



**By Art Stepanian**, Ontario, 28 March 2021

When last month President Recep Erdogan pulled his country from the Istanbul Convention by presidential decree, there was the expected empty brouhaha. Women's groups in Turkey demonstrated and expressed their outrage. European nations said that they regretted the decision. The Western media condemned and everyone pretended they were surprised. Germany, Turkey's big brother, said the decision sent the wrong signal.

Turkey was the first to sign the 2011 Council of Europe's convention (the conference was held in Istanbul) intended to protect women and promote their rights. Turkey is the first to leave. First in, first out. The accord provided a legal framework to prevent femicide and promote gender equality through legislation, education and by spreading awareness about gender inequality.

Why the surprise that Erdogan had renounced the Istanbul Convention? Since entering politics, Erdogan has made no secret of his misogyny. Femicide statistics have snowballed in Turkey in the past decade but Erdogan's regime has predictably made no attempt to stop it.

Incredible as it may sound to someone unfamiliar with Turkish mores, Turkey doesn't keep official statistics on femicide. In February of this year at least 33 women were killed and 57 were assaulted. At least another 14 deaths were reported as suspicious. The murder figures are not definite because some murders are filed as suicide, accidental, or as "unknown reason."

In 2020, there were 284 femicides –56 because the women wanted divorce. In 2019 there were 416 femicides. Seven years earlier the figure was 143. Studies show 42 percent of Turkish women between the ages 15 to 60 suffer some physical or sexual violence by their husbands or partners.

In 2016 close to 400 women were killed. In the previous year, the number was 309. Since 2015, at least 2,000 women have been killed, says the We Will End Femicides Platform. Following the 2016 coup attempt, 4,500 judges and prosecutors were fired and 11,000 Erdogan loyalists and "accredited" people were hired as civil servants. This has not helped curb femicide. Of the 4,500 about 2,500 were jailed for being members of a so-called terrorist organization. Meanwhile, human rights lawyers are intimidated with bogus terrorist charges. Turkey was never a country which believed in the rule of law. The firing and jailing of lawyers and prosecutors made the delivery of justice a painful joke. One observer said: "Turkish judiciary has played its reluctance to prosecute violence against women." The muzzled or pro-Erdogan media is not interested in the plight of women either since it knows its master's thinking. While the country is an-almost dictatorship, a research company found out that only 2.4 percent the population thinks the country's biggest problem is its democratic deficiency. Advanced democratic standards or the acute lack of them, have never been a game changer in Turkish elections. In other words, democracy doesn't sell in the Turkish market. Research shows that most Turks are happy with their "democracy" with no checks and balances, weakened institutions, government-controlled judiciary, toothless media, and widening democratic deficit.

At a 2014 international women's convention in Istanbul, Erdogan said: "Women need equal values, not equality. That idea includes fair and equal treatment before the law while recognizing the genders as having different societal roles and capabilities." He then added: "You can't make women equal to men. Why? Because their natural dispositions are different...our religion upholds a status for women: motherhood." Erdogan's speech was interrupted numerous times by applause from the audience, most of them members of the Women and Democracy Association, a pro-Erdogan group. Erdogan then said women are not equal to men and that manual labor was not suitable for women because of their "delicate nature." He finally accused feminists of rejecting motherhood.

On another occasion, Erdogan said that women who choose to work away from home rather than have children are half-persons. For years he has urged women to have at least three children.

One of Erdogan's henchmen and an AKP leader said women should not laugh loudly in public while the Diyanet (directorate of religious affairs) has tried to keep a confessed rapist out of prison. AKP MPs and Diyanet officials reportedly intervened and threatened the victim that her work contract would be canceled if she didn't withdraw her complaint.

In 2008 the Diyanet website said: "Feminism is immorality." It also issued fatwas and delivered sermons saying it is sin for unmarried couples to hold hands and it is forbidden for unmarried men and women to shake hands.

Three years ago, Diyanet claimed under Islamic law girls as young as nine can marry. Echoing the same view, Ishaq Akintola, professor of Islamic Eschatology and director of Muslim Rights Concern, said: "Islam has no age barrier in marriage and Muslims have no apology for those who refuse to accept this". According to unconfirmed reports, in 2018 an estimated 48,300 female children were married. The same year more than 11,000 of them gave birth.

In 2019 a book published in Turkey and preaching conservative values was distributed free. A remarkable sentence in it said: "It has been established that higher education and secular fields negatively affect religious belief and worship."

Numan Kurtulus, deputy chair of AKP (Erdogan's party), has said liberalization, such as gender equality, plays into the hands of "LGPTQ" and other marginal elements in Turkish society. Conservatives, such as members of AKP want to repeal some of the protections established by the Istanbul Convention, arguing it has led to increased family separation and infringement to traditional cultural norms.

Last year, on the occasion of the conversion of Hagia Sophia to a mosque, the mosque's imam said it's men's right to rule the family. He also criticized the media over what he called its excessive coverage of femicides and said: "The term 'femicide' sought to make women enemies of men." Meanwhile, lawyer Kezban Hatemi advised "preserving our traditional social fabric will protect the dignity of Turkish women. For this sublime purpose, there is no need to seek the remedy outside or to imitate others."

While Turkey's appalling femicide statistics have been confirmed, other criminal acts (rape, beating, abduction) have been lost in the shuffle and hardly remarked.

Erdogan's misogynist hasn't hurt his career. Since 2002 he has won every election and constitution referenda. A nation which elects a misogynist for twenty years can't be pro-gender equality. A nation that tolerates femicide is a nation that hates its women.

## Comments



**Tsakoug** – 2021-04-08 03:35:31

Good timing of this article given that Erdogan has just insulted the Western world by demanding that a female EU envoy stand while all male counterparts were allowed to sit during a recent meeting with Erdo and Turkish officials. The remaining EU officials went along with it without complaint.