

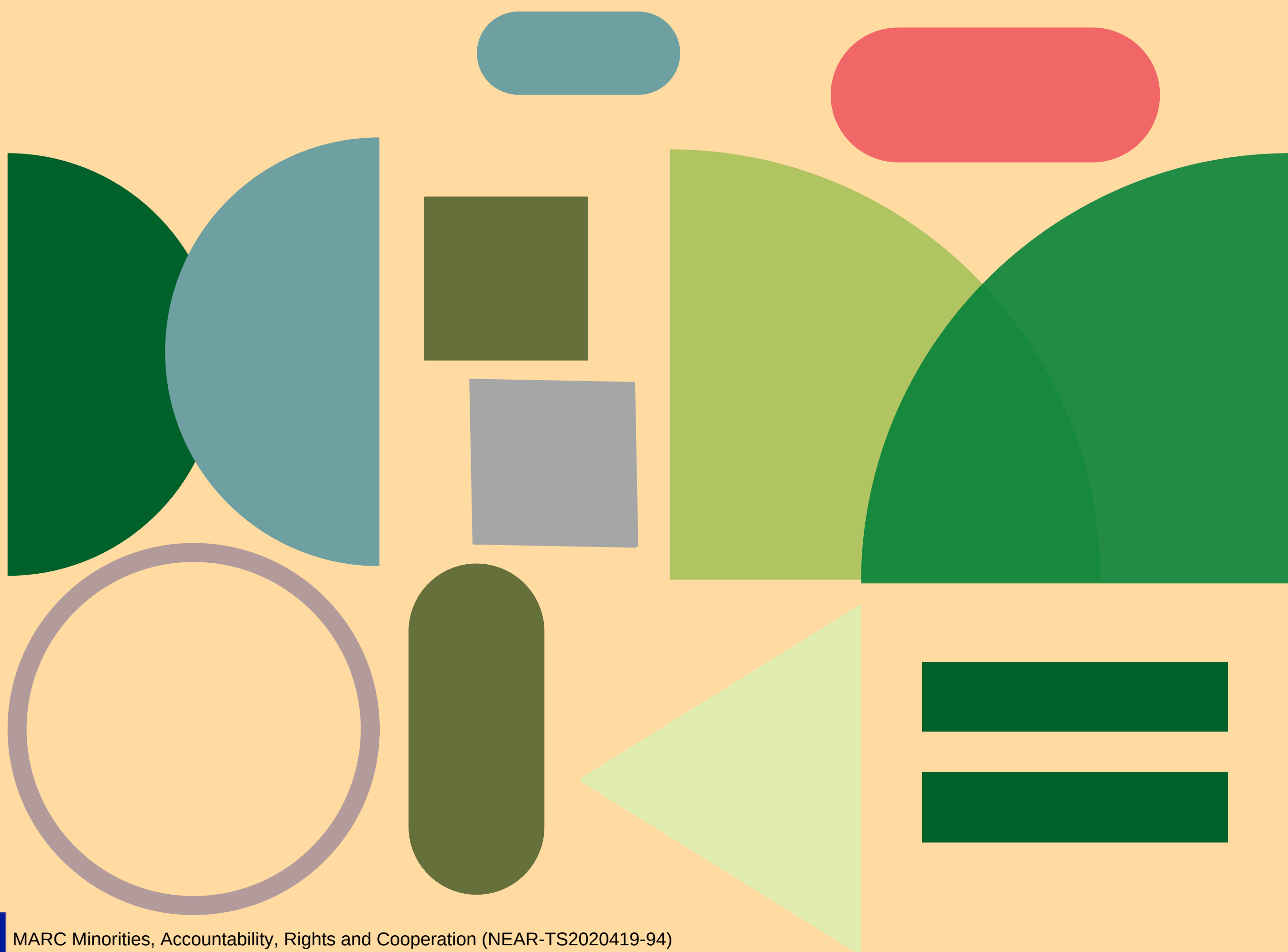
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Minorities, Accountability, Rights and Collaboration

MARC Turkey Bulletin III

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The MARC Bulletin is a bi-annual publication produced by a network that aims at documenting, monitoring and promoting minority rights in Turkey. The Bulletin is published regularly to convey updated data, reports and stories about the situation of minorities in the country. It aims to be an informative update on the situation of ethnic, linguistic and religious minorities and their rights in Turkey. [Click here](#) to sign up to receive future editions of the Bulletin.

Introduction

This year we celebrate the 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Persons belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (UNDM). Even after 30 years, the UNDM continues to be the most important UN instrument devoted to minority rights, because it provides guidance and key standards ranging from non-discrimination to effective participation of minorities in decision-making in all areas of everyday life. Therefore, this edition of the Bulletin aims to mark the 30th anniversary of the UNDM while reflecting on Turkey's minority rights record since the adoption of the Declaration. #Allin4MinorityRights

Thirty years after the adoption of the UNDM by the United Nations, Turkey still officially recognizes religion as the only criterion for defining minorities. Moreover, it does not apply this criterion generally but uses it only to refer to non-Muslims.

In 2022, the rights of officially recognized minorities in Turkey are still not fully implemented, while discrimination and hate speech against unofficial minorities continue. As summarized by the following current examples, minorities are prevented from participating in cultural, religious, social, economic and public life, contrary to the articles of the Declaration. They face interference and obstacles to the establishment and management of their own institutions; and the right to learn their mother tongue cannot be fully implemented due to problems and shortcomings.

Given the 30th anniversary of the UNDM: Do minorities matter in Turkey?

Current issues

Religious minorities

The 1923 Treaty of Lausanne established Turkey's minority rights framework. Looking at the rights granted to non-Muslims in Lausanne, one can speak of violations in the areas of education, religious freedom and representation. While minority schools continue to provide education under the status of 'private school' contrary to what the Treaty of Lausanne envisioned, the fact that Heybeliada Seminary has been closed since 1971 is not only a problem in the field of education but also violates Article 40 of the Treaty, since the training of clergy is an integral part of religious freedom. Since 1961, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has sent the Armenian Patriarchate a decree on electoral principles. The most recent decree, issued in 2019, added the condition of 'being included in the class of bishops of the Armenian Patriarchate of Istanbul' to the election principles. This interference with the Armenian Patriarchate is significant in the context of both religious freedom and representation.



In addition, the rights granted to all non-Muslims in Lausanne were implemented by official institutions for a long time only for the Armenian, Greek and Jewish communities. For example, Syriacs, who were subject to Lausanne regulations but whose rights were violated for years, were not able to open their own school, the private Mor Efrem Syriac Kindergarten, until 2013, and then only through the courts.

An important step in 2022 for non-Muslim minorities was the enactment of the Regulation on the Election of Community Foundations. The old regulation had been repealed in 2013. With this regulation, after nine years of waiting for elections, instead of improvements, only greater problems have arisen.

Contrary to expectations, this new regulation is more restrictive than the old one. The new regulation has created a major obstacle to democratic and free elections in minority communities. All candidate and voter lists, starting with the Election Organizing Committee, have to be approved by the General Directorate of Foundations, which means increased control by the state.

In addition, hospital foundations, which are the largest foundations of non-Muslims, were exempted from the regulation. Their elections were left to a regulation to be issued by the Ministry of Health. In summary, this violation of the Treaty of Lausanne has unfortunately continued, and the state's control over non-Muslim foundations has been strengthened.

Ethnic and Linguistic minorities

The violations against mother tongue education in Turkey are evident from the statement published by the Human Rights Association on the occasion of International Mother Language Day on 21 February 2022. In Turkey, some languages other than Turkish are taught as electives starting in 5th grade. However, if fewer than 10 students in a school choose a language, it is not possible for them to be taught in that language. The training of the teachers who will teach these classes and the quality of the teaching materials are not yet sufficient. According to a 2022 survey of Kurdish-speaking respondents in Turkey by the Center for Socio-Political Field Studies in Diyarbakir. Only 50.2 per cent of parents demanded education for their children in their mother tongue. Strikingly, only 5.2 per

The 2022 report of the Freedom of Belief Initiative clearly shows the numerous violations related to freedom of religion or belief. Since the Alevi faith is not recognized by the state, it is not possible for Alevis to fully enjoy their freedom of religion or belief. The report notes the problems faced by Alevis, Protestants and Jehovah's Witnesses, particularly in obtaining official recognition for their places of worship. Like Armenians and Greeks, Alevis and Protestants face difficulties training their own clergy, as the state provides funding only to Sunni Muslims. Besides, public funding of religious services is also only provided for Sunni Muslims. As the report underlines, these constraints violate the prohibition against discrimination and the state's obligation to respect the principle of equality.

cent of them were able to secure classes for their children. 42.7 per cent of them stated that they did not receive a response and/or reason for the rejection of instruction on their request.

Although, discrimination and hate speech are common for all minorities in Turkey, from education to political representation to everyday practices, the pressure on Kurdish people is striking. The violations they face are not limited to legal cases and political repression (in particular, the Kobani and People's Democratic Party closure cases, arrested Kurdish politicians, and numerous proceedings against Kurdish MPs) but also include restrictions on the arts and media.



The pressure on Kurdish music and theatre are reminiscent of the bans in the 1990s. As recently as May 2022, Aynur Doğan's concert in Bursa and a Kurdish play in Bitlis were cancelled. In June 2022, 16 journalists working in the Kurdish media were arrested for their reporting.

Destruction of Ana Meryem Tomb

After the destruction of the Tomb of the Ana Meryem, which was considered sacred by Abdal Alevis, meetings were held with the Ana Fatma Cemevi Association and the residents of the neighbourhood. Abdal Alevis living in the Esenler district of Istanbul have been praying at what was believed to be the Tomb of the Ana Meryem, which is the only site related to a female that they have designated as sacred for about 70 years. The street where this Tomb was located was closed by approximately 300 police officers during the morning of 25 May 2022. Riot police were stationed at both entrances of the street, and entry was prohibited. A fight broke out between the people who were against the demolition of the Tomb and the police; those who did not want the Tomb to be destroyed were beaten by the police. Despite all the resistance of the local people, the Tomb was demolished on the grounds of urban renewal. Thereupon, non-governmental organizations in the region and residents of the neighbourhood decided to file a complaint, and the legal process has begun.

In the statement made on the official website of the district governor's office, it was claimed that the Tomb which has been visited for many years 'does not exist': 'When the satellite photos showing the condition of the area are examined, it is seen that there is no Tomb in the area in question as claimed.' According to information obtained from organizations in the region, the district governor met with the Alevi neighbourhood headman and two city council members to receive their opinions. When these people said that they did not know of such a Tomb, it was then demolished.

Announcements

This year two monitoring and documentation field visits took place by MARC network participants in order to investigate and report on Roma and Assyrian communities' living conditions in the Aegean and Southeast regions of Turkey.

Two MARC participants participated in advocacy roundtable meetings in Brussels in May 2022. They also met with MEPs, international NGOs and European institutions to discuss and share the situation of minorities in Turkey. In addition, two MARC participants took part in the UN's European-Central Asian Regional Forum in Vienna in May 2022.

In October 2022, MARC's 5th network gathering took place in Ankara, Turkey. The 6th network gathering will be held in the middle of January 2023.

Additionally, the MARC coordinator attended OSCE's HDIM Conference in October 2022. Following advocacy visits, two MARC participants also took part in the 15th session of the UN Forum on Minority Issues in December 2022; the theme this year was 'Review. Rethink. Reform: 30th anniversary of the UN Declaration on Minority Rights'.



This year, the MARC Emergency Assistance Fund for Human Rights Defenders (HRDs) has provided financial support to three applicants. The next round of applications for the second cycle of the HRDs' Emergency Assistance Fund has opened at the end of November 2022.

Minority Rights Group Europe (MRGE) is happy to announce the collaboration with five filmmakers under the EU-funded MARC Project. Each filmmaker will cover Kurdish, Zaza, Alevi, Hemshin and Armenian communities' stories from an intersectional discrimination perspective in Turkey. Each short film will be launched in January 2023 and will be disseminated through all of MRG's social media platforms as well as at international film festivals. MRGE will continue to contribute to the visibility of minorities in Turkey.

Minority testimonies from the MARC network

Naming is political

For Assyrians/Syriacs in Turkey, the ambivalence in their self-identification has been a perennial issue. On the one hand, they identify themselves as Turks and, on the other, as Assyrians/Syriacs. This double identification stems from the Turkish government's policies of denial throughout history and the inherited fear caused by past atrocities. Clear proof of this denial is the names of Assyrians/Syriacs. The story of Barbara/Hülya reveals the state's systematic politics in denying the Assyrian/Syriac identity by not letting them choose their names.

In 1992, Barbara came to the world in Ayn-Wardo (Gülgöze village) in Mardin. Her parents named her even before she opened her eyes to this world. Derived from ancient Greek, the name Barbara means 'strange' and 'traveller' and also refers to the Christian martyr Saint Barbara. Ironically, after her birth, when her family went to the registration office, the woman typing down Barbara's information for her identity card found the name Barbara bizarre. Therefore, she (re)named her and registered her name officially as Hülya, meaning sweet dream in Turkish.



In a way, Barbara's name accomplished its destiny. As an Assyrian/Syriac, the baby girl's name underlined cultural diversity through her identities as a Christian and a member of an ethnic-linguistic minority. This difference made her name seem strange to the registrar. On the other hand, the name Hülya symbolizes a continuation of the 90s political backdrop and the state's dream to have one unified Turkey rather than a diverse, multi-vocal democratic country.

The girl is called Barbara in the house, and Hülya in school and other public places. Having a barred name mirrors the state's repressive policies which deny differences by rendering minorities into sameness. It demonstrates the effects of prohibited identity, in this instance, the rupture in Assyrians'/Syriacs' psyche caused by it. It also signifies Assyrians/Syriacs' ineligibility in the eyes of the state and their dispersal caused by massacres and forced disappearances, which led them to wander in search of new homes abroad and feel alien at home. The latest news is that Barbara will reclaim her birth name with a court appeal. Maybe there is still hope for diversity and multiplicity in the face of the dominant state's homogenizing power.

Pomak bride's face decoration traditions

The traditions of the Pomaks in Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria and many countries of the Balkan region are still kept alive in a very limited area today. The third generation of Pomaks, who immigrated from the Balkan region, continues to protect their culture.

Meryem Pelin, a graduate student at Trakya University Institute of Social Sciences, Department of Balkan Studies, stated that she applied the community's tradition at her own wedding and continues to disseminate in order to not forget its traditions.

Ja sam Pomak!



Being a Romani in Turkey

What difficulties can a Romani girl living in Istanbul, one of Turkey's most prominent cities, experience? Maybe life started for me when I was seven years old. When I learned of my brother's birth, when I learned that I was the only girl in the house, and when I learned my responsibilities. If you're a Romani girl, it becomes your job to look after your younger sibling, clean the house and cook.

Due to our living conditions, all family members have to work, and you have to take care of the housework. The first obstacle I encountered was in my school life: There were schools where Roma children were not accepted.



There was only one school in the heart of the city where Roma gathered, because you were not admitted to other schools. At the same time, there was always a police officer at the entrance of our neighbourhood. Police would either want to look at our bag or follow you with his eyes, creating a psychological pressure.

Then, high school and university life began, where I felt the discrimination even more intensely. I felt like it was my duty to answer people's many questions about Roma and to really break down prejudices, and I carried this like a burden.

Later, I made this a profession and met with civil society and placed the issues of civil society and discrimination at the centre of my life. It doesn't matter what I am or what I do. The important thing is that my identity has developed a defence mechanism in me, and this is considered normal for people. I'm a Romani woman and I want to live this life as ordinary, not mute or like I have to protect myself all the time, and that's what I'm fighting for.





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