

“Dogs Bark, the Convoy Runs Over [Them],” in *Ma’ariv*, July 30, 2010

Tulin Daloglu, a Turkish journalist, criticized the political conduct of the Turkish Prime Minister, Erdogan, in a series of editorials. She came out against the Islamicization of her birth country, against the deterioration of democracy, and she even -- heaven forbid -- sided with Israel. Now she is looking for a job.

Tulin Daloglu has resided in the United States for 11 years. She is a journalist for the Turkish press, and has often appeared as a guest commentator in a number of leading US newspapers, including *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Times*. During the last two years, she served as a staff journalist for the Turkish newspaper *Habertürk*. She used to visit Turkey often, making an effort to return every two or three months.

“There is no doubt that I have seen turkey change since I moved [to the US 11 years ago],” she says in an interview with the “Weekend Extra [edition of *Ma’ariv*],” from her home in Washington. “Once, when you used to walk around the streets of Istanbul, you were surrounded by mainly European tourists,” she explains. “Today, you walk around the streets of the city and you see more tourists from Arab countries and fewer and fewer tourists from Europe.” Tulin, a Muslim who grew up in a religious home, is careful to qualify her language: “not that there's anything bad about tourists from Arab countries,” she adds immediately. “There is a clear trend among the Turkish people, who are increasingly interested in opening up towards the Islamic world,” she explains. “The Turkish people,” she continues, “are taking a step along the path that has been paved by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan over the last several years. There is no doubt that Erdogan wants to become the leader of the Muslim world. It's possible to see his determination and enthusiasm toward achieving this goal. Nor is there any doubt that he feels much more comfortable meeting with the Syrian [leader] Bashar al-Assad than with British Prime Minister David Cameron, who visited Turkey this week.”

Daloglu worries as she speaks. The country that she left at the end of the previous century is changing its face. “More people are turning East. More women are covering their faces,” she explains. She turns toward Erdogan and the subject of her criticism. The loss of the country in which she grew up hurts. It is an authentic anger diluted by a personal insult. Two months ago she was fired from her job as a journalist at the *Habertürk* daily newspaper. Several weeks before then, she had run into Erdogan's spokesman, who was arriving at the nuclear-energy committee meeting that was taking place in Washington in mid-April. The spokesman expressed at that time a fury over her editorial, which had criticized the political conduct of Turkey with respect to Israel. “I don't see Israeli journalists criticizing Netanyahu in a similar way,” he reproached her. Then the spokesman threatened, “You'll still pay for this.”

A month and a half after this incident, she was fired. Certainly it could be a mere coincidence, were it not for the fact that the evidence points to the contrary. “I would like to clarify,” the editor at [*Habertürk's*] foreign desk wrote to her a few days later, “that at no point was I, at the foreign desk, or the assistant chief editor of the newspaper, involved in your firing.” Below, he wrote, “I understand that this is connected to the warning that you received from the Prime Minister's spokesman.” Daloglu printed these words in a special column that she published at the beginning of the month on her blog. “I intentionally waited several weeks before publishing this,” she explained. “During this time, I chatted with journalist friends of mine in Turkey. I

cannot prove the connection [between the warning and my being fired] with certainty, although there are clear circumstances that point to the link between that event and my being let go.”

Commentary Beyond the Borders

Thousands of kilometers from Ankara, Daloglu feels safe enough to speak, in her name, thoughts that local journalists are afraid to have attributed to them. Even her fundamental criticisms of Erdogan, it is important to emphasize, do not derive from personal vengefulness. Many months before she was fired, Daloglu published a series of editorial columns against Erdogan’s political conduct. Against the loss of the unique stance of Turkey as a bridge between East and West. Against attempts to blame internal problems on Israel, against the crisis of confidence/trust with Washington. And even, as she experienced with her [prime] minister, against the creeping but persistent deterioration of the democratic character of Turkey. “This is not a black-and-white situation,” she stresses. “It is not that it is prohibited to criticize the Turkish government, or that the freedom of the press has died. But lately there is a certain way to say things. All of a sudden you must be diplomatic. This is a slow and disturbing process. I chat with many of my colleagues in Turkey, who are people who worked in the media for decades. They describe a situation that they have not known before, people whose editors are now asking them ‘to be more careful what they write about.’ Journalists are asked to 'soften' their columns.”

From Washington, Daloglu feels safe enough to speak her mind. Nevertheless, many people in the Turkish media are concerned about these issues, and there are too many days when they feel the contradiction between the foreign-policy reforms led by Erdogan, with the attempt to be accepted in the European Union, and with the tightening of the grasp of the administration and the strengthening of the religious character of Turkey. One of them is [Jonait Ulsabar??], the senior columnist of the well-known Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet*. A year ago it absorbed the [Dugan?] Media group, which the newspaper belongs to, [paying a fine] for the sum of \$3 billion [for tax evasion]. However, most members of the media and political activists in Turkey are of the opinion that this was an attempt to frighten the media group and to silence its criticism of the government, which it publishes through its different outlets. “I also feel the pressure lately,” [Ulsabar] told *Ma'ariv*. “If I speak on the telephone, I assume that they are listening to me. This was the norm under the military government, and the current government is continuing what was done then.” Erdogan, incidentally, is not satisfied with heavy fines, and on more than one occasion he has urged the Turkish people not to acquire the newspapers produced by this group.

Vishnu Anthony Mills, a senior member of the “International Media Institute,” which tracks freedom of the press around the world, says: “the media in Turkey are free as long as they do not criticize Erdogan in a way that does not please him,” he said last March. A few days before this, Erdogan astonished Turkey and Western countries when he urged newspaper editors to curtail the advancement of rebellious columnists. “Even though this was not the first time that Erdogan criticized the media, his words were much more worrisome this time,” added Mills. “What he was demanding, if I understand him correctly, is that newspapers fire columnists who cross lines that he himself establishes,” he summarized.

In the European Union, which has followed Erdogan's reforms over the last several years to determine whether Turkey would be approved to join the EU, disapproval was expressed over this statement. “This is not the first time that Erdogan has applied pressure on the press,” a European diplomat told the Turkish *Daily News*, who works in Ankara and wished to remain anonymous. “We are worried,” he added. “This is not the way that Erdogan is supposed to

defend himself.” About a month ago, on June 21, Erdogan stood at the podium at the Turkish parliament and blamed the Turkish press for aiding terror. “Unfortunately, the media, whether intentionally or otherwise, seriously aids terror organizations,” he attacked. Erdogan made this statement after the news channels broadcast pictures of mourning Turkish families after they had lost their loved ones in terror attacks from Kurdish terrorists.

Soda Instead of Alcohol

Daloglu, as mentioned, is one of those rebellious journalists. Her comments are considered especially problematic not only because of their content, but also because they have been translated into English on many occasions, and because they are directed to Western countries and the diplomatic circles of Washington. A few days after Erdogan's visit to Washington, Daloglu published a critical article under the headline “Turkey Takes Sides,” which was published in the prestigious bimonthly magazine *Foreign Policy*. “Turkey is losing her role as the voice of reason because of Erdogan's obsession with criticizing Israel at every opportunity,” she wrote in the article. “Turkey's choice of new allies is accompanied by the constriction of freedoms within Turkey,” she added. “It is easy to use Israel as a scapegoat, at a time when Erdogan is trying to redesign Turkey's identity and national interests. Erdogan's conduct has created a dangerous vacuum in the Middle East.”

To what extent is Turkey's democratic character at risk?

Turkey is still a secular and democratic country, but I think that you need to put quotes around the word “secular.” When I go to Turkey I see more and more women wearing head coverings, when the entire religion issue is turning into part of the public discourse, which is something that was unheard of 10 years ago. Now Erdogan is suddenly calling on the Turkish people to drink more soda and juice instead of alcohol. These were issues that were once not acceptable to discuss in this context, and which indicate a worrying change that is occurring over the country.”

To what extent is this [change] seeping into the mainstream?

“Turkish democracy was never perfect, but we have made nontrivial progress over the years. We are now at a problematic juncture. The journalists in Turkey whom I speak with tell me about pressures that they have never had to deal with before. But I'm not referring only to the media. Today the population also prefers to shut its eyes. Everyone focuses today first of all on themselves. Not long ago a comprehensive survey was published that measured the support of the Turkish people for the law reforms that Erdogan would like to pass in the coming months. The results indicated a balance between support for the reforms and opposition to them. At the same time, however, the authors of the survey called attention to an interesting observation -- that many of those surveyed refused to speak about politics. This is something new for me, and extremely concerning. People are afraid in their workplace, that their opinion may be a negative influence on their lives.”

To what extent is the spreading perception correct that Erdogan is seeking to become the leader of the Muslim world?

“There is no doubt that Erdogan would like and is working determinedly to become the leader of the Muslim world. There is also no doubt that the stabilization of Hamas gave him enormous

support among Arab countries. At the same time, I think that you must distinguish between Erdogan and the Turkish people. There's definitely a new momentum today among the Turkish people that is turning more to the East and toward Arab countries. Thus, the Turkish people have always identified with the suffering of the Palestinian people. On the other hand, there has always been great opposition to the terror activities of Hamas, which reminded the Turkish people of the violence of the Kurdish underground. Erdogan tried to change this, and he has successfully done so. Nevertheless, I am doubtful as to whether the Turkish people as a whole support the activities of Hamas. I believe that we err when we draw conclusions from the crisis between Turkey and Israel about Turkey's broader diplomatic position. The relationship between the two countries has seen more than a few conflicts over the years, but it's important to shatter a few myths, including the belief that the crisis between the two countries jeopardizes Israel's safety.”