



Middle East Mediterranean

An ELIAMEP Report

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**Visual Media,
Law and
Minorities**
Rita Ender

**Social Media
and Minorities**
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Reintegrating Non- Muslim Communities in Turkish Society

**Focus on Non
Muslims of
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An interview with

Laki Vingas,
*Former
Representative of
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Middle East Mediterranean

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Middle East Mediterranean (MEM) is an unbiased bimonthly report of the *ELIAMEP Middle East Research Project*, focusing largely on geopolitical and economic developments, debates as well as policies, affecting the future of the Middle East. Having a global outlook MEM hosts analyses, commentaries, interviews and news, conducting research in the fields of politics, economics and culture in the Middle East and adjacent areas, such as the Eastern Mediterranean.

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Editor's Note

A democratic society is based on drawing every aspect of spiritual inventory of its citizens, regardless of religion, ideology and payments is a steady and strong politically and economically dynamic society with a bright future. The society which offers expression, creativity and work for its citizens highlights those very characteristics which guarantee safe and guide further development. Otherwise the dynamics of society has an expiration date, leading it inevitably to decline and decay. The reintegration and demarginalisation of Non-Muslim communities in the Turkish society remains a desideratum for modern Turkey.

This issue is a contribution to the research cooperation between the Rum Community Foundation of Neochori-Istanbul and the ELIAMEP Middle East Research Project in the wider context of the European perspective of Turkish society and state, which presupposes the social reintegration of non-Muslim communities in Turkey and the full respect of their human rights. It is the first time that research on Social Media (SM) in relation to the individual religious communities is conducted in Greece.

The cooperation between ELIAMEP and the Rum Community of Neochori serves to provide the corresponding comparative example of non-Christian communities of Greek society, as a country member of the European Union, with proven full respect for human rights, cultural and religious communities.

The current MEM issue focuses on four aspects: the surveys conducted in Turkey and Greece by Konda and Eliamep respectively; the visual media, law and minorities; and the social media and minorities as a means of having the Turkish society welcoming the fellow citizens-members of Non Muslim minorities back to the centre of social life of the country.

MEM

Analyses

The Konda Survey: Brief Observations on the Social Media and Minorities Project

Assist. Prof. Erkan Saka

Istanbul Bilgi University- Communication School

In this piece, the author highlights some of the most significant findings of a survey conducted among the non-Muslim minority community members in Turkey. The survey provides insights about the gender dimensions, news sources, discrimination and hate speech anxieties and demographics and general Internet usage practices of minorities.

Social Media and Minorities project proposal included a quantitative survey and this was achieved by a professional institution, KONDA. This is a well known and respected research company. The survey report is publicly available ([http://survey.konda.com.tr/rapor/Sosyal Medya ve Azinliklar Rapor.pdf](http://survey.konda.com.tr/rapor/Sosyal_Medya_ve_Azinliklar_Rapor.pdf)) and I will provide a few highlights from the survey. The survey took place between 30 January- 17 April and targeted non-Muslim minority communities in Turkey. 746 form were filled in. 567 were completed online and the rest

was completed offline. Due to technical difficulties, not all members of these communities could be accessed through online means. Thus, surveyors visited minority schools, worship places and relevant events to get more results filled in through offline means.

The Turkish part of the project aimed to survey social media usage in what ways and to what extent among the Non-Muslim minority communities and then to increase capacity to represent themselves through social media tools. The aim of increasing

capacity of representation is to better understand how minorities integrate into society in general. In order to achieve these aims workshops were organized to provide more practical means of media usage.

Essential part of the project included to examine what kinds of violations, discrimination and hate speech minorities are exposed to in social media usage. The project thus had in its agenda to encourage freedom of speech in social media, to recommend legal amendments against discrimination and hate speech, to raise social participation of minority citizens and to better position them as equal citizens. The KONDA survey aimed to provide an empirical background before our workshops began. In the following paragraphs, I will provide some highlight from the survey findings.

The survey had 67 questions that focused on demographic aspects, internet access, social media usage practices, discriminations and freedom of expression violations exposed in digital communications. Questions were prepared by the Project team with the professional

guidance of KONDA officials. Some of the demographic groups were hard to access through online platforms. In order to get the surveys done, minority schools, worship places and events were visited. 43% of survey participants are women. However, women were found to be more active in social media usage. Survey participants had higher levels of education than Turkey average (KONDA does regular surveys about Turkey's society in general).

The survey has a particular outcome because of its methodology. The survey was technically aimed all sections of minorities but it reflects tendencies and experiences of those who are more active in social media. There was a not an open call for the survey but instead it was targeted where minority citizens could be found online. In cases when online survey could not be possible, face to face interviews were conducted.

It is note worthy that 93% of survey participants were from Istanbul. Although it is not certain, 90% of all non-Muslim minorities in Turkey are believed to be living in Istanbul. Thus there might be a

demographic correlation between the survey participants and minorities demographics in Turkey. Migration data gives as valuable insights. Half of the participants stated that they live in Istanbul for a hundred years. When looked at a previous generation, 75 % of participants' parents are from Istanbul. Although there might accuracy problem related to representation of minority groups, the surveyors states that the survey results still reflect general tendencies of the minority communities.

Social media usage is relatively high among the participants. The most used tools are by order Facebook, Youtube and Instagram. Most participants stated that they feel anxiety when they use social media. Only 21 % of users declared that they share posts freely. Remaining participants range from never contributing to share with extreme caution. Some of the participants stated that they were exposed to insult, pejorative language, swearing and threat. 61% declared that they do not know their legal rights related to social media usage.

However, 80% demanded that there is a necessity for legal regulations against discrimination. Policymakers should care about this demand.

Social Media helps minorities to communicate more effectively with each other and empowers a culture of organization. What is more, minorities state that social media is effective in communicating with wider society.

In terms of gender, survey results are nearly equal in most male and female replies. For example, there is statistically insignificant difference in terms of access to internet. Those who do not have access to internet are also in equal number in terms of male and female respondents. Observable difference is seen in continuous social media usage. Women are 4 % more than men in terms of regular social media usage. Facebook is the most used social media service and more women than men are using Facebook.

In the mean time, although Twitter usage is less than Facebook, it is still beyond the Turkey average. Nearly 50% of participants declare

that they use Twitter regularly. Catholic Assyrian community has the largest group as users of social media actively for more than 6 years (72%). They are also leaders in constant usage (60%). Armeanian community has the largest group in not connecting to Internet (4%).

Minority citizens and Turkey average are same in the order of social media service usage: Facebook is followed by Instagram, Youtube and Twitter. At least 31% of participants also use Linkedin. Only in Linkedin male and female users are in same number. In all others, there are more female users than male ones. The survey did not find any other significant social media service in use. Blogging remains to be a rare activity. Turkey blogging usage is also rare. 80% of participants never opened up a blog.

Among the few bloggers, half of the blogs are focused on personal content. Political or community content is no more than 20%. Among the bloggers of political or community based content, male bloggers are three times more than female bloggers. This was yet

another major difference between male and female participants. Apart from this, all other amounts given in the following paragraphs, male and female rates can be assumed as nearly equal.

More than 80% of participants stated that they are in touch with other community members who live abroad. 60% of them also communicate with people from other communities who live abroad. Here mobility and immigration patterns should be further investigated. It was not pursued in this survey but our expectation is that travelling frequencies are higher than Turkey average as many relatives can be found living abroad. There should also be further investigation how much of these communications are offline or online. 40% of participants declared that they did not participate a minority event when they were invited through social media. Relative lack of participation among those who are social media literate should be a concern for the community leaders. There should be

more incentives to make these members more active.

Around 85% of participants declared that they only use their real names in their social media accounts. 12% stated that they both use real names and nicknames. There should be a durational investigation here. Because of the recent authoritarian tendencies in Turkey, there might be an increase in nickname usage. The survey did not focus on this aspect.

Friendship patterns have a parallel tendency with some findings in USA: A study (Ito, Mizuko et al. 2009) among American teenagers demonstrated that younger citizens do not mostly become friends with people whom they do not offline already. Here in our survey, most community members became friends with people whom they already know. Males had a little bit more tendency to become friends with outsiders.

However, only 5% of participants chose their friends only from their own communities. Most of the friendships are a mixture of community and non-community

relations. In the mean time, %4.1 of participants never became friends with community members. Here male percentage is slightly more than female choices.

Nearly half of the participants stated that they have not shared any community newspaper/ website postings in their social media services. However, further research should investigate whether this is a result of insufficient community media sources or a result of anxiety of being harassed by others. A little more than half of the minority members follow community leaders in social media. Younger members seem to be more interested in following leaders. Catholic Armenian community has the highest rate (%71.4) in following their leaders in social media.

An interesting finding of the survey is that the more religious a member, the less interest in social media usage. Minority members are most likely to share political content when it is about a country-wide issue. Women are even more interested in sharing political content in times of a Turkey wide

event (60% of them stated that they shared).

Countrywide related political content sharing is followed by political content related to one's own community, which is followed by international events and finally followed by issues related to other minority communities. *Social media seems to be more effective in connecting minority members to society in general than connecting other community members or other communities' members.* Although political content sharing is relatively rare, most of the minority members believe that social media is a significant place for expressing one's own identity (70%). At this point there is not much difference between men and women. However, religious people tend to share less about political or social issues. Women are more hesitant to share to express themselves in social media. But this is more or less felt by all participants. Only 20% of participants declared that they can freely express themselves in social media.

About 40% of participants declared that they preferred not to

comment when they have seen an insulting post. 15% of them stated they have been insulted because of a post they shared. However, since feeling free to share is already low, the insult rate might also be lower. 39% stated they do need legal help against discrimination or hate speech while 80% demanded for more legal amendments to improve situations against offenders. Most of the participants were not actually exposed to harassment but they do need there should be more to be done legally. Nearly 2% stated that they filed criminal complaints against harassments online. Catholic Armenian Community members are the most who filed criminal complaints.

As a final note; there are some findings related to journalism issues. Nearly 80% follow news through social media but 40% share political content here. Potential to be harassed online might be a deterrent for more political content sharing. 58% stated that they never used social media to attend a meeting, rally or demonstration. However, this result should also be

investigated. This might not mean ineffectiveness of social media, but possible anxieties of being persecuted. Apart from social media services, participants follow all mainstream news media, from *Hürriyet* to *Sözcü*. However, there is less interest in pro-government news media. One of the significant findings is that most of the participants trust Internet sources. Despite heavy reliance on social media in news following, trust in Internet is not always high in Western context, but because of the media situation in Turkey, it seems that social media has become a trusted venue....

The Eliamep Survey: Unfolding the Social Media and Multiculturalism in Greece

Evangelos Venetis, MA, Ph.D

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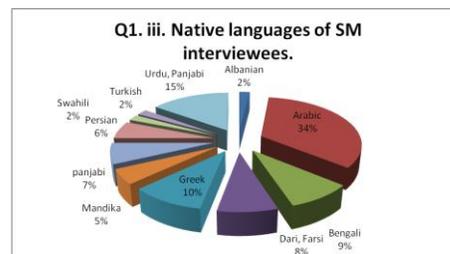
This research lays the foundations for future study at multiple levels of the study of the role of Social Media and religious minorities in Greece. It also highlights the new data that have emerged in the meantime. The comparative study between the Turkish and Greek societies in this subject highlights similarities and differences leading to further improvement.

The ELIAMEP research contribution to the research program of the Rum Community Foundation of Neochori-Istanbul involved the study and promotion of the statement for the respect of the rights of non-Christian communities (Muslim and Jewish) in Greece through a common framework of research action.

The method applied by the team of the ELIAMEP Middle East Research Project concerns the mapping survey and survey of the dynamics of the SM use by non-Christian religious communities in the capital and other urban areas of the mainland and islands. The ELIAMEP research focused on active and full social integration and inclusion in urbanized environment of these communities to the wider urban context of Greek society.

The main objectives of the research is to promote freedom of speech (right to expression), the framework of legal regulations (rights and violations of personal and

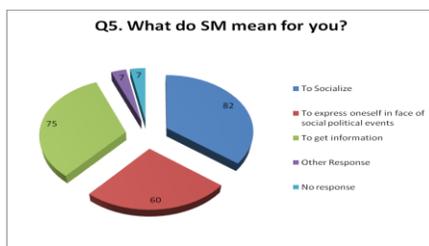
collective-Community context), qualitative and quantitative information (on speed level, reliability, unrestricted access etc.), and unobstructed participation in civil society through the SM use. It examines certain issues regarding the SM use, such as social discrimination based on religious beliefs, the degree of socialization and social integration, relations between members of the same community, between communities and those with the majority of the members of society. The degree of socialization is extended also to the sphere of political debate.



The juxtaposition of research findings focuses on target values of

freedom of expression-speech and the legal framework specifications. The indicators-research results are the information and participation in civil society by socializing and relationships of the members of each community together. The introductory framework of the questionnaire sets out the main parameters of the identity of the interviewee as a key element for the understanding of the individual quality characteristics of responses.

This research was conducted at a time of particular importance both for the respect of human rights of non-Muslim communities in Turkey, non-Christian communities in Greece and in general for the coexistence of cultures in a globalized world after cultural intolerance events that have occurred in Europe and the Middle East in recent years.



The research results demonstrate the level of harmonious coexistence between the Christian majority non-Christian communities of Muslims and Jews. Similarly, the process of integration in Greek society such as indigenous and not foreigners is very good with room for

further improvement in line and in many cases surpassing other European Union member states on this issue.

The study of the role of SM in the above process is generally at an early stage. This research lays the foundations for future study at multiple levels and highlights the new data that have emerged in the meantime. The comparative study between the Turkish and Greek societies in this subject highlights similarities and differences in order to further improve any imperfections. There is also the belief that the results of this research will be useful for studying and implementing reintegration projects of the non-Muslim communities at the heart of creation and daily life of Turkish society. Thus there is the following framework of general considerations.

Regarding the concluding general points, it should be emphasized that: i. in Greece there is in place the framework of freedoms in non-Christian communities at the level of society of citizens of the country; ii. The freedom of expression and the establishment-implementation of the necessary legal framework are in high level; iii. The indicators of freedom of information and unconstrained participation of non-Christians in civil society form a process that is well underway and is expected to improve further.

Comments

Visual Media, Law and Minorities

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When assessing a person's rights on their own images in relation to their right to respect for their private and family lives, the European Convention for Human Rights (ECHR) has ruled that a balance should be found between these rights and the freedom of expression.

"In the beginning, there was the Word. And the Word belonged to God and to prophets. The Word was the creator's. Over time, others joined in the speech. Technology and commerce accelerated the process. The printing press, local languages, universal education and finally radios and telephones allowed everyone to join in the Word. We all gained words, and therefore gained the world. In our efforts to take over the world, we made it less than a whole, neutered it, and locked it inside our own words. We are the masters now. The Word is ours!"

Gündüz VASSAF- Psychologist

Although the power to speak is now ours, words relating to God and religions include some that will never be replaced and that have long become conceptualized within one or more languages. Some of these words are about identities. Like Jew, like Armenian, like Christian....

Describing identities —or as referred to in law, the "minorities"—

with a single visual, i.e. selecting a single image to represent the entire people and communities bearing that identity, is actually not that easy for anyone. It is not easy for the bearers of that identity, and it is not easy for those who have an issue with and want to disparage that identity. Neither is it easy for the journalists

getting ready to share an identity-related news story with the public.

The visuals used when reporting news relating to religious minorities in Turkey, and hence the images with which non-Muslim citizens of Turkey are represented in the media were discussed at the meeting held in April, 2013 under the "*Minority citizens = Equal citizens*" project by the Association for the Support of Greek Community Foundations in Turkey. Journalists speaking at the meeting said that the visuals they have chosen include photographs of churches or synagogues, portraits of religious leaders or images of the properties of community foundations. Photographs of patriarchate buildings, community representatives, heads of foundations or communities and some well-known members were also among the images listed by the journalists.

Of course these visuals are not used only in traditional media; today they are also found in social media. Moreover, they are commented on and shared on social media. Using

these images, people can create new visuals; and social media users can refer to several symbols when they want to talk about non-Muslims.

Visual elements that depict images, photographs etc. of these symbols are also a narrative form. They are a form of discourse. Therefore, the language they use should not contain hatred, as hate speech alienates specific groups on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, age etc. by pushing them outside of the domain of moral and conscientious responsibility in the social imagination, thereby causing any unfairness they suffer to become psychologically invisible and morally/ethically irrelevant. Hate speech lays the groundwork for production of conspiracy theories and for symbolization and for using "a natural aspect of identity as an element of denigration."

While symbolisation is performed with regard to the non-Muslim minorities in Turkey, it has been observed that the visual symbols most commonly used on social media tools include fedoras,

crosses, the star of David, and the Turkish flag as well as photographs of individuals. So, what are the legal provisions that can be referred to when photographs of religious symbols are used with ill-intent by others?

Although every case would have to be evaluated according to its own circumstances, and even if a person may have posted their selfies with their own consent, they still have personal rights attached to that image.

And all our photographs—including “selfies”—, images, and associated memories are protected through various clauses set forth in various laws. In the Turkish legal system, individuals are protected in accordance with provisions of private law and criminal law, including Article 24 "Protection of Personality" of the Civil Code, Article 58 "Injury of Personal Rights" in the Code of Obligations, and the section on "Crimes Against Private Life and Privacy" in the Penal Code.

Concepts included in these provisions can also cover rights that

may not be spelled out directly. For example, "the right to privacy" is a right included under the concept of right to private life, and is about an individual's right to be left alone in matters that are a part of their private life and to demand respect for their privacy.

Also protected under Article 8 of the ECHR, the right to respect for private and family life is a Constitutional right and is included in other international instruments on fundamental rights and freedoms; nevertheless, it differs from traditional rights such as the right to life. It has been created and developed through case-laws in line with technological advancements. And for that reason, type of behavior that hurt a person's dignity are also discussed in relation to posts shared via social media networks.

Another important topic of discussion arising from this debate concerns freedom of expression. In many of its decisions, when assessing a person's rights on their own images in relation to their right to respect for their private and family lives, the ECtHR has ruled that a balance

should be found between these rights and the freedom of expression. This point was clearly emphasized in the judgment of the Grand Chamber (no.2) dated February 7, 2012 in the case of *Von Hannover v. Germany*:

"Although freedom of expression also extends to the publication of photos, this is an area in which the protection of the rights and reputation of others takes on particular importance... In the cases in which the Court has had to balance the protection of private life against freedom of expression, it has

always stressed the contribution made by photos or articles in the press to a debate of general interest..."

We hope that conflicting interests will not result in huge losses in rights, and that both the right to privacy and the freedom of expression will remain protected by the light of universal principles of law....

Social Media and Minorities

Rezal Koç

Independent scholar, Istanbul

The social media is a space of freedom. Various studies have been conducted in order to understand the advantages and disadvantages for the society, minorities and individuals. Social media form a sphere with less discrimination towards minorities in the future.

Our topic is related to social media and the interaction of minorities with it in the case of Turkey. Data from the year 2016 clearly demonstrates that, for one, the use of internet is quite widespread. Turkey has a population of roughly 79 million, and about 71 million have access to mobile connections – i.e. cell phones that can connect to the internet. Out of approximately 46 million active internet users, 42 million actively use social media, and 36 million of these active social media users access social media sites through their mobile phones.

According to another study conducted by Google, a large majority of internet users in Turkey are online every single day. When looking into the rates of this online population according to age groups, the highest rate is observed in the 16-24 age group with 84%. Of the 25-34

age group 77% are online every day, while this is true for 62% of the 35-44 age group, and 41% of the 45-54 age group. Another prominent piece of data is that the every day use of internet has reached 62% for the population aged over 55. It is expected that these rates shall continue rising.

A closer look into the rates of the use of different social media platforms demonstrates that there is a 93% use of Facebook and a 72% use of Twitter. As may be discerned from these statistics, social media is an effective force that has a large place in social life in Turkey. Within this context, one of the most important characteristics of social media in both Turkey and the world at large is that it provides a space for individuals to share their ideas easily, without having to physically meet up, and that it creates the

potential for this sharing of content to actually bring about changes in attitude, i.e. become action. In line with the view that social media is a space of freedom with commercial and political consequences, many studies have been conducted in order to better understand the advantages as well as threats it brings for the society at large, for minority communities and the individual. Elisabeth Noelle Neumann's theory on the Spiral of Silence helps provide further insight with regards to the virtual circulation of content shared by non-Muslim minorities in Turkey especially. Through this theory, it is, for instance, possible to speak of a sense of anxiety or unease due to the fear of isolation.

The Spiral of Silence Theory is based on the assumption that not only social groups which know each other, but also the society at large threatens those who voice opinions diverging from the prevailing opinion in society with isolation, neglect and exclusion; and that individuals have an innate – probably genetic – fear of isolation. This fear of isolation causes individuals to constantly monitor people and observe events in order to discern which modes of behaviour and thought are approved and which are reproached in their social environment. Furthermore, according to the theory, people have an innate ability or quasi-statistical

sense which allows them to guess and evaluate the public opinion, and what they say and how they behave is affected by the results of this evaluation. When they observe that their opinions are in line with the society at large they voice their opinions self-confidently in both private and public spheres; they express themselves openly by using symbols that may be seen by everyone in the posts they share. When they think they are in the minority, on the other hand, they adopt a more reserved attitude and remain silent. They thus create a weaker perception of themselves within society than is actually the case. The theory holds that this process continues in a spiral, as the minority opinion shrinks further, until it is rejected by everyone except a hard-core group that sticks tightly to their old value judgments or until their opinions become taboo.

In the socio-psychological sense, social media – the public – is a sphere in which the individual is observed and judged by everyone, where their prestige and reputation is in danger. The public is, in a way, an anonymous court of judgment. In this court, which may at times be quite merciless, a person who is subjected to the hostile reactions of their environment loses their self-confidence. Opinions and behaviours people demonstrate or are obligated to demonstrate in order to avoid

exclusion in spaces determined by traditions and habits constitute the public opinion. Studies conducted by Stanley Milgram comparing different cultures show us that in all societies individuals fear exclusion if they are to react against the pressure to assent. According to Thomas J. Scheff, the most valuable thing a person has, wishes to acquire and protect is the social bond. Those who win, who believe that they share the 'ruling opinion' tend to speak, while those who lose tend to remain silent. Only heroes or criminals do not care what others think about them. Freud argues that the feeling of acting along side many others excites and enralls the individual. This sense of belonging and safety, the strength to resist and the capacity to act – all senses that go way back – free one from the fear of isolation for a while, albeit shortly. People are cowardly and cautious when they feel alone. An individual is strong and self-confident to the extent that they believe many others think like them. According to Le Bon, anonymity forms a collective unconsciousness and loss of responsibility, which robs individuals of the sense of personal responsibility that usually holds them back. Furthermore, what individuals who share negative content on social media in order to release the tension they feel from not having reached their goals in their personal life are doing is using the

defence mechanism called "projection". The individual wishes to rid themselves of their problem by attributing to external reasons and other persons their thoughts and emotions that are either not acceptable in their social environment or contrary to their ego, their very sense of self – thus impossible for them to accept consciously. According to Freud, the source of projection is "the conflict of opposite forces," i.e. love and hatred. Love is a value that demonstrates social acceptance. It is thus foregrounded, reflected in one's conscious; while hatred is repressed into the subconscious. This repressed hatred in our inner world is turned upon the outer world through the mechanism of projection. While it is thus extracted, drawn out of the ego, it is thrown upon, projected onto others. Social myths, acquired stereotypical judgments, the fear of the unknown, as well as what opinion leaders and political figures say through mass media are effective in creating this hatred and animosity. Stereotypes are widely generalized beliefs based on very limited experiences. Stereotypical judgments are formed when individuals comprehend and interpret events according to their prejudices rather than the information and observations they have. These are a natural result of the individual's need to categorize

their surroundings. Through these categorizations, necessary relationships are formed between certain groups and certain characteristics. These judgments are usually negative. The relevant information has quite often been acquired indirectly, rather than directly through experience; and in spite of new information and experiences it is resistant to change. Once a group is defined through such judgments, this definition applies to and completely encapsulates all the individuals in the group.

In light of this knowledge, it is possible to say that one of the most prominent results of the survey conducted by Konda Research and Consultancy among non-muslim minorities (who make up approximately 0.02% of the population) between the 30th of January and the 17th of April 2015 is that the most common feeling regarding social media posts amongst minorities is unease and anxiety. 79% of those who took part in the survey have stated that they do not share content freely. Yet participants have also said that social media has improved communication and organizational culture among members of minority communities. More importantly, they have stated that this opportunity has proved important and beneficial in their

communication with all different factions of society. There is a perception of unity regarding members of minority communities, making it as if each member represents the whole. As a result, these minorities, who make up a very small portion of society, feel that the opinions they voice on social media is binding not only for themselves, but for the entire community they have been born into. This causes them to exert auto-control and limit themselves in what they share. The reason behind this self-limitation is their wish to avoid being subjected to hate speech under the guise of the freedom of expression, perpetrated by certain people from the ethnic and religious background shared by the majority of society.

Communities fear the unknown, and may easily blame what is unfamiliar to them for all the ills in society. The greatest duty here falls upon political leaders, opinion leaders and mainstream media. Minority institutions and individuals must also form communication policies to introduce themselves to and become integrated with the society at large through social media. The sole fact that a law has been made and passed increases the tendency in the society to approve of this law.



Focus on Non-Muslims of Turkey

Democracy is founded on pluralism, tolerance and diversity. Monotheistic religions with their particular common spiritual characteristics form a legacy of intellectual and social virtues for society. The communities of the monotheistic religions living in Turkey today are pockets of pluralism, cultural diversity, social support, and therefore democracy. Pluralism within a democratic framework is strengthened and enriched not only by difference of opinion within a particular political and cultural group but also by the coexistence of views and cultural groups beyond.

In this context, Mr. Lakis Vingas, Head of the Panayia Yeniköy Rum Foundation, former Representative of the *Non Muslim Foundations in Turkey Council Member, General Directorate of Foundations, Ankara* is interviewed about issues related to the current process of maximum demarginalization of Non-Muslim communities ahead of the long awaited announcement of the new Turkish constitution.

Q1: *Today the religious freedom of Christian and other religious minorities in the Middle East is jeopardized. What is the status of Christian and other non-Muslim communities today in Turkey?*

A1: In our days the Christian and other Non-Muslim communities of Turkey are in a much better position compared to the 20th century tragic experiences. Our Community members have more confidence in expressing themselves into the public; our confiscated properties are

steadily returned to our religious foundations; we have made progress within our educational system; also we have for the first time ever four Christian deputies at the Parliament in the three main political parties out of the four; we are celebrating religious services in the cities where there are no local parishes anymore; the Ecumenical title of the Patriarch is being used without any restriction. In general we can claim that we are experiencing an encouraging period

but the fact that our total population is not more than a hundred thousand people in the country makes us more skeptical about the future of the Non-Muslim communities.

Q2: *What is the role of social media in the effort of non-Muslim communities to have their own say in the developments of Turkish society?*

A2. Social media today is the number one tool of communication. It is a reality according to which everybody and every institution is under its influence and interacts with the society through this. The same happens with our small communities. We are creating our community network; we communicate our communal life events; we even have a live access through periscope to some Jewish prayers. Moreover the active participation of our members to Social Media integrates us further to the public and political life, raising our awareness to various vital issues.

Q3: *How do the members of the non-Muslim communities view the role of social media?*

A3: The social media platform seems to affect our daily life in the same way any other aspect of our life does, including community activities, gatherings and religious events. It is a platform of communication with other communities, especially with the wider Turkish community which until now had limited knowledge about the life of minorities as well as history and culture, up until 10 years ago. Social media encourage our members to express themselves freely, beyond communal limitations, which is an element for more transparency and internal democratization.

Q4: *What is the response of the majority of the Turkish society to the relation between the social media and the non-Muslim communities?*

A4: Social media has been a tool of creating self confidence, cultural dialog and knowledge of how people can face hate speech. It is a platform that invigorates solidarity understanding and the integration of citizenship.

Q5: *What do you think of the outcome of the recent Social Media and Minorities Project?*

A5: I think it has been very useful and in a certain extent it can be considered successful. We approached several new subjects and we have also promoted the role of minorities in various cities in political and social institutions. By implementing an EU Project we have achieved to overcome the difficulties of the past, by providing religious foundations. We have had the opportunity of demonstrating the positive factors lot of multicultural identity and cooperation by bringing together Eliamep, Bilgi University and a variety of minorities.

Q6: *What is the major contribution of the aforementioned project?*

A6: a) The results of the survey conducted us to new topics; b) The comparison report of legislation has been prepared by Mr. Ulaş Karan, aiming to be a guide to the government for their new legislation strategies; c) The work that still needs to be done with Greek institutions regarding minority and

migrant issues; d) The capacity of our so called religious foundations to be active in such initial social issues.

Q7: *Are the non-Muslim communities in Turkey ready to express themselves through the social media?*

A7: Yes, they mostly do depending on the generation and on their social and educational level.

Q8: *What are the future academic and research plans of your organization in unfolding the efforts of the communities to demarginalize themselves further?*

A8: We are working constantly since many years in this direction. We cannot overcome the limitations and difficulties of the past in just a few years, however in such a dynamic world, we as a Greek Orthodox minority of Turkey, along with all other minority groups should work harder and be present in every step of society, if we claim for a future in our land. EU projects and other project possibilities will be always precious contributors to express ourselves and our work.

Q9: *Are you optimistic about the improvement of the social role of Non-Muslim minorities in the forthcoming constitution of Turkey?*

A9: Yes, I am. We already have 4 non-Muslim deputies in the Parliament. Our community leaders are active. Rumvader as well as our institutions abroad such as Oiomko, are very positive in maintaining a constant dialog with goverment institutions. As we did some years ago, there is no doubt we shall raise our voice and claim for a decent equality as citizens of Turkey.

Q10: *What is the relation between the respect of human rights of Non-Muslim minorities in Turkey and the country's European orientation?*

A10: The Human rights issue is always a hot topic. It is true that in Turkey many rights were violated and there is still a long agenda that need to be upgraded. The human rights issue is also related to a cultural understanding. You need time in order to free people's minds and convince them for claiming their right. Some societies still consider it is better to be under a rulers system.

They feel confident and secure by experience. I can say that the issues considered as taboos 10 years ago are still not diffused.

Q11: *Is the Imvros Island a case study for the improvement, albeit slow, of the rights of non-Muslim communities in Turkey??*

A11: Imvros was an island with pain and suffering. It is a couple of years now that we work for normalization of the existing climate. We have achieved some important goals especially in the educational aspect and through this the return of some young families. Imvros is a pivotal Project and it must be successful. We cannot speak for a future if we do not feel at home. We need security, schools, jobs, the return of the confiscated properties and than we may hope for a new future without being stuck to a painful past.

Q12: *Has the demand for the re-opening of the Chalke Theological School been adequately promoted through the social media?*

A12: Unfortunately, Chalke Theological School from a school issue has become a chess play in the political arena. This pending matter

for almost half a century has cost a lot to the mission of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Monitoring the Middle East

General News

Afghanistan

Helmand Province under Taliban control (21 December, 2015)

Members of the Taliban militant group have according to some reports taken control of a district in Afghanistan's southern province of Helmand. A provincial police source, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Taliban militants overran Sangin district on Sunday afternoon, and captured the government building as well as the police headquarters there, Pajhwok Afghan News reported..

Cyprus

Tornado Bombers raided Syria from Akrotiri (3 December, 2015)

British bombers type "Tornado" which took off from Cape Bases in Cyprus, carried out the first air strikes in Syria, a few hours after the decision of the House of Commons for business expansion against the ISIS beyond Iraq. Specifically, a pair of fighters took off from Cyprus about an hour after the vote of British MPs and later followed by two more aircraft. The first aircraft returned after about three hours at the base, without the three missiles type «Paveway» bearing, which testifies that the attacks were made against fixed targets. Early reports indicate that hit oil installations controlled by ISIS..

Egypt

Egyptian brigadier assassinated in Sinai (20 December, 2015)

A molotov bomb explosion killed 12 people and injured six today, at a restaurant in Cairo. One of the officials said the attack perpetrator is an employee who had been dismissed from the restaurant located in the district Agkouza in the center of the Egyptian capital. Security officials had reported earlier that the dead from

the attack amounted to 18, according to agency Reuters. The AFP reported that the attack occurred at a discotheque and that the dead are 12.

Islamic militants have claimed responsibility for attacks with bombs and gunfire in Egypt; most have occurred against members of the security services since the army overthrew Islamist President Mohamed Morsi, a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood in 2013 after massive protests for the exercise of power.

Greece

Greek Parliament urges Government to recognize Palestinian State

(22 December, 2015)

The Greek Parliament voted unanimously to urge the Greek government recognize the independent State of Palestine. The decision coincided with the visit to Greece by the President of Palestine, Mahmoud Abbas, from Sunday to Tuesday.

On Monday the president of Palestine met first with the President of the Hellenic Republic, Prokopis Pavlopoulos; then he met Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras at the Maximos House. On Tuesday, the president of Palestine visited the Greek Parliament, where he met with President of the Chamber, Nickos Voutsis, and then delivered a speech in the Chamber of the Senate. Afterwards, Mr. Abbas met with the Archbishop of Athens and All Greece Hieronymus.

Greece and UAE strengthen military ties (10 November, 2015)

To strengthen and deepen defense and military cooperation between the United Arab Emirates and Greece, agreed the successor of Abu Dhabi and deputy supreme commander of the UAE Armed Forces Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nachgian and the Minister of National Defence Panos Glowing, during their meeting in Dubai, within the official visit of the Greek Minister of the United Arab Emirates. At the same time, it found coincidence estimates for regional

issues and agreed to cooperate and contribute to the prevalence of stability and security in the region.

Iran

Ayyatollah Khamenei: The US tries to penetrate Iran (26 November, 2015)

The United States of America is using sex, money and the western lifestyle in penetrating the Iranian elite and the corrupt, claimed the supreme leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The statements of Khamenei, who has the final say in state affairs, were made after a wave of arrests of journalists and intellectuals by the authorities in Tehran because of Western penetration of fear in the country following the agreement signed in Iran with great powers for Nuclear.

"Two things mainly used for this infiltration, money and sexual attraction. They are used to change the beliefs, opinions and lifestyles, so that the influenced man may think as an American," said Khamenei in statements broadcast on state TV.

Iraq

Turkey withdrawing its forces from Iraq (20 December, 2015)

Turkey announced late in the evening that "continues" to withdraw its forces from Iraq, following a telephone conversation between US President Barack Obama and his Turkish counterpart, during which the American leader called Recep Tayyip Erdogan to proceed with this measure to defuse tension between the two neighboring countries. "Taking into account the sensitivities of the Iraqi side (...) Turkey will continue the process has begun for the withdrawal of their troops are stationed in the province of Mosul" in northern Iraq, said in a statement the Turkish Foreign Ministry.

Jordan

King Abdallah visiting Moscow (23 November, 2015)

On Tuesday King Abdullah of Jordan held talks in Moscow with Russian President Vladimir Putin to address under the Islamic State "terrorist organizations" in Syria, Jordanian official source announced. Amman agreed in October with Moscow that Russian raids against targets in southern Syria, which borders with Jordan, will not affect the powers of the puller rebels known as the Southern Front and hamper the expansion of extremist Islamist forces on the border with Jordan, but also in Israel. King Abdullah is expected to express the Russian leadership's concerns about the fact that Russian raids in southern Syria, along the border with Jordan, can cause large wave of refugees to their country, which is under intense pressure hosting already more than one million refugees from Syria, told Reuters Jordanian official who is not named.

Lebanon

Ping-pong of mortar shells between Israel and Lebanon (21 December, 2015)

Mortar shells fired by Israel landed inside Lebanese territory in uninhabited areas along the Lebanon-Israeli border, according to sources of the Lebanese security services. Earlier, three Katyusha rockets that were fired from Lebanon hit northern areas of Israel, according to Israeli military sources. Cross-border tension is following the Israeli air raid which killed the leader of Hezbollah Samir Kandar yesterday night in Damascus. Tri Israel announced that Samir Kandar was preparing attacks against Israel from the territory of Syria, but not unequivocally confirmed its responsibility for the airstrike against him.

Samir Kadar assassinated in Damascus (21 December, 2015)

The organization Hezbollah in Lebanon announced today that the Lebanese fighter Samir Kadar was killed in an Israeli raid on residential building in the area Tzaramana Damascus. Israel had released Kadar in a prisoner exchange with Hezbollah in 2008. Kadar then joined the organization and considered that he had been senior executive. Hezbollah said the raid took place late yesterday.

Meanwhile, Israeli Minister "welcomed" today the death of Kadar, but declined to confirm the information according to which he was killed in airstrike Israel. "It is good that people like Samir Kadar will not be part of our world," said the Israeli radio the Minister of Construction and Housing, Yoav Gkalant. Asked if Israel launched the raid near Damascus, he said: "I do not confirm nor refute anything that has to do with this matter." Other Israeli officials, including military representatives declined to comment.

Palestine - Israel

Silvan Shalom resigns amid sex scandar (21 December, 2015)

Silvan Shalom, the Deputy Minister of the Israeli government, a veteran politician of the party Likud of Benjamin Netanyahu, resigned today after formal accusations for sexual harassment of women series during his political career, reported Israeli media. The decision of Silvan Shalom, who has and debts interior minister and has served as foreign minister of Israel, not expected to jeopardize the stability of the Netanyahu government. According to Israeli media, many women complained in recent days the Shalom harassment, but has not ordered investigation into such complaints. The television station reported that the Knesset Silvan Shalom announced that he is retiring from politics in part because of the effects that the recent events in his family.

Erdogan meets with Meshaal in Istanbul (20 December, 2015)

Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Khaled Meshaal, leader of the Palestinian organization Hamas on Saturday in Istanbul, according to sources close to the Turkish presidency, a day after Israel and Turkey indicated that they are close to an agreement to overcome the crisis in diplomatic relations, which lasts five years.

A source close to the office of President of Turkey said that Meshaal "Erdogan informed about the latest developments in the region," without going into details. The Islamist group Hamas controls the Gaza Strip. Late Thursday night, Israeli government officials have stated that an agreement was concluded with Turkey to normalize relations after high-level negotiations in Switzerland. Turkish government officials said the agreement has not been signed yet, but given the progress it would happen soon. The once close ties between Israel and Turkey have deteriorated sharply in 2010, when men of the Israeli Special Forces killed 10 activists aboard the Mavi Marmara, the ship that participated in a flotilla trying to break the naval blockade of Israel in Gaza and deliver humanitarian aid.

Turkey had demanded Israel apologize for the attack, pay compensation and lift the blockade of Gaza. For Israel, the key was to limit the activities of Hamas in the territory of Turkey. Under the preliminary agreement between the two countries Saleh al Arouori, senior member of Hamas who lives in Turkey, will be banished from the country and entry is denied, said Israeli government official.

Qatar

Qatar under fire for supporting IS (20 December, 2015)

Qatar, an ally of France, which has taken a lead role in forming a large suspended coalition against the Islamic State after the attacks of November 13, denies political or economic link with the organization Islamic State, however wealthy donors from the Persian Gulf States have contributed to the increasing strength of the Islamist organization, according to specialists. "The issue of financing puts France at a disadvantage once it has declared war on terrorism", according to Khasni Abidi, Director of Studies and Research Center for the Arab and Mediterranean World in Geneva.

Qatar, along with Saudi Arabia, categorically denies any connection with the Islamic State officially fight against the organization. They also participate in the Washington air campaign against IS from 2014 and especially Qatar hosts the US Central Command (CENTCOM), which coordinates the airstrikes in Syria and Iraq.

Saudi Arabia

US to sell smart bombs to Riyadh (17 November, 2015)

The State Department of the United States approved the sale of bombs for 1.2 billion euros (1.29 billion dollars) in Saudi Arabia to fill the skills used in battle against rebels in Yemen and air attacks against the Islamic State (IK) in Syria, said the Pentagon yesterday. The ministry informed the Congress, which has room for 30 days to reject the sale, which is unusual as the agreements have been checked carefully before announced. Sales mirrored the promise US President Barack Obama that will enhance the support of Saudi Arabia and other Sunni Muslim area in the Gulf Cooperation Council since the government signed an agreement on nuclear with rival Shiite Muslims in Iran.

Syria

UN votes peace plan for Syria (18 December, 2015)

The Security Council of the United Nations last Friday unanimously adopted a decision which ratifies an ambitious peace plan for Syria. The decision states that will take place "early January" negotiations between the government and opposition to end the war that lasts four and a half years and simultaneously implement a ceasefire throughout the Syrian territory.

Turkey

Turkey's crackdown on Kurds (20 December, 2015)

More than 100 militants of Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) were killed in the last five days during a military operation unprecedented in range continues in the southeast of Turkey. The operation, carried out jointly by the armed forces and special police forces, has claimed the lives of 102 people in the ranks of the PKK, according to a new report released today released a security source. Moreover, at least two soldiers and five citizens have lost their lives in the conflict, stated the same source. Altogether, 10,000 men supported by tanks have been mobilized and involved in this business that aims to expel Kurdish militants from urban centers, and focuses on two cities near the Syria-Iraq border, Tzizre and Silopi. In these two regions of Sirnak province has imposed curfew for days.

Turkey and Israel to resume ties (18 December, 2015)

Turkey and Israel are "near the final frame" an agreement to normalize their relations, and noted progress in adopting the Turkish claims, reported today an official of the Turkish government. On Thursday, an Israeli official stated that the two countries have found some places "understanding" to normalize their relations, which deteriorated after the business of the Israeli security forces on the flotilla that was heading to Gaza in 2010, during which They killed 10 Turkish nationals. "We are close to the final frame," he told reporters in Ankara, the Turkish official said, noting that it has achieved "concrete and positive progress." He stressed, however, that at present has not signed any final agreement. According to the source, the progress concerning two requests of Turkey to lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip and compensating victims of the operation against the flotilla.

The Israeli official said that the two countries have agreed on the issue of compensation to victims, as well as for the return of their ambassadors to their posts and launching negotiations to export Israeli gas to Turkey. All prosecutions initiated by the Turkey against Israel will be terminated and Turkey will refuse

entry into its territory of Salah al-Rat, a senior member of Hamas. The Turkish official, however, did not confirm this latest information. "We did not discuss specific names. If Israel raised such a request, we will discuss it," he said.

Yemen

Fresh fierce Saudi airstrikes aim the Houthis (7 December, 2015)

The jihadist organization Islamic State claimed responsibility for the explosion earlier today that killed the governor of Aden, General Jaafari Mohamed Saad. In its communication, the organization says it detonated a car full of explosives, while the motorcade Jaafari Mohamed Saad ran through a western district of Aden.

In a brief statement, which reported the news agency Saba, chief of the security forces in Aden, General Mohamed Mousad confirmed the death of the captain and several of his bodyguards speaking of car bomb attack, without specifying the exact number victims. According to eyewitnesses, two of his bodyguards were killed in an explosion caused by remote control from a distance. The fate of the chauffeur remains unknown..

Economy News

Algeria

EU-Algeria Association Agreement (22 December, 2015)

The formal assessment process of the Association Agreement between Algeria and the European Union (EU) will start in next January, announced Monday in Algiers Foreign Ministry's Director of Cooperation with EU and the European Institutions Ali Mokrani.

Bahrain

Bahrain Bay development is formulated (16 December, 2015)

Work has started on more sections of the \$2.5 billion Bahrain Bay development in Manama. Gulf Daily News reported that the ten-year-old project will see a number of projects completed in 2016, following the opening of the Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay in March this year. The 47-storey United Tower, a twisting tower development from real estate developer Investment House, is expected to open by mid-2016 and will include the five-star Wyndham Grand Manama Hotel.

Cyprus

Cyprus and the Turkish-Israeli Rapprochement (16 December, 2015)

Any pipeline between Turkey and Israel presupposes the consent of the Republic of Cyprus. The solution of the Cyprus Problem is a condition for the construction of the Turkish-Israeli gas-pipeline. According to the Israeli minister of Energy, there is huge importance between the normalization agreement of Israel-Turkey and the development of the Leviathan, which hopes to attract new companies to the Israeli EEZ.

Egypt

Orascom Telecom makes \$128 mn bid for CI Capital (20 December, 2015)

Commercial International Bank (CIB), Egypt's largest listed company, said on Thursday it had received a LE1 billion (\$127.7 million) offer from Orascom Telecom for its investment banking subsidiary CI Capital. Orascom Telecom is a holding company with investments in media, technology and cable businesses but has more recently entered the energy, transport and logistics sectors. It is looking to broaden its focus to financial services.

Greece

Greece in favor of Israeli products coming from illegally occupied Palestinian lands (2 December, 2015)

Greek Foreign Minister. Nikos Kotzias, in a letter to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that Greece will ignore the signal that distinguishes Israeli settlements products and opposes the EU decision on labeling of settlement products and their separation from other products.

According to the publication, the letter was sent shortly after the visit of the Greek Prime Minister in Israel, where he met with his Israeli counterpart. The notes Greece is the third country declares that it will ignore the labeling of products from settlements and rejects the decision of the European Union, together with Hungary and Germany.

Iran

Tehran to seize frozen assets (27 December, 2015)

Iran is following US plans to appropriate some \$2 billion of its assets frozen in Citibank accounts in New York, Central Bank Governor Valiollah Seif says. US

Congress has approved allowing the Americans to claim Iranian funds in a case which is currently before the American Supreme Court, with the Obama administration urging the tribunal to rubber-stamp it.

Iraq

Stirling Group to train next generation of Iraqi workers (20 September, 2015)

It is reported that Stirling Group has ventured in a partnership with EU Iraq Energy Centre (EUIEC) to provide risk management training to the Iraqi oil and gas industry to help build a highly skilled and competent workforce. Stirling Group is known as a specialist in health, safety and environmental services. Headquarter of the company is situated at UAE. It is reported that the company will render three-day courses on dealing with uncertainty and risk in the global energy sector from its training centre in Erbil, Kurdistan..

Jordan

PM: Jordan supports tourism (21 December, 2015)

Prime Minister Abdullah Ensour said, on Monday, that his government took a host of measures and decisions to back tourism and to overcome the repercussions stemmed from regional situation on this sector. Ensour made remarks as he visited Jordan Tourism Board, where he met with its board of directors and urged its members to put in place scientific studies related to key challenges facing the tourism sector, voicing his government's desire to take more procedures to promote this pivotal sector since it creates job opportunities for Jordanians.

Kuwait

Kuwait launches free economic zone (18 December, 2015)

Kuwait has said it will establish a free economic zone on five islands with large investments open to the private sector. The decision was taken by the Gulf state's supreme planning council which met late Wednesday, the KUNA news agency reported. Planning Minister Hind Al-Sabeeh said the project is based on inviting local, regional and international private sectors to finance, execute and operate the zone.

Lebanon

Lebanon became EBRD member (16 December, 2015)

The shareholders of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development have approved a request by Lebanon to become a shareholder of the bank with a view to becoming a recipient of EBRD investments at a later stage, a statement said Tuesday. It added that the governors are the highest authority representing the EBRD's existing 66 shareholders, which currently comprise 64 countries as well as the European Union and the European Investment Bank.

Oman

Fast track for Oman's largest power project (21 December, 2015)

Oman's commercial banks have achieved a robust 10.44 per cent growth in total credit to OMR18.32 billion for the last year one year ending October 2015, from OMR16.59 billion reported in the same period last year, according to the latest monthly statistics released by the Central Bank of Oman. The incremental growth for the last one year was OMR1,731.8 million, which is more or less in line with the loan growth seen in 2014 and was mostly driven by both the corporate and retails segments.

Palestine - Israel

EU strains ties with Israel over products from the occupied territories (30 September, 2015)

In a stinging rebuke to Israel, the European Union insisted on Wednesday that some goods produced on land seized in the 1967 war must be labeled “made in settlements,” a mandate that added to Israel’s deep unease over a growing international boycott.

Qatar

Qatar to publish margin trading rules in next few days (9 December, 2015)

Qatar Exchange will publish rules approving margin trading in the next few days, its chief executive said on Wednesday, a tool intended to deepen liquidity on the bourse. Margin trading involves investors borrowing money from a broker to purchase stock. "Margin trading will increase liquidity. It's very important for investors as they've been asking for it for some time," Rashid al-Mansoori told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of a financial conference.

Saudi Arabia

Need for renewable energy highlighted (10 December, 2015)

The Riyadh Economic Forum (REF) stressed the Kingdom’s need to provide for alternative and renewable energy sources so as to meet the increasing energy needs that are met at increasing rates reaching 4.4 percent annually until 2035. This would require 350 million tons of oil annually, Saudi Press Agency (SPA) said Wednesday. In order to sustain the Kingdom’s natural resource, the need to look out for alternative sources is imperative, the forum stressed.

The forum emphasized the importance of preparing a national strategy for localizing alternative and renewable energy, considering them to be a top priority in order to protect the Kingdom's long-term energy security.

Turkey

Erdogan: Turkey will find alternative energy sources (5 December, 2015)

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan assured today that Turkey will find energy suppliers other than Russia because of strong tensions between the two countries after Ankara shot down a Russian military plane on the border with Syria. "It is possible to find other suppliers," Erdogan said during a televised speech and did very reason for Azerbaijan and Qatar. Russia is the main supplier of energy in Turkey, which covers 55% of the gas needs and 30% of its oil needs. Ankara introduces 90.5% oil and 98.5% of the natural gas it needs.

UAE

Abu Dhabi, Canada funds sign \$3.15bn US property deal (18 December, 2015)

A unit of the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority and the Public Sector Pension Investment Board, one of the largest Canadian pension investment managers, purchased 209 US industrial properties from Exeter Property Group for \$3.15 billion. The buildings have 58 million square feet (5.4 million square meters) of space and are located in 25 markets throughout the US, according to a statement Thursday. The properties are used by both Internet and traditional retailers, suppliers and wholesalers, the companies said.



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