters. In that sense, as a Sweden-based human rights watchdog organization, the Stockholm Center for Freedom remains deeply concerned about increasing human rights and freedoms violations in Turkey and worried that it may lead to widespread violence and terrorism against Christians.

When the anti-Christian rhetoric raised in the AKP's 15-year period of rule is chronologically examined, it is noteworthy that this discourse started to rear its ugly head when the Arab revolutions began in 2011 and the Erdoğan government started to support Islamists' rise to the power from Egypt to Tunisia. For that, the AKP government funded and armed jihadist groups in Libya and Syria with the hope that an Islamist regime would take root in these countries. The political campaign of Egypt's ousted leader, Mohamed Morsi, was run by Erdoğan's team. The campaign against Christians appears to have intensified right after corruption and bribery investigations that were made public December 17-25, 2013 and which incriminated Erdoğan, his family members and his business and political associates.

The political background of most AKP members and specifically that of Erdoğan is based on the idea of "Milli Görüş" (National View), the Turkish extension of political Islam. The Milli Görüş movement, deeply influenced by political Islamist reactionary movements like Jamaat-i Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood, is based on a strong anti-Western and anti-Christian hostility in all its rhetoric and actions. This was reflected in the programs of the political parties it has established. For example, according to the Milli Görüş system of thought, the European Union is a "Christian Club" and should be treated as an "enemy." The same goes for other transatlantic institutions including NATO.

Despite coming from such a troubled and controversial past, a group of political Islamist politicians including Erdoğan have said they denounce Islamist policies by saying that they took off their political Islamist shirts and set out on a new path.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, between 2002 and 2011, which corresponds to the first two periods of rule by the AKP, they by and large followed liberal, market-oriented, democratic policies required by the EU membership perspective and carried out reforms for this perspective, albeit slowly. In these first two terms in power, Erdoğan and his AKP government had stayed "as far away" as possible from anti-Christian and anti-Christianity rhetoric.

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6] Erdoğan: Kaç kez 'Milli Görüş gömleğini çıkardım' dedim", Yeni Asya gazetesi, 21 July 2017, <http://www.yeniasya.com.tr/2007/07/21/haber/h3.htm>





**Erdoğan led the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative in 2005 together with his Spanish counterpart. He effectively abandoned it later when he rejected interfaith dialogue.**

So much so that Erdoğan became the co-president of the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative which he founded in 2005 together with Spain's then-Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero. Then-Prime Minister Erdoğan even went a step further and praised the Crusades -- which Pope Benedict XVI apologized for,<sup>7</sup> saying they were ashamed of it -- in a speech he delivered to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in 2011 in which he said: "It has been claimed throughout history that the greatest conflicts separating East and West, Muslims and Christians are the Crusades. The Crusades were also times when all these sides were acquainted with each other, communicated with each other, formed alliances with each other, and most importantly, exchanged science and art in the most intense way."<sup>8</sup>

At the time, Erdoğan was trying to avoid using anti-Christian rhetoric as much as possible in his political and diplomatic discourse. However, Erdoğan couldn't resist saying in a TV interview during his political campaign before the June 12, 2011 elections that "they called me Jewish, Armenian, forgive me, but Greek as well, they said all that. Can you imagine it?"<sup>9</sup> and he categorized being Armenian or Greek -- perceived as Christians in Turkish public opinion -- along with being Jewish, as humiliating.

He made a similar statement in an interview with NTV on August 7, 2014 and said that "I have my roots in Rize. But I was born and raised in Istanbul. One of them, from the same [biased] mindset, said about me that I was Georgian. One of them even used a far more repugnant expression and used the word 'Armenian' in reference to me."<sup>10</sup> These expressions, which Erdoğan could not prevent himself from uttering in his improvised and spontaneous talk, revealed that despite all the pretense and make-up efforts, Erdoğan's subconscious view about Christianity and Christians was still the same as the classic political Islamist Milli Görüş line.

The year 2014 was a turning point for the anti-Christian rhetoric of Erdoğan and the AKP. Behind this radical transformation, or rather comeback, mostly stand the claims that the Gülen movement, allegedly supported by the West, or the Christian world, which they preferred to refer to as the "higher mind," was responsible for the corruption and bribery operations that became public December 17-25, 2013, in which four AKP government ministers were forced to resign and Erdoğan and his family's name were implicated.<sup>11</sup>

7] "Papa özür diledi", aHaber, 28 November 2011, <http://www.ahaber.com.tr/dunya/2011/10/28/papa-ozur-diledi>

8] "İkinci one minute", Habertürk gazetesi, 13 June 2011, <http://www.haberturk.com/dunya/haber/620412-ikinci-one-minute>

9] "Twitterda tepki seli", Milliyet gazetesi, 11 June 2011, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/twitter-da-tepki-seli-siyaset-1401213/>

10] "Cumhurbaşkanı adayı ve başbakan Recep Tayyip Erdoğan'ın açıklamaları", Milliyet gazetesi, 7 August 2014, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-adayi-ve-basbakan-recep-ankara-yerelhaber-324246/>

11] "17-25 Aralık sürecinde üst akıl iddianamede", Yeni Şafak gazetesi, 9 August 2016, <http://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/17-25-aralik-surecinde-ust-akil-iddianamede-2507703>

**Erdoğan brandished the photo of Pope Francis who appeared with European heads of governments in March 2017 to commemorate the 60th anniversary of signing the 1957 Rome Treaty that established the EU as a proof of major Christian conspiracy.**



This period is also a time in which Erdoğan and the AKP trampled on the rule of law and the constitution, started dismantling the secular characteristics of democratic institutions and aggressively questioned their troubled relations with Europe. In a big splash, Erdoğan and his henchmen reclaimed their line of the political Islamist Milli Görüş and adopted a hostile attitude towards the West in general and Christianity in particular. This meant that the AKP's Islamist rulers have never actually taken off their "Milli Görüş shirt," contrary to their initial claims.

Hayrettin Karaman, a leading theologian and issuer of fatwas, or religious edicts, for AKP circles and President Erdoğan, has started issuing a series of commentaries opposing interfaith dialogue, accusing the Jewish and Christian West of being the troublemakers of the world. Karaman's anti-Christian remarks were published in the *Yeni Şafak* daily and widely circulated among government quarters. Erdoğan's chief aide, Yiğit Bulut, is one of the leading figures in fueling hate speech against Christians and the Vatican. He has openly said time and again on the state-owned Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT) that a crusaders alliance led by the Vatican's Pope Francis had launched a war against Turkey.

Erdoğan, who was elected president on August 10, 2014, started adopting even harsher language. For example, in an interview with Al-Jazeera on April 20, 2017, he showed a surprisingly strong reaction to a gathering of the leaders of the 28 EU member states at the Vatican, saying: "There are Orthodox, Protestants, atheists among them. ... What are they doing there? They're listening to a sermon and counsel. Because as I see it, they all form one nation [of infidels]." This rhetoric and attitude of Erdoğan corresponded to the typical political Islamism that divides the world into Muslims and non-Muslims.<sup>12</sup>

When the language and style of Erdoğan, AKP leaders and all the media they directly and indirectly control are examined, the increasingly intense anti-Christian rhetoric is more focused on the terms "Crusades," "Cross vs. Crescent War" and "the Vatican." Especially when they face pressure at home or abroad, Erdoğan and his associates seem to employ more anti-Christian rhetoric to create distractions, find scapegoats and mobilize their supporters.

SCF's examination of hate speech patterns targeting Christians in Turkey is examined in this research from the narrative employed by Turkish political leaders, reflections in the government-controlled media and footprints on news websites and social media sites. SCF also reviewed several po-

12] "Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan El Cezireye konuştu", 20 April 2017, <http://www.haberler.com/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-el-cezire-ye-konustu-9521133-haberi/>



litically motivated indictments that abused the criminal justice system in justifying the hate campaign against Christians and thereby preserved impunity for perpetrators.

The study is just a glimpse into an iceberg-size problem facing Christians in Turkey, limited in its coverage and providing merely a snapshot that requires further in-depth and careful analysis.

## 1. General overview of the situation of Christians in Turkey

The bitter memories left by the Crusades and the various confrontations between Christian and Muslim nations for centuries, the occupation of Ottoman lands during World War I and the empire's disintegration afterwards, battles, conflicts and tensions have all helped shape the psyche and social consciousness of the people living in Turkey today.

Revisionist history and the reconstruction of past events have also negatively influenced relations among nation states that have emerged in the vast former Ottoman lands. The terrible experiences and traumatic events lived by both Muslim and non-Muslim communities were sharpened as they were transferred from one generation to another, shaping the culture and identity of people living in what came to be known as Turkey at the end of World War I.

The Republic of Turkey was founded on this reactionary psychology, and the state and society are structured according to the extreme sensitivities stemming from this history. This problematic approach, kept alive by both the political Islamist and neo-nationalist Kemalist groups over time, has its roots in anti-Western sentiment in Turkey. Islamophobic rhetoric and the attitudes of extremist right-wing parties in Western countries in recent years have exacerbated this sentiment.

"Nine Christians die in England, it becomes agenda of the #world. 10 Muslims die in every 9 minutes in #Syria, but nobody cares." This statement, which was mentioned on social media, is a common feeling in Turkish society as it is in many Muslim societies. Erdoğan and the AKP are tapping into this lingering resentment and are turning it into an extreme anti-Western and anti-Christian rhetoric, not only for making a political score but also to shift the blame to outsiders for anything that goes wrong in the governance of the country under their watch. In other words, the lack of accountability in Erdoğan's government requires a constant search for scapegoats to deflect all the bad things away from the Islamist rulers.

### 1.1. Unsolved problems of Christian citizens in Turkey

The Republic of Turkey was founded in 1923 with the motto "There is no other friend for Turks but Turks!" and it systematically exerted pressure on the non-Muslims living in the country for centuries in order to force them to emigrate. Since the establishment of the republic, regardless of which political party came to power, this nationalist predisposition has exhibited itself time and again with some small differences. Erdoğan and the AKP government have not only maintained this policy but also taken it to an extreme.

The Turkish government still relies on the archaic 1923 Lausanne Treaty to interpret non-Muslim minorities in a way that only Jews, Armenian Orthodox Christians and Greek Orthodox Christians were



recognized. As a result, other Christian groups including Protestants face more challenges in getting recognition in Turkey. In any case, the Turkish government does not recognize non-Muslim groups as legal entities, forcing them to run their properties by individual associations. The Erdoğan government has promised to reform these old practices but has failed to deliver on most of them.

The most fundamental problem of Christians living in Turkey is not being regarded as an essential component of the country and not having equal citizenship in practice. In general, Christians in Turkey face five serious challenges:

**Education problem:** It is still forbidden for non-Muslim groups in Turkey to open religious education and training institutions. It is therefore impossible for these groups to receive religious education in Turkey and train their own clergy, although some ad-hoc practices have been allowed by the government.

**Place of worship problem:** With amendments to the 2003 Law on Reconstruction, it was made possible to open places of worship other than mosques. However, this decision has not been implemented in practice, and applications to municipalities were usually rejected on the pretext of zoning regulations. Most Protestants use makeshift, unregistered venues for prayer services, which means they may face penalties.

**Employment problem:** While non-Muslim citizens may have equal rights in the constitution of the Republic of Turkey, employment in the public sector is virtually impossible for them. In particular, non-Muslims cannot become part of the judicial, military or security bureaucracies.

**Legal entity problem:** The law does not allow any faith group to have a legal personality. Because of this, non-Muslim groups cannot open a bank account, cannot employ staff and cannot acquire ownership. This issue stands as a serious problem in terms of the Armenian and Greek patriarchs.

**The problem of inability to benefit from public finances:** Public funding for religious services is exclusively for Sunni Muslim groups, mainly through the Directorate of Religious Affairs, or Diyanet. Neither Christian citizens nor Alevis receive any services or support from the state in return for their tax payments.

## 2. Hate speech of Erdoğan and other officials against Christians

Erdoğan, who has gradually been returning to his political Islamist roots and rhetoric since 2011, frequently resorted to anti-Christian discourse to consolidate the grass roots that he radicalized day by day.

The main pattern that can easily be detected from a series of remarks by President Erdoğan shows that he has been quick to attack any opposition figure or group by identifying them with “Crusader” or “Vatican” connotations and by claiming that they are cooperating with the West and Christians. Whenever Erdoğan wants to demonize a critical organization, ranging from civic group the Gülen movement to the main opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP), he immediately injects an anti-Christian narrative to associate these groups with conspiracies. That is followed by a defamation campaign that runs in the media he owns and controls directly or through associates. Erdoğan has weaponized the hateful narrative with a heavy dose of Christianophobia whenever he feels like bashing and bullying an opposition group.

He used this anti-Christian narrative during the presidential election campaign for the August 10, 2014 elections and won the majority of the vote but refused to sever his ties to the political party in

violation of the Turkish Constitution, which required the head of state to be a neutral figure. He had campaigned illegally for the AKP in the June 7, 2015 elections in which the AKP lost its parliamentary majority for the first time in its 13 years of rule. Furious over the loss, Erdoğan and other AKP officials resorted to more vitriolic hate speech against critics. As expected, the Christian groups and Vatican received their fair share of that bashing from the increasingly poisonous narrative of Turkey's leaders.

For Erdoğan, the elections of June 7, 2015 and Nov. 1, 2015 as well as the April 16, 2017 presidential referendum were battles between the "Cross" and the "Crescent." The "Crescent" was naturally represented by Erdoğan and the AKP, while the "Cross" was represented by all Erdoğan and AKP opponents. The narrative was that the "Crusader Alliance" consisting of "Crusaders" and "Zionists" did not want a strong Turkey. For this reason, they targeted Erdoğan. Inside, critical groups such as the Gülen movement, the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) and the CHP were all extensions of this "Crusader Alliance."

On Oct. 16, 2016, addressing thousands of followers in his hometown of Rize on the eastern Black Sea coast, Erdoğan lashed out with anger against Iraq's Yazidis (Ezidi), accusing them of conspiring with the terrorist enemies of Turkey. He said Turkey had opened its doors to Yazidis who were fleeing the killing campaign of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). He wrongfully claimed that Yazidis are Christians, adding that Turkey, a predominantly Muslim nation, accepted them nonetheless.<sup>13</sup>

The anti-Christian euphoria gained momentum in Turkey during the campaign for the April 16 presidential referendum, which cemented Erdoğan's one-man rule without checks and balances and consolidated the executive branch's control over the judiciary.

Erdoğan needed a scapegoat for his government troubles in the economy and failures in social policy, and the Vatican fit nicely into his game of distraction. The Netherlands' refusal to allow Turkish ministers to hold political rallies for fear of destabilization in its own population on the eve of a national election provided an opening for Erdoğan to exploit for domestic purposes. The Dutch government revoked the landing rights for the plane of Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who had vowed to fly to the Netherlands anyway. Then came Family and Social Policies Minister Fatma Betül Kaya, who travelled to Rotterdam by land from Germany but was deported. Germany and Austria as well made it difficult for Erdoğan's ministers to hold large meetings.

Erdoğan immediately labelled the moves as a 21<sup>st</sup> century "Crusader-Crescent War" and started bashing and bullying European countries for being enemies of Islam.

When the Vatican hosted 28 European leaders and the leaders of EU institutions for the 60 years of the Rome Agreement, Erdoğan claimed the gathering was rock-solid proof of a Christian club versus Turkey.

A family picture featuring European Union leaders and Pope Francis was plastered all over in the pro-Erdoğan media with headlines that the Christian world is united in opposing Erdoğan's Turkey. Erdoğan criticized the pope's presence in the family photo and said this shows all EU member states are from the same "nation," hinting that all are "infidels" hostile to Muslim Turkey.

Here are some excerpts from the vitriolic hate speech Erdoğan has delivered over time:

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13] Erdoğan's hatred of Yazidis takes a toll in Turkey, Turkish Minute, 24 January 2017, <https://www.turkishminute.com/2017/01/24/erdogans-hatred-yazidis-takes-toll-turkey/>



**President Erdoğan publicly denounced interfaith dialogue between Islam and Christianity during a speech in Pakistani parliament on November 17, 2016.**

## **2. 1. Erdoğan rejects interfaith dialogue, says Crusader-Crescent war started**

President Erdoğan, who visited Pakistan on November 17, 2016, said of Fethullah Gülen: “He can easily establish interreligious dialogue with the Vatican. How can a dialogue between religions be? How can we establish a dialogue between Islam and other religions? Is it possible? But this man can establish [it].”<sup>14</sup>

On March 16, 2017 President Erdoğan criticized the European Court of Justice’s ruling on headscarves during a public event in the northwestern city Sakarya. “They allowed employers to prohibit workers who so desire from wearing a headscarf in the workplace. Where is the religious freedom? They started a crusader-crescent war. There is no excuse for this.”<sup>15</sup> One day later, Yeni Akit, Akşam, Yeni Şafak, Güneş and Türkiye ran lead stories on the president’s remarks with the headline “They launched a crusader-crescent battle.”<sup>16</sup>

At a public event on March 27, 2017 in Istanbul, President Erdoğan portrayed the European leaders’ visit to the pope as the “Crusaders’ Alliance” and said the following:

“They got together at the Vatican. Since when is the pope a member of the European Union? The crusade alliance has shown itself. You are not letting Turkey in the union since Turkey is a Muslim nation.”

At a public speech on April 13, 2017 in Giresun, President Erdoğan continued to criticize the European leaders who visited the Vatican and said the following:

“Did you see what the European leaders who pretended to be champions of equality and pluralism

14] “Gördüğümüz kadarı ile Fetö Pakistan’da”, DHA, 17 November 2016, [http://www.dha.com.tr/erdogan-gordugumuz-kadari-ile-feto-pakistanda\\_1383943.html](http://www.dha.com.tr/erdogan-gordugumuz-kadari-ile-feto-pakistanda_1383943.html)

15] Haçlı-hilal mücadelesini başlattılar”, Türkiye gazetesi, 16 March 2017, <http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/gundem/456279.aspx>; “Haç ile hilal mücadelesi başlattılar”, Yeni Şafak gazetesi, 17 March 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/hac-ile-hilal-mucadelesi-baslattilar-2629492>

16] Hilal ile haçın savaşını başlattılar. (17 March 2017) <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/hilal-ile-hacin-savasini-baslattilar-290355.html>  
Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan geri kabulü geç artık. (17 March 2017) <http://www.yenisafak.com/ekonomi/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-geri-kabulu-gec-artik-2629302>  
Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan konuşuyor. (17 March 2017) <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-konusuyor/haber-605866>  
Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan Haçlı hilal mücadelesini başlattılar (17 March 2017) <http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/gundem/456279.aspx>





Erdoğan's attacks on Vatican and Christianity were often amplified from the headlines of his media and broadcasted to masses in Turkey.

did during the last Rome summit at the Vatican? What were you doing in the Vatican? Is the Vatican a member of the European Union? You have Protestant, Orthodox and even atheists among yourselves. The Vatican is Catholic; what were you doing there? They went and listened to the pope's advice there; later on, they returned to their countries to implement it.”<sup>17</sup>

## 2. 2. Hate speech against Christianity by other Turkish officials

Faruk Çelik, the minister of food, agriculture and livestock, on March 17, 2017 said the following at a public event in Eskişehir: “Some use terror, some the economy [to attack Turkey]. Others do it with diplomacy. In the past, they organized the Crusades. The same people now organize a ‘No’ campaign and mobilize people for a ‘No’ vote.”<sup>18</sup>

Radiye Sezer Katırcıoğlu, an AKP lawmaker and chairman of the parliamentary Commission on Gender Equality, claimed that “a holy crusaders’ alliance is being formed in Europe just as happened in the 1100s. ...The faces of Europe are being unmasked one by one.” Her comments came against the back-drop of the European Court of Justice’s headscarf ruling.<sup>19</sup>

Turkey’s ruling AKP Deputy Chairman Yasin Aktay said in a statement he made on November 16, 2016, that “it is now very clear that the PKK, FETÖ<sup>20</sup> and ISIL are crusader organizations that serve the same purpose and are fed from same place.” Aktay continued: “In the past, the Crusaders used to form an army of all Christian nations -- Germans, English, Danish, French and Italians -- when they organized an expedition against Islam, and they sent this army to the Muslim geography.”<sup>21</sup>

17] “Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan Giresunlularla buluştu”, Milliyet gazetesi, 13 April 2017, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/cumhurbaşkanı-erdogan-giresunlularla-giresun-yerelhaber-1976281/>

18] “16 Nisan’da yeniden büyük Türkiye için diriliş destanı yazacağız”, 17 March 2017, <http://www.farukcelik.com.tr/16-nisan-da-yeniden-buyuk-turkiye-icin-dirilis-destani-yazacagiz>

19] “1100’lerdeki gibi haçlı ittifakı kuruluyor”, AA, 17 March 2017, <http://aa.com.tr/tr/politika/1100lerdeki-gibi-hacl-i-ttifa-ki-kuruluyor/773635>

20] “FETÖ” is a derogatory term amounting to hate speech perpetrated by President Erdoğan and his government to smear the Gülen movement, which is inspired by US-based Turkish Muslim intellectual Fethullah Gülen, who is one of the many vocal critics of the Turkish government. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) in April 2017 rejected a proposal from Turkey’s ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) deputies to use the term “FETÖ” instead of the phrase “Gülen movement.”

21] “PKK, FETÖ ve DAESH aynı amaca hizmet eden haçlı örgütüdür”, Vatan gazetesi, 16 November 2016, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/yasin-aktay-pkk-feto-ve-daesh-ayni-amaca-hizmet-eden-hacl-i-orgut-996057-gundem/>

In a comment on an Armenian genocide resolution in the German Parliament, Aktay described the move as “Crusaders’ sensitivity” and said there was no point in revisiting incidents that happened 101 years ago and involved Armenians and Christians.<sup>22</sup>

On December 14, 2016 Metin Külünk, an AKP deputy and confidante of Erdoğan, said on his Twitter account: “Today, the mind that established a dirty alliance with the Vatican is stabbing the Ummah [world Muslim community] in the back just like yesterday.”

Yiğit Bulut, Erdoğan’s chief advisor and a Star daily columnist, claimed in a column published on April 24, 2017 that the European nations were threatening Turkey and the Islamic world and warned there would be consequences.

He said: “You will come to appreciate the value of every breath you take in the event the slightest harm comes to our president, the state or the nation, and this Ummah. Of course, if you know the meaning of appreciation. Even the robes of the pope that you hide behind will not protect you.”<sup>23</sup>

Bulut referred to Christianity in an article on November 2, 2016, saying that EU Parliament Speaker Martin Schulz had “graduated from a seminary,” adding: “Schulz, a seminary school graduate who thinks he is in a position to ‘fix the old Turkey, or rather thinks Turkey is still the ‘Old Turkey,’ this time attempted to draw a ‘red line’ to Turkey.”<sup>24</sup>

AKP Deputy Chairman Fatih Şahin said in a statement on November 19, 2016 at a program organized by the AKP Çankaya District Presidency that the July 15 failed coup was an unprecedented invasion attempt against Turkey. “At the same time, July 15 was the last Crusade in these lands,” he remarked. “Members of the **Fethullahist** Terrorist Organization, who are also the representatives and stooges of this Crusader mentality, demonstrate their dishonor by using tanks, rifles, weapons, helicopters and bombs that were purchased by the taxes collected from the people against the nation,” Şahin added.<sup>25</sup>

Speaking at the “National Will and Democracy Meetings” held on August 7, 2016 in Istanbul’s Yenikapı district, Parliament Speaker İsmail Kahraman said, “You are the grandsons of Saladin, who ruined the Crusaders.”<sup>26</sup>

Mehmet Ali Şahin, former parliament speaker and AKP deputy, claimed “The first plan of the Crusaders’ fascist Europe for April 16 is a ‘No’ [vote] and then a coup d’état,” during a public speech in the northwestern district of Yenice in Karabük province, on April 2, 2017. Turkey had switched from a parliamentary democracy into an executive-style presidential system in an April 16 constitutional referendum that granted Erdoğan huge powers without much accountability.

22] AK Parti Genel Başkan Yardımcısı Aktay: Bu bir Haçlı duyarlılığıdır, 1 June 2016, <http://aa.com.tr/tr/politika/ak-par-ti-genel-baskan-yardimcisi-aktay-bu-bir-hacl-duyarlilikidir/582310>

23] “Yolun sonuna gelen AB, biten AB ve başlayan yolumuz”, Yiğit Bulut, Star gazetesi, 24 April 2017, <http://www.star.com.tr/yazar/yolun-sonuna--gelen-ab-biten-ab-ve-baslayan-yolumuz-yazi-1210779/>

24] “Sen kimsin de kırmızı çizgi çiziyorsun”, Yiğit Bulut, Star gazetesi, 2 November 2016, <http://www.star.com.tr/yazar/sen-kimsin-de-kirmizi-cizgi-ciziyorsun-yazi-1154745/>

25] “15 Temmuz haçlı seferleri”, Sputnik, 19 November 2016, <https://tr.sputniknews.com/politi-ka/201611191025888015-15-temmuz-hacl-sefer/>

26] “İsmail Kahraman: Darbeler tarihi sona ermiştir”, 7 August 2016, <http://www.abcgazetesi.com/ismail-kahraman-darbeler-tarihi-sona-ermistir-24437h.htm>

Covering Şahin's speech, the *Diriliş Postası* daily published the following story: "Şahin unmasked the dirty plan by the crusaders' alliance in Europe that introduced all sorts of fascist policies, oppressed Turkish expatriates and gave orders to terrorist organizations. Stressing that an executive presidency means a 'Big Turkey,' Şahin said Europe put every effort into preventing a 'Big Turkey' and said Europe would move to oust Erdoğan if the referendum ends with a 'No'."<sup>27</sup>



The hate speech employed by Erdoğan and other AKP officials at the national level also had a cascading impact at the local level. For example, Halil Kocaer, the AKP mayor of Antalya's Kaş district, said the following on March 15, 2017: "Those who say 'No' are against Turkey's development and rise and the rule and protection of the Islamic world. Who are they? It is a Crusader mentality. ... Let's go to the ballot box for our flag, motherland, stability and Turkey's indivisibility and vote 'Yes'."<sup>28</sup>

The chairman of the AKP's Adana provincial branch, Ziyaeddin Yağcı, likened the main opposition center-left CHP to a church by smearing CHP candidate Aytaç Durak, who was nominated even though he was coming from a center-right background. "I would not want to live in a mosque and die in a church at the end," Yağcı was quoted as saying.<sup>29</sup>

Abdullah Bahadır Örs, the AKP's district head in Konya's Alaşehir town, said, "I'm offering my thanks to our true nationalist brethren for seeing the referendum process as a battle between the Cross and the Crescent."<sup>30</sup>

Bursa Osmangazi Mayor Mustafa Dünder from the AKP claimed at an event he participated in on July 25, 2016 that "the betrayal network in the coup attempt is a tool of the international crusader mind."

### 2. 3. Hate speech by Erdoğan's political allies

It is not only Erdoğan and the ruling AKP lawmakers who churned the anti-Christian hate machinery in Turkey. The Turkish president's allied partners in opposition political parties have also helped expand the hateful narrative. Doğu Perinçek, the leader of the neo-nationalist Homeland (Vatan) Party, took the lead in this march. Another Erdoğan ally is Devlet Bahçeli, chairman of the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), a fascist and racist politician who has entertained conspiracy theories implicating Christians and the Vatican. Last but not the least is the Grand Unity Party (BBP), a nationalist/religious party led by Mustafa Destici.

27] "Crusader Fascist Europe's Plan for 16th of April" Önce hayır, sonra darbe", *Diriliş Postası*, 2 April 2017, <http://dirilis-postasi.com/n-31970-haclı-fasist-avrupanın-16-nisan-planı-once-hayir-sonra-darbe.html>

28] "AKP'li başkan hayır diyenleri haçlılara benzetti", *Birgün gazetesi*, 15 March 2017, <http://www.birgun.net/haber-detay/akp-li-baskan-hayir-diyenleri-haclılara-benzetti-150796.html>

29] "Yağcı'dan inanılmaz Gaf: CHP'liler Hristiyan mı?", *Adana Haberci*, 6 November 2013, [http://www.adanahaberci.com/haber-4763-yagcidan-inanılmaz\\_gaf\\_chp\\_liler\\_hristiyan\\_mi.html](http://www.adanahaberci.com/haber-4763-yagcidan-inanılmaz_gaf_chp_liler_hristiyan_mi.html)

30] "AKP'li başkan 'hayırcı'ları 'haçlı' olarak tanımladı", *İlk Kurşun*, 20 April 2017, <http://www.ilk-kursun.com/haber/316674/akpli-baskan-hayircıları-haclı-olarak-tanimladı/>

Perinçek has long been claiming the Vatican is at war against the Muslim states. He said in 2006 that Pope Benedict XVI was a spiritual leader in a new crusaders' war declared against Muslim countries and that the battle was led by the US.<sup>31</sup> In fact, when Perinçek protested the pope's visit to Turkey in 2006, Erdoğan defended the pope against Perinçek. Today, Erdoğan's transformation, or rather returning to his Islamist factory settings, brought him to the side of Perinçek in hostility towards Christians.

MHP leader Bahçeli is another Erdoğan ally who often invokes the Crusades, expressing an anti-Christian position. Speaking at a rally on August 7, 2017, he said: "FETÖ, who shared the crusaders' desires, aimed at the heart of Turkey. All the mean groups jealous of Turkey patted FETÖ on the back."<sup>32</sup> During a public speech in the eastern city of Elazığ, Bahçeli claimed that "FETÖ's attempt to overthrow the government in the July 15, 2016 coup attempt was a crusade," adding that "on April 16, Turkey's system will change, and regimes in Europe will change as well."<sup>33</sup>

Bahçeli, in a speech on December 22, 2017 at an MHP parliamentary group meeting, said: "FETÖ is very much like esoteric organizations such as the Assassins, Knights Templar, Sion Sect, Illuminati. ... The apparent ringleader of this dark organization is a faithless scrap of a crusade dressed as an imam."<sup>34</sup> He spoke in Elazığ on March 17, 2017, associating Gülen and the Gülen movement with the Crusaders, saying: "FETÖ, taking orders for the occupation of Turkey from barbarians who commanded the last Crusade, mobilized on the evening of July 15. ... They are disguised among the honorable Turkish troops by camouflage. They were aligned by profanity and served to vanity by exploiting religion. They took their place among the most despicable, dirty and slavish of creatures."<sup>35</sup>

The youth branches affiliated with Destici's far-right BBP have been actively promoting anger at the perceived Christian aspects of New Year's celebrations every year. The BBP's local branch in the city of Bolu in western Turkey staged a show displaying Santa Claus converting to Islam. The fictional play saw Ottoman janissaries chasing jolly old Saint Nick before he decides to become a Muslim, after a trial.<sup>36</sup> The party had presented similar shows before, staging a skit that chased Santa out of town in 2014.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Hate speech in the Erdoğan-controlled media

The media, which is nearly in the total control of Erdoğan and his associates, toes the line with Erdoğan's hateful narrative and helps in fanning hostility and anger against Christians across Turkey. In the

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31] "Perinçek'ten Papa'ya sert tepki", Haber10, 16 September 2006, [http://www.haber10.com/diger/perincekten\\_papa\\_ya\\_sert\\_tepki-89856](http://www.haber10.com/diger/perincekten_papa_ya_sert_tepki-89856)

32] "Darbeler tarihi sona ermiştir", Habertürk, 7 August 2016, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/1278141-tb-mm-baskani-ismail-kahraman-darbeler-tarihi-sona-ermistir>

33] "Tahtlar sallanacak", Takvim gazetesi, 19 March 2017, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/guncel/2017/03/19/tahtlar-sallanacak>

34] "Mhp Genel Başkanı Devlet Bahçeli: Türk milletinin istiklalini korumak mecburiyetindeyiz", Milliyet gazetesi, 22 December 2017, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/mhp-genel-baskani-devlet-bahceli-turk-ankara-yerelhaber-1856474/>

35] "Devlet Bahçeli ilk evet mitingini yaptı", Vatan gazetesi, 18 March 2017, <http://www.gazetevatan.com/devlet-bahceli-ilk-evet-mitingini-yapti-1049396-siyaset/>

36] "Santa 'converts' to Islam after 'altercation' with Ottoman soldiers", RT, 1 January 2016, <https://www.rt.com/news/327676-convert-santa-islam-turkey/>

37] "Janissary chases Santa Claus out of town in symbolical anti-New Year's Eve celebration act", Hürriyet Daily News, 31 December 2014, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/janissary-chases-santa-claus-out-of-town-in-symbolical-anti-new-years-eve-celebration-act-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=76343&NewsCatID=341>



print and broadcast media, Erdoğan exerts near control either directly with the help of family ownership or through associates who act as caretakers for the Erdoğan propaganda machine. The owners of several outlets in the mainstream media have already been intimidated, so they go along with the wishes of the Turkish president. Only a few media outlets on the fringe left, which has little penetration in Turkish society, are still in business in Turkey.

Catholic and Orthodox Christian figures are the usual villains in Erdoğan's media, and anything that goes wrong gets blamed on them. At times, this goes to such extremes that even for FIFA's decision for Turkey to join the Champions League with two teams and the cabin ban on electronic devices for the eight national flag carriers that included Turkish Airlines (THY) were described as a "Crusader mentality" in the pro-Erdoğan media.

### 3. 1. Erdoğan family's media

The Sabah daily, owned and controlled by Erdoğan's family, referred to an anti-Erdoğan news article in European media outlets in its report published on March 16, 2017 and told its audience that the "Crusader media declared war."<sup>38</sup>

On March 13, 2017 Şeref Oğuz, a Sabah columnist, evaluated the tension between the Netherlands and Turkey as the former did not allow members of the AKP government to hold referendum campaigns. He wrote: "We do not have any problem with the Dutch people, but they are playing with fire by raising the tension. What these cheese-brain people and EU leaders who have no vision do not understand is that they sit in glass houses when they throw stones at us. A crusader alliance that was built against Turkey as they utter their master's voice [Germany] could crush the high-flying Dutch. The last word: 'It is not history that repeats itself, rather mistakes, and that's why your crusade and our Ottoman slap will never end.'<sup>39</sup>

The AKP, which received 49.9 percent of the vote in the 2011 general elections, fell to 40.9 in the June 7, 2015 elections. The Takvim newspaper, also owned by Erdoğan's family, described the analysis about these results in the Western media as "The Crusaders are celebrating victory." It stated that "the Crusade Alliance, which attacked Turkey and President Erdoğan in every environment before the June 7 elections, celebrated victory after the elections and attacked Erdoğan again. ..."<sup>40</sup>

On March 6, 2017, the Takvim daily published another news article with the headline "Crusader Alliance on the move" when some AKP ministers were not allowed to hold meetings for the pro-Erdoğan



The media, owned by Erdoğan's family, spearheads anti-Christian paranoia in Turkey.

38] "Haçlı basını savaş açtı, Sabah gazetesi, 16 March 2017,

<http://www.sabah.com.tr/dunya/2017/03/16/hacli-basini-savas-acti>

39] "Haçlı ittifakının Türkiye seferi", Sabah gazetesi, 13 March 2017, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/oguz/2017/03/13/hacli-ittifakinin-turkiye-seferi>

40] "Haçlılar zafer kutluyor", Takvim gazetesi, 8 June 2015, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/dunya/2015/06/08/haclilar-zaf-er-kutluyor>

**Takvim  
newspaper**



campaign in Europe. The report said: “Germany did not allow a ‘yes’ campaign for the April 16 referendum on its soil. Previously, Germany cancelled the meetings of Bekir Bozdağ, Nihat Zeybekçi and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu and then allowed a ‘No’ campaign organized by some people, including PKK members. Upon this, the Crusader Alliance mobilized. Austria, Switzerland, France and the Netherlands banned the ‘Yes’ voters with a Nazi mentality and welcomed the ‘No’ voters. ...”<sup>41</sup>

Bülent Erandaç, a columnist for the Takvim newspaper, referred to Christianity in his article on December 19, 2016. Erandaç wrote that “today, it is no coincidence that Gülen, who was a pawn behind the Cross attacking the Crescent and Turkey being besieged, the PKK and Deep America-Europe are cooperating. On July 15th we had overthrown their steel armor. Now they are coming back again. Let’s never forget that. The war between Right and Wrong never ended. And it will never end until judgment day. What happened today is war between Crescent and Cross, East and West, ‘faith’ and ‘blasphemy’.”<sup>42</sup>

On April 4, 2017, Erandaç penned another column with the title “‘Yes’ slap against Crusade.” “They will go nuts when they witness big Turkey after April 16. They will be crushed by President Tayyip Erdoğan’s ‘World is bigger than five’ campaign. The ‘Yes’ votes on April 16 will become merely one of the most effective slaps our nation will give the Crusaders,”<sup>43</sup> he stated.

Erkan Tan, a TV host and columnist, claimed in an article for Takvim that Muslims in Europe are under oppression. In the piece, titled “Is this a European Union? Crusader, Zionist Union?” published on March 17, 2017, he wrote that “Crusaders and Zionists united in an alliance and called it the European Union. And they are waging war. There is a crusader in this world. They are waging war against Turks and Muslims. On the surface, it looks to be against Turks. But all Muslims in Europe are repressed, and they are targeted in this war. Turks are more visible since Turks have a strong leader like Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. ...”<sup>44</sup>

### 3. 2. Erdoğan’s associate Ethem Sancak’s media

Another media outlet owned by Ethem Sancak, a businessman very close to Erdoğan who serves as the senior figure on the ruling AKP’s Central Executive Board (MKYK), is among the leading media groups that have targeted Christians. For example, Star ran the headline “The Reason for Cruelty of Crusaders on Old Continent: Fear of the Crescent” on March 20, 2016.

The following was said in the headline news story: “Births are decreasing, the elderly population is increasing. In 2050, the Turkish and Muslim population will be the largest ethnic group. Europe is recruiting children against labor and economic threats. But why is Europe confiscating Turkish and Muslim children? Why are they tearing these children, especially at the age of infancy and in childhood,

41] “Hitlere bak”, Takvim gazetesi, 6 March 2017, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/guncel/2017/03/06/hitlere-bak>

42] “Hilalin savaşı”, Bülent Erandaç, Takvim gazetesi, 19 December 2016, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/yazarlar/erandac/2016/12/19/hilalin-savasi>

43] “Haçlı seferine evet tokadı.”, Takvim gazetesi, 4 April 2017, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/yazarlar/erandac/2017/04/04/hacli-seferine-evet-tokadi>

44] “Haçlı Siyonist birliği mi Avrupa birliği mi?”, Takvim gazetesi, 17 March 2017, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/yazarlar/erkan-tan/2017/03/17/hacli-siyonist-birligi-mi-avrupa-birligi-mi>



from their roots and forcing them to convert while in the care of Christian families? The answer seems to be hidden in the words of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan that the 'Cross started war against the Crescent' and 'Have four children, not three.' Christian countries with decreasing populations are seeking to collect a 'young Christian population' from the Muslim population."<sup>45</sup>

In another news story, Star ran the headline "Crusaders' Alliance behind the Betrayal of Truck" in its March 25, 2016 edition. The newspaper criticized a Constitutional Court decision that opened the way for the release of Cumhuriyet newspaper's former editor Can Dündar and Ankara representative Erdem Gül as "controversial." It said "Consuls general of 11 countries who supported Can Dündar by attending the trial tried to influence the judiciary" and "Lawyers of KCK / PKK, DHKP-C and FETÖ defended Dündar and Gül, who were spies. In addition to the United States, the consuls general of the 11 EU countries supported them. All domestic and foreign enemies of Turkey united for support."<sup>46</sup>

The Star newspaper published the headline "Crusaders' Alliance against Erdoğan" on June 6, 2015, one day before the elections. It used a second title, "Do not think Byzantium is over," and said: "Turkey is going to the polls tomorrow. The front that united against the AK Party, which has undertaken a 'Silent Revolution' in its 13 years of rule, has put President Erdoğan as the target. Western media, much of which is very close to Israeli lobbies, have campaigned to stop Erdoğan, while in Turkey the media of the Parallel<sup>47</sup> organization and its affiliates are standing in the same campaign."<sup>48</sup>

The Akşam newspaper, also owned by Sancak, ran the headline "Crusaders' Idea Did Not Want Us" in its December 8, 2016 edition. "Turkey was barred from participating in the Champions League with two teams. Prejudices are also reflected on a green field at a time when the European Union has closed its doors to us. Our teams were prevented from developing economically,"<sup>49</sup> the report said.

The Güneş newspaper, also owned by Erdoğan ally Sancak, published a news story on June 6, 2015 with the headline "New Crusaders to New Turkey."<sup>50</sup> The report said: "The West, which did not want Turkey, which has strengthened its power and economy day by day in the region, established a new Crusader alliance and started a war

**Star  
newspaper**



**Akşam  
newspaper**



45] "Hilal korkusu", Star gazetesi, 20 March 2016, <http://www.star.com.tr/politika/hilal-korkusu-haber-1198455/>

46] "Tır ihanetinde haçlı ittifakı", Star gazetesi, 25 March 2016, <http://www.star.com.tr/guncel/tir-ihanetinde-hacl-ittifa-ki-haber-1098643/>

47] Erdoğan and his AKP government had begun referring to the Gülen movement as the "Parallel State Structure" ("Paralel Devlet Yapısı" or "PDY" in Turkish) to defame the group before they started referring to it as a terrorist group.

48] "Haçlı ittifakı", Star gazetesi, 6 June 2015, <http://www.star.com.tr/guncel/hacl-ittifaki-haber-1034424/>

49] "Haçlı zihniyeti bizi istemedi", Akşam gazetesi, 8 December 2016, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/futbol/hacl-zihniyeti-bi-zi-istemedi/haber-574377>

50] "Yeni Türkiye'nin baş düşmanı yeni haçlılar", Güneş gazetesi, 6 June 2015, <http://www.gunes.com/gundem/yeni-turki-yenin-bas-dusmani-yeni-haclilar-147866>



against the nation and the state with all the resources available to them. Fearing a growing and strengthening Turkey, the West has launched a new Crusade. But this time it attacks Turkey not with guns or rifles but with its media, intelligence agents and cooperating traitors inside. Their goal is to cut the front of the new Turkey. The Western world, which sees June 7 as its last chance, is trying every way possible to accomplish what it could not achieve by Gezi or December 17. The Crusader alliance, which linked arms with the Parallel Structure, PKK, DHKP-C, Doğan Media Group and some political parties held captive by them, attacks Turkey relentlessly every day by using its media, The Crusader Alliance is constantly attacking because they are afraid of a growing Turkey, a strong Turkey. They are afraid of stability and the presidential system.”

The same day Akşam published this story on its web page under the headline “Main Enemy of New Turkey: New Crusaders,” it described Fethullah Gülen, HDP Co-chairman Selahattin Demirtaş and Aydın Doğan as “New Crusaders” in a caption under their photos.<sup>51</sup>

### 3. 3. Islamist and nationalist media

Islamist media, funded and supported by Erdoğan, has also joined in this hysteria. For example, Yeni Akit, a radical Islamist daily, ran a lead story on July 20, 2014 with the headline “This is a Crusaders’ Alliance.” It was criticizing what it claimed to be the silence of the Western states against Israel’s attack on Gaza by saying that “the US, German, British, French and UN support for the Zionists once again exposed the ‘Crusader Alliance,’ while the terrorist state Israel continues to bomb women and children in Gaza.”<sup>52</sup>



Ahmet Gülümseyen, the editor of Yeni Akit, titled a column on April 7, 2017 “From Crusaders’ Mind, Scandalous Ban on Beşiktaş.” Gülümseyen said in his article: “European countries show their true colors, they continue to let the chips fall as they may. The Crusaders’ mindset continues to implement policies that were shaped by its fascist views about Islam. The last example of this is that the French Football Federation has signed on to an outdated and scandalous practice to ban the Beşiktaş team.” He claimed that France, just like the Netherlands, Austria, Germany and Sweden, supported terror groups against Turkey.<sup>53</sup>

Yeni Akit published an interview with notorious mafia leader Sedat Peker, who is known to be close to Erdoğan, on June 6, 2015.<sup>54</sup> In the interview Peker described the June 7 elections as the “Crescent-Cross war.” Peker said the alliances that were formed before the elections made him nauseous and added, “In such a struggle, the point where me and both my brothers who love me and my nation will stand is certain. Our nation must think carefully when voting.”

51] “Yeni Türkiye’nin baş düşmanı yeni Haçlılar”, Akşam gazetesi, 6 June 2015, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/yeni-turkiyenin-bas-dusmani-yeni-haclilar/haber-411227>

52] “İşte haçlı ittifakı”, Yeni Akit, 20 July 2014, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/iste-hacl-i-ttifaki-24432.html>

53] “Haçlı zihniyetinin Beşiktaşlılara yasak rezaleti”, Yeni Akit, 7 April 2017, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/ahmet-gulumseyen/hacl-i-zihniyetin-besiktasli-lara-yasak-rezaleti-18959.html>

54] “Sedat Peker ilk defa Akit’e konuştu”, Yeni Akit gazetesi, 6 June 2015, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/sedat-peker-ilk-defa-akite-konustu-7-haziran-secimleri-hilal-hac-mucadelesidir-72713.html>



İbrahim Karagül, the editor-in-chief of the Yeni Şafak daily, owned by the Albayrak group, which is very close to Erdoğan, published a column on March 13, 2017 with the title “April 16 Front a Crusader Front.”

He wrote that “an April 16 front has been established in Europe, and all terrorist organizations and the small opposition circles inside Turkey have re-gathered under a single roof and have started a large-scale war to sabotage the referendum. Watch out for this front. New threats are emerging from Europe and from the south, and attacks directly targeting the referendum are being planned. The whole world knows that a win for the ‘Yes’ votes is one of the most critical stages of the great transformation taking place in Turkey, that as of April 17, it will not be possible to stop Turkey, but a kind of crusader front is standing against us.”<sup>55</sup>

In another news article published on March 20, 2017, Yeni Şafak claimed the Western nations had mobilized for a “No” vote and likened this to a crusade alliance. “In a cooperation similar to the Crusader alliance in history, they openly engage in public propaganda for ‘No’ through the media. Western officials who

do not allow the activities of Turkish officials for ridiculous reasons open their doors to any kind of ‘NO’ activity,” the article noted.<sup>56</sup>

Karagül also wrote on March 27, 2017 that the West acts against Turkey with a Crusader spirit. “Why does a Crusader attack? They know Anatolia, the last remaining fortress, is going to spoil their game. Just wait, major hell will break loose among themselves. While we’re minding our business, we are also going to be carefully watching the fight among those who formed the crusader front and the major crises they are going through with other centers of power. The real hell-fight will break loose there. Perhaps they will continue hitting Turkey. Perhaps they will continue to mobilize the entire West against Turkey with a Crusader spirit.”<sup>57</sup>

Yeni Şafak columnist Salih Tuna said in an article on June 29, 2017 that “To us, Erdoğan means determination and ambition against Crusaders.” Tuna wrote that “Because Erdoğan is not just a person for us. He is the embodiment of standing by the oppressed against the tyrant. In other words, a noble resistance, that is, the determination and ambition to prevent these lands from being trampled by ‘Crusaders’ ...”<sup>58</sup>

Tamer Korkmaz, a columnist for Yeni Şafak, claimed in his article titled “Crusader-Zionist Alliance Against Crescent Country” dated June 10, 2015 that the Western media is the spokesman for the states that formed the Crusader-Zionist alliance. “The New York Times, the most prominent servant of the alliance in the American media, published a story before the June 7 elections saying ‘US and NATO must stop Erdoğan.’ The ‘Western’ media is very happy because the HDP’s votes did not pass

55] “Nisan’a kadar herkes tetikte olsun”, Yeni Şafak gazetesi, 13 March 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahim-karagul/16-nisana-kadar-herkes-tetikte-olsun-2036727>

56] “Hayır için haçlı ittifakı”, Yeni Şafak gazetesi, 20 March 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/hayir-icin-hacl-i-ttifa-ki-2631108>

57] “Neden haçlı saldırısı Anadolu son kale oyun bozulacak biliyorlar”, Yeni Şafak gazetesi, 27 March 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/ibrahimkaragul/neden-hacl-i-saldirisi-anadolu-bu-son-kale-oyun-bozulacak-biliyorlar-2036989>

58] “Ben kimim asuman kim?” Salih Tuna, Yeni Şafak, 29 April 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/salihtuna/ben-kimim-asuman-nedir-2037600>

the electoral threshold’ and the AK Party cannot come to power alone,” he wrote, adding that “the Crusader-Zionist Alliance has organized many open-secret attacks with its pawns for nine years to make a colonial state become connected to the US and Israel once again, as Turkey used to be. But they were unable to reach their goals.”<sup>59</sup>

Another contributor at Yeni Şafak, Yusuf Kaplan, wrote a column titled “Europe’s subconscious has exploded: Crusaders’ alliance came back from the dead,” published on April 2, 2017. “Europe sends the message that it does not have anything to say to the world and that it can mobilize a barbaric spirit for own interests by demonstrating its archaic, soulless history and culture and by resurrecting its Crusader spirit,” he commented.<sup>60</sup>

Milat, also an Islamist daily, ran the headline “Crusader-PYD Alliance Has Been Proved” on February 20, 2016. The newspaper, claiming that the PYD was controlled by Western states, labeled this as a “Crusader-PYD alliance” by referring to Christianity. It said that ‘Christian Army’ elements were found in the PYD, the pioneering terrorist organization of the American and Western states that aims to redraw the borders of the Middle East. It noted that the PYD was taken under the control of Western countries through Christian militias sent to Syria from different parts of Europe. It claimed the US through the UK and France has been providing arms, medical supplies and logistics to these fighters.<sup>61</sup>

Alper Tan, the chief editor of Kanal A television, a pro-Erdoğan channel funded by an anti-Western religious/nationalist faction called Milli Damar, wrote in an article on February 9, 2016 that the weapons sent to Syria from Russia were blessed by Orthodox priests. Tan said in his article: “What are Islamic countries doing against this Crusader-Zionist alliance? The Crusader-Zionist alliance has caused Muslim countries to form alliances among themselves. The planes, tanks, weapons, squadrons and soldiers sent from Russia to massacre Syrian Muslims were

blessed by Orthodox priests.”<sup>62</sup>

In a column that appeared on March 28, 2017, Tan also commented on the meeting between European leaders and Pope Francis at the Vatican. “This is a Crusaders’ alliance against the Crescent. This photo shows Crusader nations acting with Vatican spirit,” he wrote.<sup>63</sup>

**Milat**  
newspaper



59] “Haçlı Siyonist ittifakı hilal ülkesine karşı”, Tamer Korkmaz, Yeni Şafak gazetesi, 10 June 2015, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/tamerkorkmaz/hacli-siyonist-ittifaki-hilal-ulkesine-karsi-2013342>

60] “Avrupa’nın haçlı ruhu hortladı”, Yeni Şafak gazetesi, 02 April 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/yusufkaplan/avrupanin-bilincalti-patladi-hacli-ruhu-hortladi-2037091>

61] “Haçlı PYD ittifakı kanıtlandı”, Milat gazetesi, 20 Şubat 2016, <http://www.milatgazetesi.com/hacli-pyd-ittifaki-kanitlandi-haber-78680>

62] “İslam ordusu haçlı Siyonist ordusuna karşı”, Alper Tan, Kanal A, 9 February 2016, <http://www.kanalahaber.com/yazar/alper-tan/islam-ordusu-hacli-siyonist-ordusuna-karsi-27707/>

63] “Haçlı ülkeleri Vatikan ruhu ile hareket ediyor”, KanalA Haber, 28 March 2017, <http://www.kanalahaber.com/haber/gundem/alper-tan-hacli-ulkeleri-vatikan-ruhuy-la-hareket-ediyor-351993/>



**Erdoğan's media often played Vatican conspiracy in the EU to claim malicious intent towards Turkey.**

State Rex Tillerson on a list of wanted “terrorists” in reaction to arrest warrants issued in Washington for members of Erdoğan’s security detail. The daily published a story with pictures and labeled them as terrorists, accused of supporting terrorist organizations.<sup>65</sup>

Şükrü Alınçık, a columnist for the Ortadoğu daily, which is affiliated with the far-right MHP, claimed that the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) is not a Kurdish rebellion but rather a Christian Crusade. He wrote that ethnic groups in nation-states are fifth columns used by the Christian West.<sup>64</sup>

The pro-government Yenisöz daily has put US President Donald Trump, Pope Francis and US Secretary of

### 3. 4. News websites funded by the Erdoğan government

There are hundreds of news websites that were funded and supported by the Erdoğan government either through official channels or through clandestine networks that fuel hatred and xenophobia in Turkish society. They go to extremes in smearing Erdoğan’s critics and opponents and fanning anti-Christian sentiment.

Medya Gündem (Medyagundem.com) is a prominent example of how Erdoğan can lower the bar in smearing people, organizations, countries and international organizations with hard-core, extremist materials. The website is funded indirectly by Erdoğan’s media empire Turkuvaz, which has stakes in several media outlets such as the Sabah and Takvim dailies and the A Haber TV station. Turkey’s notorious National Intelligence Organization (MİT) is alleged to have been providing confidential information to this website, amounting to a breach of privacy.

Medya Gündem said in a report on October 2, 2015 that it was the “Crusader Alliance” that was behind the outlawed PKK, adding: “Foreign warriors coming to PKK-YPG<sup>66</sup> camps from all over the world may soon outnumber the Kurdish population. Due to the airstrikes on Kandil [where top commanders of the PKK are based in northern Iraq], the Germans, British and Americans descending into the plains of Syria began to form the backbone of the terrorist organization with the Cross on their necks.”<sup>67</sup> On June 6, 2015, the Media Gündem website also published the news of the Güneş newspaper

64] “Kürt İsyanı Değil, Haçlı Seferi!”, Ortadoğu, 1 September 2016, <http://www.ortadogugazetesi.net/haber.php?id=47027>

65] “Turkey’s Pro-Erdoğan Daily Lists Pope And Trump As Terrorists In Its Front Page”, Yeni Söz, June 18, 2017, <https://stockholmcf.org/turkeys-pro-erdogan-daily-lists-pope-and-trump-as-terrorists-in-its-front-page/>

66] YPG (People’s Protection Units) is a Syrian offshoot of the PKK.

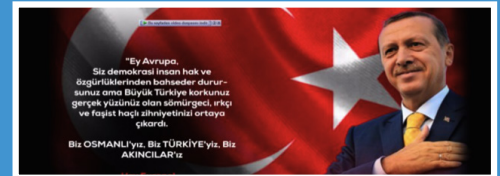
67] “PKK değil haçlı ittifakı”, Medya Gündem, 2 October 2015, <http://www.medyagundem.com/84016/>



and used the headline “Here is the New Army of Crusaders,” claiming that the West had launched a new Crusaders’ alliance against Turkey.<sup>68</sup>

Another hate-mongering online news website is Superhaber.tv, which was set up in 2013 by the Turkish president’s cousin, Cengiz Er, who previously worked for the Erdoğan-family-owned Turkuvaz media. It published a story on Jan. 4, 2017 highlighting how the ornaments on the new wrought iron fences at the Turkish Parliament were removed when they were seen to resemble the cross or a knight’s sword.<sup>69</sup>

Upon tension with the Netherlands, hackers called the Cyber Warrior Group hacked some official Dutch websites and posted a statement with Erdoğan’s photo on it on March 14, 2017. In the statement the group said, “Well Europe, you talk about human rights and freedoms, but your fear of big Turkey has exposed your real face as having a colonial, racist and crusader mentality.” The group is believed to be linked to the Turkish government.



### 3. 5. Seized media outlets

Independent and critical media outlets that had refused to carry the Erdoğan government’s xenophobic narrative were quickly turned into hate-mongering machines after they were unlawfully seized by the government. The editorial lines of Zaman, Turkey’s one-time most highly circulated daily with up to 1.2 million copies at its peak, and Bugün changed 180 degrees overnight.

For example, the Bugün newspaper, which used to be a critical daily owned by the Koza İpek Group,<sup>70</sup> the third largest media outlet with two dailies, two TV channels and one radio station, targeted the main opposition CHP’s then-Deputy Chairman and party spokeswoman Selin Sayek Böke by claiming in the headline that she was a Christian. The newspaper also said “She was baptized” and “The horrible truth was uncovered.” In the news story statements such as “Into which hands has the CHP fallen? Are we going to see this as well?” were used.

### 3. 6. Official media

In an unprecedented change, Turkey’s official news media outlets have also become mouthpieces for the Islamist government in Turkey, adopting an editorial line that is overtly anti-Christian.

For example, the state-run news agency Anadolu Ajansı dispatched a wire on December 28, 2015

68] Gülen gizli kardinal (4 Ağustos 2016) <http://tr.farsnews.com/world/news/13950514000286>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNk00tPMpkU>

69] “TBMM’de ‘haç’ krizi: Korkuluklar yeniden yapıldı”, Superhaber.tv, 4 January 2017, <http://www.superhaber.tv/tbm-mde-hac-krizi-korkuluklar-yeniden-yapildi-33711-haber>

70] On 26 October 2015, Koza İpek Group’s media organs were confiscated by Ankara 5th Criminal Court of Peace. Bugün and Millet newspapers, Kanaltürk and BugünTV and Kanaltürk radio were in the group.



stating that a Bible had been found to be criminal evidence. The report, titled “A Kurdish Bible is Found in the Sanctuary of Terrorists,” noted that “the Kurdish Bible was seized as well as materials used in the construction of homemade explosives in the separatist terrorist organization shelter found in the rural district of Mutki, Bitlis.”<sup>71</sup>

In another wire dated July 17, 2017, Anadolu carried comments by Turkey’s ambassador to the Holy See Mehmet Paçacı, who said members of the Gülen movement had tried to distort Islam by establishing interfaith dialogue and outreach activities with the Vatican.<sup>72</sup>

The Anadolu news agency even started carrying remarks by Erdoğan’s family members whose xenophobic statements were widely covered. In a wire report filed by Anadolu on April 2, 2017, Bilal Erdoğan, the Turkish president’s son, was quoted as saying “The European Union proved itself to be a Christian union by [their leaders] making a trip to see the pope at the Vatican.” He claimed the EU thinks it can consolidate its unity on Islamophobia.<sup>73</sup>

The state-owned television network TRT has also become a platform for hatred against Christians. Erdoğan’s chief aide, Yiğit Bulut, has a regular TV show every week, often attacking Pope Francis and accusing the Vatican of declaring a Crusaders’ war against Turkey. In January 2017 he said Turkey has a real problem with the Vatican and described the Holy See as an imperialist power.



#### **4. Using hostility against Christianity to alienate and stigmatize the Gülen movement**

With the defamation campaign targeting Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen movement, the opposition to Christianity and interfaith dialogue, which were an underlying theme for Kemalist and nationalist groups in the past, were embraced by Erdoğan after the huge bribery and corruption scandal that erupted on December 17/25, 2013.<sup>74</sup> In fact, Erdoğan has acted as a catalyst in accelerating the anti-Christian campaign

71] Terör örgütü sığınagında Kürtçe İncil bulundu (28 December 2015) <http://aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/teror-orgutu-siginaginda-kurtce-incil-bulundu/497545>

72] “Vatikan Büyükelçisi Paçacı: Diyalog adı altında İslam’ı dönüştüren anlayışla ilişki kurmuşlar”, 17 July 2017, <http://aa.com.tr/tr/15-temmuz-darbe-girisimi/vatikan-buyukelcisi-pacaci-diyalog-adi-altinda-islam-i-donusturen-anlayisla-iliski-kurmuslar/863157>

73] “TÜGVA İstişare Kurulu Üyesi Erdoğan: AB Hristiyan olduğunu Papa’nın elini öperek dünyaya haykırdı”, Anadolu Ajansı, 2 April 2017, <http://aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/tugva-istisare-kurulu-uyesi-erdogan-ab-hristiyan-oldugunu-papanin-eli-operek-dunyaya-haykirdi-/786096>

74] December 17 Investigation: The investigation that was initiated by a number of notices in September 2012 and February 2013, became known by the public on December 17, 2013 by the fulfillment of public prosecutor Celal Kara’s custody orders and the search decisions of the courts, conducted by the Istanbul Security Directorate for Combating Organized Crime and financial branches, and carried out against four ministers of the 61st government of Turkey and three sons of Cabinet members, businessmen, bureaucrats, bank managers, public officials at various levels on charges committing the crimes of “bribery, misconduct, misappropriation and smuggling.”

December 25 Investigation: The investigation carried out by prosecutor Muammer Akkaş on accusations of establishing and managing an organization to commit crimes, to conspire to rig bids and bribery, into 96 people including Erdoğan’s son Bilal Erdoğan. During the process, both investigations were closed, members of the judiciary and policemen who served during these investigations were first fired then arrested and imprisoned.

and has turned it into a systematic endeavor.

There are many examples of how the antagonism towards Christianity is exploited in the speeches of Erdoğan and the AKP, or in the media under Erdoğan's control, within the scope of the witch-hunt targeting the Gülen movement.

Following the bribery and corruption scandal that came to public attention on December 17/25, 2013, Erdoğan claimed that the corruption investigations were the work of the Gülen movement and presented them as a coup attempt against the AKP government. To take revenge and hush up the graft probes, Erdoğan dismissed police chiefs, judges and prosecutors who exposed major corruption in his government, forcing four ministers to resign. He also launched a witch-hunt against the Gülen movement, which is quite vocal and critical of government corruption. Erdoğan bluntly said in a statement on May 11, 2014, "If it is a witch-hunt, then yes, a witch-hunt. We will conduct this witch-hunt [against the Gülen movement]."<sup>75</sup>

As part of the escalating witch-hunt, efforts at demonstrating anti-Christian and anti-Christianity discourse and portraying the Gülen movement as being related to Christianity have been accelerated by the Erdoğan government to discredit and demonize Fethullah Gülen and the movement. This rhetoric intensified further after the failed coup attempt on July 15, 2016, which SCF research concluded was staged by Erdoğan himself as a false flag operation to criminalize the opposition.

In this widespread smear campaign that the AKP and Erdoğan carried out in order to disgrace Gülen and the civic movement he inspired in the eyes of the Turkish and Muslim public, expressions such as "secret Christian" or even "secret cardinal," "working against Islam with the Vatican," "interfaith dialogue studies have betrayed Islam" and "he emptied the religion" about Fethullah Gülen were frequently used to defame. The visit of Gülen to Pope John Paul II at the Vatican in 1998 was again brought up,<sup>76</sup> his meeting with many Christian and Jewish spiritual leaders in Turkey<sup>77</sup> and the Gülen movement's important activities in the field of religious dialogue are the main supporting points of all these unjust accusations. Erdoğan and his supporters obviously see the visits and meetings of a Muslim scholar with Christian and Jewish spiritual leaders as an unacceptable "sin."

Before leaving Turkey in 1999, Gülen met with Greek Orthodox Patriarch Bartholomeos, Armenian Patriarch Mutafyan and Jewish rabbis Davit Aseo and Ishak Haleva on various occasions. Religious interfaith studies conducted under the leadership of Gülen were first in the field after Said Nursi's visit to Greek Orthodox Patriarch Athenagoras in 1953 in Istanbul "disturbed" a large segment of society infected by official Kemalist ideology and political Islamism.<sup>78</sup>

Erdoğan does not hide his discomfort with the values of interfaith dialogue espoused by Gülen. Speaking during an official visit to Pakistan on November 17, 2016, Erdoğan expressed his discomfort with Gülen's activities in this area: "He can easily establish religious dialogue with the Vatican. How can a dialogue between religions be? How can we establish a dialogue between Islam and other religions? Is

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75] "Cadı avıysa cadı avı", Habertürk gazetesi, 11 May 2014, <http://www.haberturk.com/gundem/haber/947328-cadi-aviy-sa-cadi-avi->

76] 'Fethullah Hoca Papa'yla görüştü', Hürriyet gazetesi, 10 February 1998, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/fethullah-hoca-pa-payla-gorustu-39005791>

77] "Bartholomeos: Liberalleşme için Gülen'le çalışıyoruz", Dünya Bülteni, 12 April 2012, <http://www.dunyabulteni.net/haber/205739/bartholomeos-liberallesme-icin-gulenle-calisiyoruz>

78] "Bediüzzaman Said Nursi'nin Düşüncesinde Müslüman-Hristiyan Diyalogu ve İşbirliği" <http://www.bediuzzamansaidnursi.org/icerik/bediuzzaman-said-nursinin-dusuncesinde-musluman-hiristiyan-diya-logu-ve-isbirligi>

it possible? But this man can establish it.”<sup>79</sup>

Strangely enough, the meeting of a Muslim scholar with Christian and Jewish spiritual leaders in Turkey is seen as a “big sin” not only by political Islamists but also by the secular Kemalist groups. These two opposite groups have a very cooperative attitude when it comes to dealing with Christianity. One of the reasons for the Gülen movement becoming a common enemy of both political Islamists and secular Kemalists is the group’s long-running activities in interfaith dialogue. This targeting has even turned into acts of violence in individual cases. The Journalists and Writers Foundation (GYV), whose honorary president is Fethullah Gülen, was bombed by radical Islamic groups in 2000 due to work in interreligious dialogue, and foundation authorities have repeatedly been threatened by such groups. The GYV was shut down by the Erdoğan government in July 2016 on false charges.

#### 4.1. Media smear campaign against Gülen over interfaith dialogue

The media smear campaign that has been run against Gülen and his movement often invoked interfaith dialogue as something that was terribly wrong and even a criminal activity as part of Erdoğan’s efforts to undermine his key critic, a Muslim scholar. As a result, Christian groups, especially the Vatican, were vilified in this campaign of slander that targets Erdoğan’s opponents.

For example, speaking on A Haber TV, a network owned by Erdoğan’s family, on February 17, 2014, theologian Ahmet Mekin said: “The Vatican, the US and the union of churches are behind the Cemaat [the Gülen movement]. They [members of the movement] are in touch with all of them. There are eight different missionary groups active in Turkey. The Cemaat has close contact with these groups. They are acting according to the Second Vatican Council of 1964,”<sup>80</sup> he said.

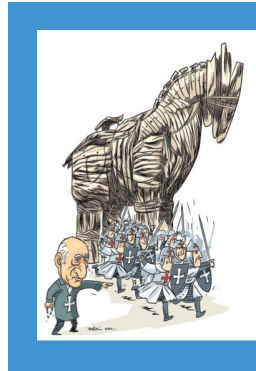
The Sabah newspaper, also owned by Erdoğan, made the following claims in a news piece titled “A Bible Is Found in the House of FETÖ Member.” The report, published on August 1, 2016, claimed that several Bibles were found during the execution of a search warrant at the homes of suspects linked to the Gülen movement. It even noted that a bookmark was left in the Corinthians section of the Bible, which talked about “resistance.”

On August 7, 2016 Sabah newspaper writer Erhan Afyoncu stated in his column that the “Crusaders found new servants to help them” by claiming that “the Crusaders roasted Turkish children in Anatolia by sticking on their spears.” Afyoncu wrote that “apparently this Trojan horse, which speaks as a Muslim and a Turk, was FETÖ. Turkey and many Islamic countries, deceived by their outward appearance, have begun to be gradually taken over by the ‘FETÖ Crusaders’ under their Muslim mask. The Turkish nation, which ruled the world for 2,200 years, will beat this crusader mentality.”<sup>81</sup> President Erdoğan’s chief advisor, Yiğit Bulut, quoted Afyoncu’s comments in an article in

79] “Erdoğan gördüğümüz kadarı ile FETÖ Pakistan’da...” DHA, 17 November 2016, [http://www.dha.com.tr/erdogan-gordugumuz-kadari-ile-feto-pakistanda\\_1383943.html](http://www.dha.com.tr/erdogan-gordugumuz-kadari-ile-feto-pakistanda_1383943.html)

80] “Gülen cemaati Vatikan’a hizmet ediyor”, Medya Gündem, 17 February 2014, <http://www.medyagundem.com/gulen-cemaati-vatikana-hizmet-ediyor/>

81] “Fetö haçlı seferlerinin Truva atıdır”, Sabah gazetesi, 7 August 2016, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/yazarlar/erhan-afyoncu/2016/08/07/feto-hacl-seferlerinin-truva-atidir>



the Star newspaper on August 8, 2016 and wrote “The Papal Crusades were launched against the dominance of Turks in Anatolia and the Middle East. The new face of crusaders: FETÖ.”

The Sabah newspaper cited a speech made its columnist Afyoncu, delivered at a school program on September 23, 2016. Afyoncu was quoted as saying that members of the Gülen movement went to places that he, a historian, didn’t know existed and opened schools there. “It is impossible to open schools in places where some countries do not even have embassies. It cannot be done without political support. For this reason, the Crusades took on a new form today. They recruited Turkish people. Their apparent aims were different; their original purposes were different. The last Crusade was defeated on July 15 by the nation’s resistance and foresight.”<sup>82</sup>

The Gülen movement is part of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), the Sabah daily claimed in another report by quoting from a book titled “Silent Occupation,” written by Azeri journalist Agil Alesger, in its September 7, 2016 edition. Alesger also claimed that the Gülen movement was a Trojan horse placed in the Islamic world by the Vatican.<sup>83</sup>

Erkan Tan, a columnist for the Takvim newspaper, stated in his article on March 12, 2017 that “those who attack Turkey through Germany and those who attack Turkey with FETÖ are connected to the same center. If you cannot see the battle against FETÖ as a battle against a part of the US, the CIA and MOS-SAD, you will be wrong in all your evaluations. This is the lean truth that we all have to accept in our country. These deep structures bound by the Crusader and Zionist alliance, with all their cells, are stealing our generations from us.”<sup>84</sup>

Fuat Uğur, a columnist for the Türkiye newspaper, owned by pro-Erdoğan businessman Ahmet Mücahid Oren, said the following in an article on December 13, 2016: “When we look at what we have experienced in recent years, we realize that our country wants to be invaded by a new version of the West or a Crusader army that we can call a new generation. FETÖ and the PKK cooperate without hesitation and apply the instructions they receive from the West literally. We know very well that it was the West behind the new-version Crusader massacre carried out in the middle of Istanbul with the cooperation of FETÖ-PKK. We are facing a new situation. Diplomatic pretense is over. Let’s know this and be ready. By closing ranks and cleansing the traitors from within us.”<sup>85</sup> In a news piece citing Uğur’s article, the Medya Gündem website portrayed Fethullah Gülen as a Christian reverend in a photomontaged picture.<sup>86</sup>

The Yeni Akit newspaper was published with a lead headline of “Support from Crusaders to Parallels” on December 16, 2014. The coverage in the international media of the detention of Ekrem Dumanlı, the editor-in-chief of Turkey’s one-time largest national daily Zaman, and Hidayet Karaca, the general manager of leading TV network Samanyolu, was interpreted as “Crusader support.”

82] “Son haçlı seferi mağlup edildi”, Sabah gazetesi, 23 September 2016, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/09/23/son-haclı-seferi-mağlup-edildi>

83] “Vatikan’ın Truva atı FETÖ”, Sabah gazetesi, 7 September 2016, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/09/07/vatikanin-truva-ati-feto>

84] “Almanya ve Fetö’yü üzerimize salanlar aynı”, Takvim gazetesi, 12 March 2017, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/yazarlar/erkan-tan/2017/03/12/almanya-ve-fetoyu-uzerimize-salanlar-ayni>

85] “Batı’nın Yeni Nesil Haçlı Ordusu FETÖ İle PKK” Fuat Uğur, Türkiye gazetesi, 13 December 2016, <http://www.turkiyegazetesi.com.tr/yazarlar/fuat-ugur/594563.aspx>

86] “Batının yeni nesil haçlı ordusu”, Medya Gündemi, 13 December 2016, <http://www.medyagundem.com/batinin-yeni-nesil-haclı-ordusu-feto-ve-pkk/>





The report said “Collaborators appeared! The West, which has never abandoned its ambitions [of dominance] on Muslims and turns a deaf ear to cruelty in the Islamic world and attacks against Muslims, informed the world public about police operations against the media arm of the Parallel Structure [Gülen movement] as breaking news. It is very meaningful that the Western media criticized the operations against the Zaman daily and Samanyolu TV and protects the Parallel Structure.”<sup>87</sup>

In its August 12, 2016 edition, the Yeni Akit newspaper published a picture of Fethullah Gülen and Pope John Paul II during a visit to the Vatican in 1998. The newspaper claimed that Gülen had the support of the Vatican and that the Gülen movement in Italy had survived with the support of the Catholic Church for the purpose of promoting the program of dialogue between religions, which the newspaper called sedition. “It turned out that the source of reference for the traitor FETÖ was the Vatican, the center of the Christian world. It was discovered that Fetullah Gülen, who visited Pope John Paul II at the Vatican in 1998, tried to open up to the world by conducting activities under the name of ‘dialogue between religions.’ It was stated that it was spread all over the world with the permission of the Vatican,”<sup>88</sup> the report explained.

The Yeni Akit newspaper claimed that “Fethullah Gülen, the leader of FETÖ, declared devotion to the pope and Armenian patriarch, who are disgusted with the Islamic religion,” in a news article published on September 1, 2016. Gülen’s remarks were fabricated and it was claimed that Gülen had said “The Crusaders would not harm the Muslims,” and this was regarded as “perversion.” In the story Gülen was accused of «bringing Islam closer to Christianity» at the request of the Vatican.<sup>89</sup>



The Akşam newspaper reported on July 26, 2016 that the date of the failed coup on July 15 coincided with the date on which the Crusaders invaded Jerusalem.<sup>90</sup> It claimed the date of the coup attempt was not chosen at random. It was originally planned to be July 16, a date that marks the anniversary of the Prophet Muhammad’s trip to Medina, the Hijrah. “However, when the date of the coup was rescheduled for an earlier time, it coincided with the date of the invasion of Jerusalem by the Crusaders on the 15th of July,” the paper wrote.

A similar allegation was entertained by others as well. For example, the rector of the state-run Er-ciyes University, Muhammad Güven, said in a statement made on July 18, 2016 that “those who have chosen the anniversary of the invasion of Jerusalem by Crusaders as a date for a coup attempt are now aware that they are pathetic people who are not aware of the glorious history of this nation.”<sup>91</sup>

Tamer Korkmaz, a columnist for Yeni Şafak, claimed in an article published on February 22, 2017 that Fethullah Gülen worked for the Crusader-Zionist front and alleged: “The encirclement of Jerusa-



87] “Paralelcilere haçlı desteği”, Yeni Akit gazetesi, 16 December 2014, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/paralelcilere-hac-li-desteği-40657.html>

88] “Terör elebaşı sırtını Vatikan’a dayamış”, Yeni Akit gazetesi, 12 August 2016, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/ter-or-elebaşı-sirtını-vatikana-dayamış-201774.html>

89] “Gülenin günah galerisi”, Yeni Akit, 1 September 2016, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/gulenin-gunah-galeri-si-207595.html>

90] “FETÖ’nün darbe girişiminde dikkat çeken tarih”, Akşam gazetesi, 26 July 2016, <http://www.aksam.com.tr/guncel/fe-tonun-darbe-girisiminde-dikkat-ceken-tarih/haber-536304>

91] “Üniversiteler de darbeye hayır dedi”, Sözcü gazetesi, 18 July 2016, <http://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/egitim/universiteler-de-darbeye-hayir-dedi-1320171/>

lem by the Crusader army was on July 7, 1099; the invasion took place on July 15, 1099! On July 15, 2016, Gülen, the head of FETÖ who wanted to occupy Turkey in the name of the states under the crusader Zionist movement, said in a sermon in Pennsylvania on August 20, 2016 that “the invasion of your country by Crusaders is not something dangerous.”<sup>92</sup>

The Timeturk news site repeated the statements of theologian İhsan Süreyya Sırma claiming that the Gülen movement is guided by the Vatican and that dialogue between religions is a fallacy, in a report published on August 11, 2016. “It is a secret formation that was created under the guidance of the Vatican, but under the control of Zionism,” he claimed.<sup>93</sup>



Yeni Şafak columnist Korkmaz claimed that Gülen’s mother’s real name was “Rabin” and stated that “Gülen cooperated with both Christian and Jewish leaders for years through all the cells,” in an article published on August 12, 2016. “FETÖ, led by Gülen, the commander of the Crusader Zionist Front, attempted to seize Turkey on July 15 by a bloody coup to make Turkey a colonial state of the West as it used to be in the past.”<sup>94</sup>

The Milat newspaper claimed that “Gülen, who wants to bring Islam closer to Christianity, acted upon the request of the Vatican” in its lead story published under the headline “Polytheism file of FETÖ” on August 16, 2016.<sup>95</sup>

The Yeni Mesaj newspaper used a fake photo of Fethullah Gülen wearing a priest’s cassock on August 6, 2016. The newspaper claimed that donations collected by the Gülen movement, which it called “a friend of Israel,” in Austria were transferred to churches. The same allegation was also covered by the Yeni Akit daily in a cartoon on the front page on Aug. 5, 2016.

The Islamist Haber7 new site published the following statement in a report titled “A Figure under the Command of the Vatican: FETÖ”: “The ‘religious dialogue’ phrase that was adopted as a new missionary tactic by Western churches in accordance with the conditions of the day entered the agenda of the whole FETÖ/PDY structure, especially leader Gülen, as a lifesaver. In this process, Gülen first met with Orthodox Patriarch Bartolomeos and Armenian Patriarch Karakin II in Turkey and with Istanbul’s chief rabbi of the time, Davit Aseo. On February 9, 1998, he went to the Vatican and met with Pope John Paul II.”



The Medya Gündem website used the headline “FETÖ, Dog of Crusaders!” in an article it published on August 11, 2016: “Dialogue associations of the Fethullahist Terrorist Organization [FETÖ] in Italy play a central role. Following the meeting of Gülen

92] “Hoca kılıklı haçlı artığı”, Yeni Şafak, 22 February 2017, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/tamerkorkmaz/hoca-kilikli-hacl-artigi-2036347>

93] “Abant platformu mercek altına alınmalı”, Timeturk, 11 August 2016, <http://www.timeturk.com/prof-dr-ih-san-sureyya-sirma-abant-platformu-mercek-altina-alinmali/haber-244015>

94] “Rabin’in oğlu Fethullah bunalımda”, Tamer Korkmaz, Yeni Şafak, 12 August 2016, <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/tamerkorkmaz/rabinin-oglu-fetullah-bunalimda-2031135>

95] “Fetönün şirk dosyası”, Milat gazetesi, 16 August 2016, <http://www.milatgazetesi.com/feto-nun-sirk-dosyasi-acildi-haber-92183>

in February 1998 with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, the organization paid particular attention to strengthening its ties with the Vatican.” It said the Gülen movement maintains four interfaith dialogue institutions and one businessmen’s association in Italy.<sup>96</sup>

Ali Karahasanoğlu, a columnist for the Yeni Akit newspaper, claimed in an article on April 4, 2017 that the Gülen movement was cooperating with the Vatican to prevent Turkey and all Muslims from standing up and becoming the voice of the oppressed. “If they cooperate with the Vatican and organize all kinds of unrest... You have already fallen into the deepest pit you shall fall into... You have already betrayed. Don’t you see, all the infidels are arm-in-arm with you? Atheists stand by you. All the Muslims in Turkey are against you,”<sup>97</sup> he wrote.

## **5. Criminalizing Christianity and targeting the Vatican in court indictments**

The anti-Christian campaign by the Turkish government and its proxies entered a new phase when the government-controlled judiciary attempted to criminalize missionary work and interfaith dialogue activities. Many indictments that were filed with the courts by prosecutors entertained the idea of the Vatican conspiracy and plots by non-Catholic Christian groups including Protestants and Orthodox. The narrative seen in political discourse and media language was transferred to legal documents, and judges had no problem accepting these political manifestations dressed as legal text.

### **5.1. Case of Pastor Andrew Craig Brunson**

Pastor Andrew Brunson, a North Carolina native, has been in custody since Oct. 7, 2016 after he and his wife were detained on immigration violation charges. At the time, the Brunsons were running a small Christian church in İzmir. They had lived in Turkey for 23 years.

Brunson’s wife, Norine, was quickly released, but the pastor remained in custody and soon saw his charges upgraded to terrorism. Prosecutors have suggested in court hearings that Brunson is being held on suspicion of being a follower of Fethullah Gülen.

Both US President Donald Trump and Vice President Mike Pence brought up the issue of Brunson’s release during a meeting between Turkish and American delegations on May 16, 2017. A statement released by the White House<sup>98</sup> also said Trump asked for Brunson’s release three times and his immediate deportation to the US during a meeting with Erdoğan.

However, the pro-Erdoğan media launched a further attack on Brunson after the Erdoğan-Trump meeting, accusing him without any evidence of being a CIA agent.

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96] “FETÖ, Dog of Crusaders” Medya Gündem, 11 August 2016, <http://www.medyagundem.com/hacli-kopeci-feto/>

97] “Gülen, belam gibi baş aşağı gitmekten korkuyormuş”, Ali Karahasanoğlu, Yeni Akit gazetesi, 4 April 2017, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/yazarlar/ali-karahasanoglu/gulen-belam-gibi-basasagi-gitmekten-korkuyormus-18915.html>

98] “Readout of President Donald J. Trump’s Meeting with President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey”, White House, 16 May 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/05/16/readout-president-donald-j-trumps-meeting-president-recep-tayyip-erdogan>

Takvim's editor-in-chief, Ergun Diler, who accompanied Erdoğan during his visit to Washington, accused the American pastor of being behind a coup attempt in Turkey on July 15, 2016, claiming that he would be the CIA chief if the coup attempt had been successful.

According to the top story on Takvim's front page, Brunson is a "high-level CIA agent"<sup>99</sup> and also a "high-level member of the Gülen movement," which Erdoğan has labeled as a terrorist organization and which he accuses of masterminding the failed coup attempt. The arrest of the pastor has paralyzed CIA operations in Turkey, according to the article, and the US has been exerting all efforts to save him.

Diler also published a column about Brunson with the title "Rambo Pastor,"<sup>100</sup> claiming that the minister got rid of an assassination attempt in 2011 in İzmir due to his agent training. Brunson was a "deep" name, and he was influential not only in Turkey but all over the region," Diler wrote and claimed that the CIA would kill him in prison if they believed that Turkey would not deport him to the US.

Brunson's case was raised during the 35th regular session of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) at the Palais des Nations in Geneva on June 6-23, 2017. The issue was brought to UN attention by the European Centre for Law & Justice (ECLJ), which sent a letter on behalf of Pastor Brunson asking the UN help in securing his release.

"The ECLJ urges this Council to call upon Turkey to honor its obligations. The ECLJ further requests that the UN make every effort to ensure that Pastor Brunson is not only treated with great care, but that he is quickly released and allowed to return home without injury or delay," said the letter circulated by the General Assembly on May 29, 2017.<sup>101</sup>

Calling Brunson's imprisonment unjust, the ECLJ said Pastor Brunson committed no crime and peacefully observed his religious beliefs in service to the people of Turkey for over two decades.

"As a founding Member State of the UN, Turkey is obligated to adhere to norms set forth in the UN Charter, such as those requiring members '[t]o achieve international cooperation . . . in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and . . . fundamental freedoms . . . without distinction as to [inter alia] religion.'

"Pastor Brunson's detention appears to be related to his work as a Christian minister. By detaining and imprisoning Pastor Brunson because of his religious expression, peaceful association, and assembly of religious believers, Turkey is violating not its obligations under the UN Charter, but its own Constitution as well as Pastor Brunson's fundamental rights: freedom of religion and belief, freedom of expression, freedoms of peaceful assembly and association. Therefore, these violations concern not only Turkey, but every Member State and every agency of the UN," the letter explained.

In a letter given to US Embassy consular officials during a meeting with Brunson in March, the pastor calls himself a political prisoner and says the Turkish government should face consequences for jailing him without cause.

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99] "15 Temmuz başarılı olsaydı CIA'nın başına geçecekti", Takvim, 20 May 2017, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/guncel/2017/05/20/15-temmuz-basarili-olsaydi-cianin-basina-gececekti>

100] "Rambo papaz", Ergün Diler, Takvim, 20 May 2017, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/yazarlar/ergundiler/2017/05/20/rambo-papaz>

101] "Written statement submitted by European Centre for Law and Justice, The / Centre Européen pour le droit, les Justice et les droits de l'homme, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status", UN, 15 May 2017, [http://media.aclj.org/pdf/2535\\_A\\_HRC\\_35\\_NGO\\_Sub\\_En.pdf](http://media.aclj.org/pdf/2535_A_HRC_35_NGO_Sub_En.pdf)



“Will the Turkish government face no consequence for stubbornly continuing to hold an American citizen as a political prisoner?” Brunson asks in the letter, which was published by the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), a non-profit group helping the pastor.

Since being imprisoned on Oct. 7, 2016 the “Turkish government has produced no proof and has rebuffed numerous attempts by the American government to secure my return to the United States,” says Brunson. “In fact they are treating the US government with contempt and paying no price for it,”<sup>102</sup> he said.

“I plead with my government — with the Trump Administration — to fight for me. I ask the State Department to impose sanctions. I appeal to President Trump: Please help me. Let the Turkish government know that you will not cooperate with them in any way until they release me. Please do not leave me here in prison.”

Also, a bipartisan group of lawmakers sent a letter to Erdoğan asking for Brunson’s release.<sup>103</sup>

## 5.2. Case of Fethullah Gülen and interfaith dialogue

The Erdoğan government has made concerted efforts to link Fethullah Gülen to Christianity and the Vatican in various false indictments filed by partisan prosecutors at the orders of the executive branch since January 2014. In these indictments Gülen’s interfaith dialogue activities and outreach efforts were described as criminal wrongdoing. Gülen’s offers such as the joint administration of Jerusalem by all three Abrahamic religions under UN auspices, establishing a theology faculty to be jointly managed in Turkey’s southeastern province of Şanlıurfa, the birthplace of the Prophet Abraham, and his meetings with non-Muslim leaders as part of his outreach activities were listed as criminal acts in these indictments.

The 721-page “espionage” indictment drafted by public prosecutor Okan Özsoy and accepted by the Istanbul 13th High Criminal Court claimed that Gülen tried to forge a political alliance with the pope and even tried to promote proposals such as handing over control of Jerusalem to the representatives of all three Abrahamic religions under the UN system. “In a way, they [the Gülen movement] tried to develop policies that contradict the fundamental policies of the Republic of Turkey. ...”<sup>104</sup>

The pro-government Yeni Şafak covered this indictment on Feb. 12, 2016 by publishing a report with the headline “Gülen-Pope partnership is included in the indictment.” The report claimed Gülen wanted a political alliance with the pope and that he promoted religious and political arguments internationally including lobbying the United Nations for a proposal to give the authority over sacred places for Muslims to the representatives of the three religions.<sup>105</sup>

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102] “US pastor held in Turkey appeals to Trump: ‘Please help me’”, FoxNews, 30 March 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2017/03/30/us-pastor-held-in-turkey-appeals-to-trump-please-help-me.html>

103] “Congress Demands Release Of American Pastor Jailed In Turkey On Bogus Terror Charges”, Chuck Ross, Daily Caller, 16 February 2017, <http://dailycaller.com/2017/02/16/congress-demands-release-of-american-pastor-jailed-in-turkey-on-bogus-terror-charges/>

104] “Espionage and Illegal Eavesdropping Indictment”

105] “Gülen Papa ortaklığı iddianamede”, Yeni Şafak gazetesi, 12 February 2016, <http://www.yenisafak.com/gundem/gulen-papa-ortakligi-iddianamede-2410765>



In the 848-page “December 25” indictment filed by public prosecutor Ömer Faruk Aydınar against Gülen and others that was submitted to the Istanbul 13th High Criminal Court, the prosecutor wrote that “... The main concepts defended by Fetullah Gülen are ‘tolerance’ and ‘dialogue between religions.’ Moreover, Fetullah Gülen supported the interfaith dialogue initiative proposed by the Moon sect. He held meeting with the pope and proposed launching a theology university in Harran although he does not have any authority. Gülen wants to open a seminary in the Southeast that is not allowed in Istanbul.”<sup>106</sup>

Deputy Chief Public Prosecutor İsmail Uçar claimed in an indictment there are similarities between the Gülen group and Opus Dei and the Moon sect. He emphasized that the main concepts championed by Gülen are “tolerance” and “interfaith dialogue.” “Moreover, the interfaith dialogue initiated by the Moon sect is supported by Fethullah Gülen in Turkey. He met with the pope and even though he does not have any official capacity, he proposed the establishment of a theological university in Harran. Gülen wants to open a seminary in the Southeast that is not allowed in Istanbul,” the indictment reads.<sup>107</sup>



The following statement appeared in the 660-page indictment filed against Gülen and others by public prosecutor Serdar Coşkun and submitted to the Ankara 4th High Criminal Court, which is hearing the lawsuit against Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen movement:

“He [Gülen] attended Pope John Paul II’s Easter program in 1997 with Zaman’s Vatican Representative Mesut Erişen and Greek Representative Salih Dede, and Fetullah Gülen’s meeting with the pope in 1998 was organized by Monseigneur Georges Marovitch, Turkey’s Catholic spiritual leader, and Abdullah Aymaz...” The indictment also included testimony by discredited witness Latif Erdoğan, who claimed he had coordinated Gülen’s relations with Fener Greek Patriarch Bartolomeos and was with him when Gülen met the pope at the Vatican.”<sup>108</sup>

The 550-page indictment filed by public prosecutor Ömer Faruk Aydınar with the İstanbul 14th High Criminal Court against police officers who investigated the December 17, 2013 corruption probe that incriminated President Erdoğan and his family members again raised the issue of Gülen’s meeting with the pope.

The prosecutor criticized Gülen for writing a letter to the pope on interfaith dialogue on February 8, 1988 and even found it strange that Gülen used honorific greetings at the beginning of the letter. A copy of the letter was included as criminal evidence.<sup>109</sup> The prosecutor labeled Gülen’s salutation to the pope as “His Honorable Holiness” in his letter dated 08/02/1998 as “a crime.” The prosecutor claimed “holiness” is used in Islam for Allah and the Prophet such as “Holy Prophet” and “Holy Allah.” There is no such crime in the Turkish Penal Code, yet the partisan prosecutor invented new crimes under the secular, parliamentary, democratic regime of Turkey. Ironically, President Erdoğan himself used similar greetings

106] “25 December Indictment”

107] “Fetö Hristiyan tarikatlar gibi”, Sabah gazetesi, 3 November 2015, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/10/03/feto-hiristiyan-tarikatlar-gibi>

108] “FETÖ Main Indictment”

109] “December 17 Indictment”

in his invitation letter addressed to Pope Francis by calling him “Your Holiness.”<sup>110</sup>

The prosecutor Aydiner concluded that the Gülen movement became a worldwide intelligence agency that declared an overt and covert war against the Turkish Republic.

Another indictment against 30 journalists also includes references to Gülen’s interfaith dialogue efforts. Public prosecutor İsmet Bozkurt, who submitted an indictment to the İstanbul 13th High Criminal Court, seeks aggravated life sentences for journalists on trumped-up terror and coup charges based on their critical articles, commentaries and tweets.

“Undoubtedly Gülen’s meetings with senior government officials in Turkey and around the world, various representative of religious and beliefs and intelligence services played a crucial role behind the activities of FETÖ-PDY in the 1990s. They had the opportunity to advertise these events without any

effort to hide them in order to create the perception that the movement’s efforts are supported at the senior level.” The indictment cited Gülen’s meetings with Pope John Paul II and Abraham Foxman, the president of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), as examples.<sup>111</sup>



An indictment filed in İzmir by public prosecutor Zafer Dur stated that Fethullah Gülen was appointed as a “secret cardinal” by Pope John Paul II during a meeting in 1998 at the Vatican. On September 3, 2016 Yeni Asır, a daily owned by Erdoğan’s family, published a news story with the headline “Secret Cardinal Gülen,” and the fol-

lowing appeared in that news: “The indictment included some major claims about FETÖ leader Fethullah Gülen. The indictment prepared by Zafer Dur, the public prosecutor of İzmir, said Fetullah Gülen was appointed as a ‘secret cardinal’ by Pope John Paul II during a meeting in 1998 at the Vatican.”

An indictment prepared by the Konya public prosecutor on the Gülen movement claimed that “Gülen added Crusaders and Zionists to his movement.” The prosecutor alleged that Gülen pardoned wrongdoers according to his fabricated religion just like he pardoned wrongdoers who donated money to his movement through his people in the judiciary, just as the pope did. The prosecution said the fake savior Gülen made no distinction between those who donate money and even included Crusaders and Zionists in his organization.”<sup>112</sup>



110] “Erdoğan’ın Papa’ya yazdığı mektup ortaya çıktı”, 15 November 2014, <http://www.haberler.com/erdogan-in-pa-pa-ya-yazdigi-mektup-ortaya-cikti-6689949-haberi/>

111] “Zaman Daily Indictment”

112] “Vatikan kardinali Fetö’dan parayla günah çıkarma”, Diriliş Postası gazetesi, 4 December 2016, <http://dirilispostasi.com/n-23333-vatikan-kardinali-fetodan-parayla-gunah-cikarma.html>

## 6. Case study of fabricating a conspiracy to fuel anti-Christian hatred

There have been many instances of slanders, fabrications, lies and deceits uttered by the Turkish leader and covered by the pro-government media. But one particular example deserves special focus on how the machinations of this thickening plot work in a way that is deliberate and systematic.

One of the propaganda elements being used by the Erdoğan-led smear campaign is the claim that Muslim scholar Fethullah Gülen is a “secret cardinal.” In fact, the slander first surfaced during the February 28 post-modern coup.<sup>113</sup> Gülen, who suffered in all past coups, had become a target in this period as well. The neo-nationalist and Kemalist groups that were behind February 28 set out to persecute Gülen, who had to go into self-exile in 1999.

The same claims and slanders have resurfaced against Gülen under Erdoğan’s rule in the last couple of years. This claim, that Fethullah Gülen is a cardinal, was first used in Cumhuriyet columnist Aytunç Altındal’s article on March 18, 1996. The title of this column published by Cumhuriyet was “Pope’s Secret Cardinals.”<sup>114</sup> According to Altındal, the pope appointed 20 cardinals and an additional two “in pectore” cardinals. These two cardinals have been living in their own countries by hiding their Christian beliefs. Without any sound evidence, Altındal alleged that Fethullah Gülen was one of the two secret cardinals.<sup>115</sup> Gülen denied all these allegations and called them preposterous.

### 6.1. Neo-nationalists and Erdoğan media propagate slander

Mine G. Kırıkkanat, a Cumhuriyet columnist known for her Kemalist nationalist views, revisited the claim that Gülen was a secret cardinal in her column on August 7, 2016. In her article she claimed: “Pope John Paul II had selected three ‘in pectore’ cardinals throughout his 26-year rule at the Vatican. The names of two cardinals among these three selected were disclosed. But the 31st cardinal’s identity that the pope kept hidden in his heart in 2003 was buried with him in 2005. Is it possible? Why not? Who can ask for more than an imam whose allegiance is with the Church!”<sup>116</sup>

The Avrupalı daily rehashed the old claim made by Aytunç Altındal<sup>117</sup> and published a report on August 23, 2016 with the headline “Vatican’s secret cardinal.” The daily alleged: “That journalist proved

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113] The 28 February 1997 represents an era during which the Turkish military indirectly interfered in the government after an extraordinary meeting of the National Security Council and led to mass persecutions and human rights violations specifically targeting religious groups and the Kurdish political movement.

114] Aytunç Altındal’ın ağzından Gülen’in kardinal olduğu iddiasını dile getirdiği yazısı dakika -01.03- (2 April 2017) <http://www.sabah.com.tr/webtv/turkiye/vatikanin-gizli-kardinali-gulen>

115] “Gülen gizli kardinal”, Fars News, 4 Ağustos 2016, <http://tr.farsnews.com/world/news/13950514000286> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VNk00tPMpkU>

116] “İslamiyete bir kardinal”, Mine Kırıkkanat, 07 August 2016, [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/580562/islamiyete\\_bir\\_kardinal.html](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/koseyazisi/580562/islamiyete_bir_kardinal.html)

117] This claim, that Fethullah Gülen is a cardinal, was first raised by Aytunç Altındal, in an article published in the leftist Cumhuriyet daily on March 18, 1996. The title of this column was “Pope’s secret cardinals.” According to Altındal, the pope appointed 20 cardinals and an additional two “in pectore” cardinals. These two cardinals have been living in their own countries but were hiding their Christian beliefs. Without any evidence, Altındal alleged that Fethullah Gülen is one of the two secret cardinals. Gülen denied the allegations on April 4, 1998, saying that they were preposterous charges given his 60-year-long life work as a Muslim



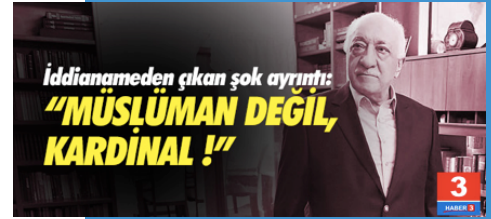


this, the terrorist leader Fethullah Gülen is a secret cardinal of the Vatican. It was claimed that 12 days after the meeting between Fethullah Gülen and Pope John Paul II at the Vatican, on February 9, 1998, Gülen was secretly appointed as a cardinal by the pope. Since the meeting with the pope at the Vatican, the actions carried out by Fethullah Gülen and his followers showed that the allegations of a 'secret cardinal' are right."<sup>118</sup>

On February 4, 2016, the Haber3 news website put forward the same claim with a news report headlined "Fetullah Gülen is a cardinal" and said:

"The indictment stated that a year before Gülen went to the USA, Gülen met with the pope on Feb. 9, 1998, and Pope John Paul II had appointed two secret 'in pectore' cardinals through a practice that has not been used for 100 years, together with appointing 20 cardinals. The allegation that Fetullah Gülen is one of the two cardinals is a serious claim. This appointment entered into force on Feb. 21, 1998 and 'in pectore' means 'the Church's cherished secret son' and 'a person affiliated with another religion who hides his identity in his country'."<sup>119</sup>

The Erdoğan family-owned media promoted the slander of Gülen being a secret cardinal. On September 4, 2016 the Sabah daily alleged that "it turned out Gülen has been appointed as a 'secret cardinal' by Pope John Paul II, who he met at the Vatican," in a news story titled "Secret Cardinal Gülen."<sup>120</sup>



The Sabah daily on September 4, 2016 published a report with excerpts from the indictment under the headline "Secret Cardinal Gülen" and said the following: "There are stunning findings about FETÖ's financial arm. It turned out that Gülen was appointed a 'secret cardinal' by Pope John Paul II during a meeting at the Vatican. ..."<sup>121</sup>

"Fetö was granted a cardinal's passport" said an article on the pro-government Takvim daily's front page on October 8, 2016. The daily also published fake documents to prove the allegations.

The forged document published by the daily showed that Gülen was "a special person," meaning that he got a "cardinal's passport" during his visit to the Vatican.<sup>122</sup> However, it was quickly discovered that

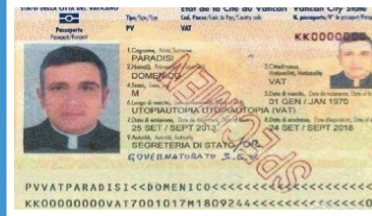
118] "O gazeteci kanıtladı", Avrupalı Türk gazetesi, 23 August 2016, <http://www.avrupaturkgazetesi.com/o-gazeteci-kanitladi-terorist-basi-fethullah-gulen-vatikanin-gizli-kardinalidir/>

119] "Fethullah Gülen kardinal", Haber3, 4 September 2016, <https://www.haber3.com/guncel/039039fetullah-gulen-kardinal039039-haber-4408090>

120] Gizli kardinal (4 Eylül 2016) <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/09/04/gizli-kardinal>

121] "Gizli Kardinal", Sabah gazetesi, 4 September 2016, <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/09/04/gizli-kardinal>

122] "Fetö'ya kardinal pasaportu", Takvim gazetesi, 8 October 2016, <http://www.takvim.com.tr/guncel/2016/10/08/fetoya-kardinal-pasaportu-verildi>



The daily, owned by Erdoğan's family, published fabricated passport of Gülen showing him as Cardinal.

the passport belonged to one Domenico Paradisi, a clergyman, and the daily apparently photoshopped the passport.

The daily wrote "Fetullah" in the name section, "Gülen" in the surname section, "27 Aprile 1941" in the birthdate section, "20 Mar/Marzo 1999" for the issuance date and "25 Mar/Marzo 2019" for the expiration date. However, the daily forgot to change the real name at the end of the page of the fake passport with a 20-year period of validity. In the barcode section, the real owner of the passport is written as Domenico Paradisi. The serial number of the passport is written as KK00000000, unchanged. For the photo, a recent picture of Fethullah Gülen was photoshopped to make him appear to be a cardinal.

The Haber Vitriini website used this news from Takvim, which appeared to be completely fabricated, on October 9, 2016 with the photo displayed here:<sup>123</sup>

The Star daily on September 4, 2016 claimed that "Gülen has been appointed a 'secret cardinal' by Pope John Paul II, who he met at the Vatican in 1998" in a news story with the headline "FETÖ leader Gülen is a secret cardinal."<sup>124</sup>



On September 6, 2016 Yeni Şafak alleged that media closely affiliated with the Gülen movement engaged in a public relations campaign for the Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarchate.

The article, titled "Missionary Headlines by Secret Cardinal Gülen," claimed that Fethullah Gülen was appointed as a "secret cardinal" by Pope John Paul II in 1996 and that Gülen has given "missionary" messages since then. It was also alleged that Alaaddin Kaya, the former owner of

the Zaman daily, kissed the pope's hand and led the Fener Greek Orthodox Patriarchate's public relations.<sup>125</sup>

On October 2, 2016, the Dinihaberler religious news website published an article titled "The brother of the cardinal was caught," referring to the arrest of Gülen's



123] "Vatikan Fethullah Gülen'e kardinal pasaportu verdi", Haber Vitriini, 9 October 2016, <http://www.habervitrini.com/gundem/vatikan-fethullah-gulen-e-kardinal-pasaportu-verdi-862742>

124] Fetö elebaşı gülen gizli kardinal çıktı (4 September 2016) <http://www.star.com.tr/guncel/feto-elebas-gulen-gizli-kardinal-cikti-haber-1139313/>

125] "Gizli kardinal Gülen'in misyonerlik manşetleri", Yeni Şafak gazetesi, 6 September 2016, <http://www.yenisafak.com/dunya/gizli-kardinal-gulenin-misyonerlik-mansetleri-2523255>

brother, Kutbettin Gülen, as part of the government's witch-hunt against members of the Gülen movement.<sup>126</sup>

The Yeni Akit daily on September 4, 2016 repeated the same allegation in a news story with the headline "Gülen appointed as 'secret cardinal' by the pope" that had appeared in the indictment drafted by Zafer Dur, a public prosecutor in Izmir.



It quoted the indictment, saying that "Gülen undertook activities incompatible with the foundations of Islamic belief through interfaith dialogue." The indictment cited the cover page of weekly news magazine Aksiyon, which featured "Humanity Expects Him: Jesus," as evidence of a crime. Aksiyon was part of the Feza Publishing media outlet, which also owned the Zaman daily and other publications. All of them were seized by the government in March 2016 and shut down in July 2016.

The indictment alleged that Gülen wrote a letter to a church during his assignment in Edirne as an imam. It also said it was interesting that Aytunç Altındal, who claimed Gülen was a secret cardinal and wrote a book titled "The Vatican and the Knights Hospitaller" (Vatikan ve Tapınak Şövalyeleri), received many death threats.<sup>127</sup>

On September 4, 2016, the pro-Erdoğan news website İnternethaber.com published a report under the headline "Is Fetullah Gülen a secret cardinal?"

The indictment said Gülen met with Pope John Paul II at the Vatican on February 9, 1998 before traveling to the US, adding, "After 12 days of this meeting, Pope John Paul II appointed 20 cardinals along with two secret cardinals he did not name publicly through an 'in pectore' appointment, which has not been used for 100 years. The claim that Fethullah Gülen is one of these cardinals must be emphasized."<sup>128</sup>

## 7. Hate speech targeting Christianity on social media

Erdoğan and his AKP have invested a great deal in creating an army of trolls on social media microblogging site Twitter to churn the defamation campaign against their critics and opponents. It was reported that a huge team of social media users numbering between 6,000 and 12,000, drawn mostly from youth branches, were financed by the AKP's political party machinery, mainly by municipalities. These trolls, often masked by fake names, target Erdoğan's enemies with vile, hateful and offensive language.

The demonization of the Vatican in particular and Christianity in general has been fanned by these trolls on Twitter, unleashing latent prejudices and lingering resentment towards the Christians in Turkish

126] "Kardinalin kardeşi yakalandı", Dinihaberler, 2 October 2016, <http://www.dinihaberler.com/guncel/kardinalin-bankamatik-kardesi-yakalandi-h99250.html>

127] "Gülen Papa tarafından gizli kardinal olarak atanmış", Yeni Akit gazetesi, 4 September 2016, <http://www.yeniakit.com.tr/haber/gulen-papa-tarafindan-gizli-kardinal-olarak-atanmis-208689.html>

128] "Fethullah Gülen gizli kardinal mi?" İnternethaber, 4 September 2016, <http://www.internethaber.com/fetullah-gulen-gizli-kardinal-mi-bomba-iddia-1712464h.htm>

society. Turkish authorities have shown a reluctance to investigate criminal complaints against the abusive and even threatening language employed by these trolls, suggesting that they have been given free rein to target vulnerable minority groups in Turkey.

Such a systematic and deliberate pattern of hate speech and threat of violence targeting Gülen and his movement often involve slurs and defamations for Christians as part of the campaign of persecution and hate against the Gülen movement. Many average users on social media have jumped on the bandwagon of hatred led by the paid trolls. Tens of thousands of social media accounts have attacked opposition figures that were targeted by Erdoğan and his associates.

No doubt Erdoğan and his judiciary have given a green light to these aggressive and abusive social media users who act with impunity and resort to any kind of hate language without legal repercussions.

It is seen that there is no moral guidance and no legal concern in these tweets that use hate speech as well as threats very openly. This is just a sample of what is seen on Twitter and represents a larger and growing problem of hatred and rage toward Christians in Turkey.

“@BENANLATI\_YORUM: Vatican servant American bitch Fetö

#ÖlünLEŞdirinKALLEŞfetö”

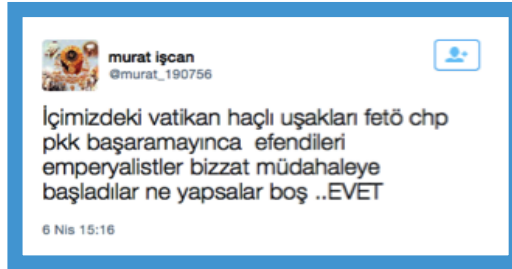


“@yeterzeynep\_64: #ÖlünLEŞdirinKALLEŞfetö I hope he pegs out asap and is buried in Vatican’s evil grave that he loves so much”





“@[murat\\_190756](#): When Vatican crusader servant FETÖ, CHP and PKK were not successful, the masters of imperialism have joined the fight, whatever they do, it is in vain... YES”



“@[beceren\\_hamit](#): FETÖ is a crusader dagger where the Vatican has stuck in Islamic world's flank. Turks will do this. It is important the devil has been caught.”



“@[yvzayd](#): Ahmet Tekin: 'FETÖ is Vatican's the most important subcontractor. Gülenists not a Muslim.' #HerDaimUyanıgız”



“@[Securit54368916](#): FETÖ had been a project of Vatican crusader, they were going to invent a new 'religion'... A religion without a prophet, a strange Masonic organization...”



“@ZazaHasan23: Vatican-crusader servant PKK fetö, dhkpc you are all traitor.”



“@hbpehlivan: Behind Fetö, there are Vatican, NATO, crusades. The enemy is again strong but the fate will not be weak. Brothers will not turn against each-other, our line will not fall inshallah.”



“@lutfiakarcay: To destroy the Fetö and its institutions means to destroy the 40 years old Crusader Zionism’s castle (Vatican-Evangelism) in TR...”



“@HalilOzturk60: A seed of Crusader Vatican who martyred Muslims Turks on July, 15<sup>th</sup> with helicopter’s fires Bastard! Pimp FETÖ”



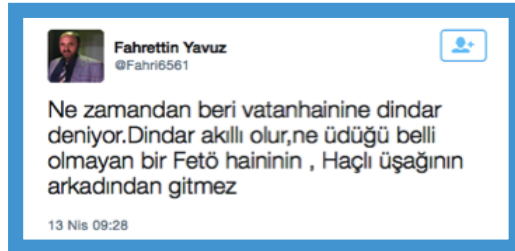
“@zea\_1111: A project by the alliance of Zionist Vatican Crusader to alienate from religion that started with FETÖ has been working like clockwork. We need to come up with a solution.”



“@isasahintrk: Against PKK, FETÖ, CHPkk, Assad, Germany, the Netherlands, France, UK, USA, Belgium, Australia Crusader alliance, #BenimKararımNet, my vote is #YES!”



“@Fahri6561: Since when a traitor is labelled as faithful. The faithful is clever and cannot follow unknown Fetö traitor and crusader servant.”



“@Umut\_Demir: PKK HDP crusader alliance Jew Israel all traitors FETÖ without honor pride and you are saying no. Think the rest but there is no brain.”



“@[nihat\\_eriş](#): It is certain that the devil fetö subjects are crusader followers then how come these CHP are blind and deaf. Let God awake them.”



“@[ulubath\\_](#): Stateless crusader servant Fetö bastard, if you don't wet yourself, come and vote in the airport. Bastard, rogue, traitor. You will be accountable. Yes to Constitution”



“@[\\_VatanDelisi\\_](#): Say Yes #OyVerTarihYaz liar asshole fitter crusader dogs chp fetö dhkpc pkk doğan media ntv group American Fox bury them all in the ballot box”

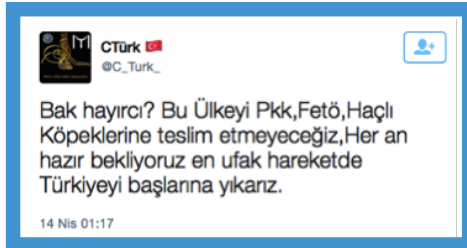


“@[\\_VatanDelisi\\_](#): #17aprilmorning if we don't bury these crusaders chp pkk fetö dhkpc we are going to be mandated by England for another 100 years.”





“@C\_Turk\_: Look No voters? We are not going to surrender this country to Pkk, Fetö, crusader dogs. We are ready we level Turkey to their heads with a smallest move.”



“@mahmutlug326: Crusader Zionists do you think feto and chp will stop following Turkey, the dogan media is a dog for them.”



“@cengaver03: If #Yes, fetö dhkpc pkk the crusader alliance and other assholes will lose the nation will win.”



“@aslannparcasii: #Vatikan Cardinal Fethullah Gülen gave a cipher message in his last sermon to kill the Religion Authority Leader Mehmet Görmez. Son of a bitch fetö”



“@sevketkoc: If you say No Germany, the Netherlands, all kinds of crusader alliance, Fetö, Pkk will celebrate #OfCourseYes”



“@NursaritasNur: PKK SAYS NO. FETÖ SAYS NO. THE CRUSADER ARMY SAY NO. CHP SAYS NO. HDP SAYS NO. BUT OTTOMAN GRAND KIDS SAY YES. THAT IS OUR DIFFERENCE!”



“@ErgunKilinc: Here is Istanbul! There will be coup! They will divide Turkey German and its baby PKK..! Fetö is preparing Turkey for a crusader invasion..! Come all..!”



“@THMGundem: FETÖ’s link with Vatican exposed.”

Vatican link is exposed.



A SPECIAL INTEREST TO PRIESTS BY FETÖ.

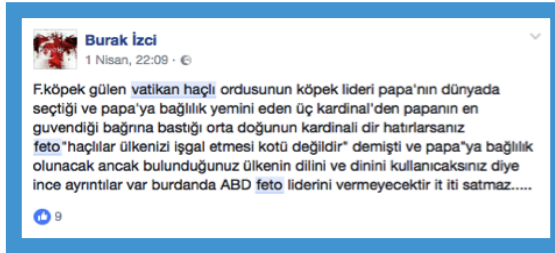
“@TcYavas: FETÖ-Vatikan alliance!.. Christian’s Fetö linked work during pilgrim!!”



“@Rabiasuriye: Let seal Yes against secret Cardinal Fetö and Vatican. Bismillah. Yes.”



“**Burak İzci:** F. bastard Gülen is the Pope’s most trustworthy middle east’s cardinal among three cardinals who made vows to Pope whose is the bastard leader of the Vatican crusade army. If you recall, Fetö claimed the crusader’s invasion is not a bad thing and there are nuances like you are going to use the local language when committed to Pope and USA will not extradite Fetö leader. Bastard does not turn against bastard...”



“**Sinan Akkuş:** Pope manages and takes decision for all dirty things. Fetö is one of the two secret cardinals who have been sucking Muslims’ blood. They sell refrigerators to the eskimos and plan a military coup d’etat insidiously. Wake Up Muslims.”



“**@ihacomtr:** #Holy Birth is Fetö. Write under this hasthag and share. Reveal FETÖ’s abuse of religion!”





“@k\_4\_b: When will FETÖ Organization leader clown Fethullah peg out. Pope is waiting him to bury.! @zamancomtr”



“@murfetdin: What we miss is a caliphate. Vatican composes of a priest and 12 cardinals. Eleven of them are known for years and the twelfth cardinal is a crusader disguised as Muslim. Who do you think it is?”



“@ihacomtr: Interfaith dialogue with Fetö-Vatikan cooperation targeted Islam and it is a working project to empty Islam. #KutluDoğumFETÖdür.”



“@YeniTurkiye38 : Ummah Unity against #Crusaders. O Crusaders Infidels, does not matter if you all come out. You are nothing against Crescent and Ottoman grandchild #YES”



“@YeniTurkiye38 As a nation, we will gather under the Crescent. As a nation, we will be together against Crusaders Infidels. #SAY YES FOR YOUR COUNTRY”



“@his\_24 : Crusaders!!! a WOLF flock in sheep’s clothing... La galibe illallah [There is no victor other than Allah]”



“@yankaray: Leader told the story. All we are going through is a war between crusade-crescent. This is a struggle between right and wrong. O Muslim choose your side, Right or Wrong?”



“@evrbsr: Think about this! Who will be sorry when #Yes wins? FETÖ, Qandil, Vatican, Israel, EU, USA and those who cause unrest in this land. What about you?”



“@abdurrahman30: Why are we sitting idle if the crusader alliance showed itself. Against this crusader alliance, we will say #YES in the referendum @RT\_Erdoğan”



“@UstAkilOyunlari: The process of voting in Europe has begun. Our brothers living in Europe give the necessary answer to crusader’s alliance with the seal stamps... (Vienna)”



“@RT\_Erdoğan: Our ancestors survived the crusader invasion, survived the interregnum period, succeeded in the Dardanelles and the War of Independence”

“@zeynom7927: Fetö-Vatican alliance, they will mix three religion, deviant, interfaith dialogue project...”

“@ahmetnas33: Who is among “No” front? FETÖ, Dogan media, Unionists, Armenians, Zionists, Vatican, United Kingdom... Decide Muslim!”



“@Kayilar\_1: #Sayyestospoilthegame to spoil the puppet K.Kilicdaroglu’s game, a project of Fetökan-Vatican project, #OfcourseYesforOurMotherland”





“@TurkeyT92137247: To Crusader Alliance, Vatican priests, devil in Pennsylvania, Armenian clown in Imrali, Murderer in Qandil. We will slap big with YES”



“@MuratKa52: Our YES in 16 April will cause a nuclear quake in VATICAN and Europe! Our YES will destroy devil castles one by one!”



“**THIS FIGHT IS BETWEEN CRESCENT AND CRUSADE:** Unite under the crescent! We will be very crowded! You will see!”



“EU Member Countries Meet in the Vatican. How long has the Pope been a member of the European Union? The Crusader alliance showed herself at last.



RECEP TAYYİP ERDOĞAN

Ak Politician”

“16 April 2017; IT WILL BE THE SECOND TIME THE HISTORY WILL BOW AGAINST TURKS AFTER MALAZGIRT”

## CONCLUSION

**T**he hate campaign pursued by Turkey's Islamist leaders against Christian groups in Turkey boosts intolerance and discrimination and negatively impacts already vulnerable groups. The hate-mongering narrative has not remained in bitter words but in fact has resulted in concrete actions such as imprisonment, deportation and the confiscation of property.

The hatred against interfaith dialogue has even reached a point of expelling the teachers of a student who praised interfaith dialogue during a speech at a ceremony on April 23, National Sovereignty and Children's Day. The student, who was acting as minister of education for a day, in line with a longstanding tradition, said, "Our Civilizations Alliance Initiative [a UN initiative that was co-sponsored by the governments of Turkey and Spain] has reached a leading position in the context of intercultural and interfaith dialogue." The student's teachers were immediately dismissed,<sup>129</sup> but that did not stop Erdoğan's media from launching new attacks.<sup>130</sup>

Turkey has seen how paranoia and hysteria can lead to catastrophic results. In the early years of Erdoğan's rule, neo-nationalist and Kemalist groups nested in Turkish state structures such as the military, the intelligence organization and the judiciary fanned the outrage against Christian missionary work in Turkey. The media outlets, funded and supported by these shady elements, promoted anti-Christian sentiment. The Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet), the government's official religious authority, published a book on missionary work and distributed it to all provinces and schools.<sup>131</sup> According to this book the Diyanet claimed that Christian missionaries in Turkey were carrying out "Crusades."

Anti-Christian publications and the hate speech against non-Muslims paved the way for attacks and the murders of Christians. On July 6, 2006, French priest Pierre François Rene Brunissen (74) was wounded when he was stabbed.<sup>132</sup> On January 19, 2007, the editor-in-chief of the Agos newspaper, Armenian Turkish journalist Hrant Dink, was assassinated in Istanbul.<sup>133</sup> On February 22, 2007, Father Andrea Santoro, the pastor of Santa Maria Church in Trabzon, was killed in an armed attack.<sup>134</sup> At the time, 16-year-old suspect Oguzhan Akdin was captured and received an 18-year prison sentence. But the real perpetrators were never found.

On April 18, 2007 German national Tilmann Ekkehart Geske, Necati Aydın and Uğur Yüksel, who were working for Zirve Publishing, which distributed Christian-related books in Malatya, were killed by assailants who slit their throats. All the suspects except for one were released pend-

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129] "Çocuk bakanların öğretmenleri açığa alındı", Haberdar, 26 April 2017, <http://www.haberdar.com/gundem/cocuk-bakan-in-ogretmenleri-aciga-alindi-h50056.html>

130] "Skandal, 23 Nisan çocuğu Başbakan'a Fetö'nün projesini savundu", Haber Vitriini, 24 April 2017, <http://www.habervitriini.com/gundem/skandal-23-nisan-cocugu-basbakan-a-feto-nun-projesini-ovdu-886557>

131] "Rövanş almak istiyorlar", Milliyet gazetesi, 01 July 2005, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/-rovans-almak-istiyorlar-/guncel/haberdetayarsiv/01.07.2005/253044/default.htm>

132] "Papa'nın Ağca'ya yaptığı gibi onu ziyaret edeceğim", Hürriyet gazetesi, 6 July 2006, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/papa-nin-agca-ya-yaptigi-gibi-onu-ziyaret-edecem-4705895>

133] "Gazeteci Hrant Dink silahlı saldırıda öldü", Hürriyet gazetesi, 19 January 2007, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gazeteci-hrant-dink-silahlı-saldirida-oldu-5805242>

134] "Trabzon'da Hristiyan papaz öldürüldü", Hürriyet gazetesi, 22 February 2007, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/trabzon-da-italyan-papaz-olduruldu-6002139>



ing trial in 2014 when the prosecutors and judges involved in the case were abruptly removed by the government-controlled judicial council.

A high-profile Nusra militant of Russian nationality identified as Magomed Maghomedzakhovich Abdurrahmanov (aka Abu Banat), who decapitated three Christian clerics in Syria on April 22, 2013, is about to be set free. Abu Banat, designated by the US State Department on Oct. 29, 2015 as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist” and listed on the sanctions list by the UN Security Council Sanction Committee on Oct. 2, 2015, has admitted to having links to the Turkish intelligence agency.<sup>135</sup>

The circumstances in Turkey are worse than those early years of Erdoğan’s rule in the sense that the government and all the state institutions have been mobilized to fuel this hatred against Christians. Turkish authorities overlook acts of hostility and hate speech targeting Christians and fail to effectively investigate them while undermining groups such as the Gülen movement, which has been working on interfaith and intercultural dialogue for decades for the purpose of living in harmony and respect and with the acceptance of diversity.

The Association of Protestant Churches in Turkey released the Human Rights Violations Report 2016, revealing the continued attacks and hate speech against churches and religious officials. The report criticized Turkish authorities for not reacting to hate campaigns against Christians. The report covered Brunson’s imprisonment and also listed the case of a church leader being deported, while another one was denied entry into Turkey.<sup>136</sup>

135] “Turkey’s Erdoğan goes after the pope and the Vatican”, Abdullah Bozkurt, Turkish Minute, 11 November 2016, <https://www.turkishminute.com/2016/11/11/opinion-turkeys-erdogan-goes-pope-vatican/>

136] “Protestant Church Association Reports on Attacks, Hate Speech in Turkey”, 1 February 2017, <http://asbarez.com/159726/protestant-church-association-reports-on-attacks-hate-speech-in-turkey/>



It is impossible for Erdoğan and his associates not to foresee what might be the possible consequences of this discourse of hate speech, which is obviously used for political exploitation. Even though Erdoğan hosted Pope Francis as his first guest as head of state in his newly built, lavish palace on Nov. 28, 2014 and said during a joint press conference that “there is not the slightest issue about which we think differently,”<sup>137</sup> the Turkish president has said and done completely the opposite to that spirit of cooperation since then.

Rather, he increased his targeting of the pope and the Vatican and started using these attacks as leverage and bargaining chips with his interlocutors abroad. He acts as if Turkey should behave like a non-state actor rather than as a rational player in international politics in line with its commitments and obligations. For that, the Erdoğan government must be named, exposed and shamed rather than being appeased in the name of engagement.

SCF calls on the Turkish government to take immediate measures to ensure the effective enjoyment of the protection of the freedoms of religion, thought and belief as part of its obligation under international treaties, most specifically the European Convention on Human Rights. Christian groups have been the very fabric of Turkey for centuries, and they must be awarded full enjoyment of their rights as equal citizens. The Turkish government should cease discriminatory practices stigmatizing Christians in areas such as education and respect their right to provide their children with an education in conformity with their religious or philosophical convictions. They should be able to establish houses of worship, associations and foundations without any hindrance.

SCF also urges Turkish leaders to stop using an abusive and hateful narrative against Christians and to publicly condemn the use of violence or incitement to violence on religious grounds. Turkish authorities should cease the practice of using politically motivated cases to harass and persecute Christians. The reported cases of hate speech and hate crimes must be effectively and thoroughly investigated. Last but not least, Erdoğan and his government should stop using their media propaganda machine to smear and demonize Christian groups.

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137] “Cumhurbaşkanlığı sarayının ilk konuğu Papa Francis”, Mynet, 28 November 2014, <http://www.mynet.com/haber/politika/cumhurbaskanligi-sarayinin-ilk-konugu-papa-francis-1580274-1>

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# HATE SPEECH AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN ERDOĞAN'S TURKEY

