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PROPAGANDA OF TERRORISM AND EXPLOITATION OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION BY TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS: THE CASE OF SWEEDEN

Yusuf ÇEVİK*

ABSTRACT

This article examines the exploitation of freedom of expression as a justification for malign propaganda of terrorism by the terrorist organization, PKK, and its supporters. The study also examines the concepts of terrorism, propaganda, and freedom of expression. Finland and Sweden submitted applications for membership to NATO with security concerns after the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in 2022. Yet Türkiye's concerns about the activities of PKK/YPG and FETO in Finland and Sweden have made the ratification process conditioned to some legal steps to be taken against PKK and FETO. The application of Sweden brought about some significant discussions such as terrorism and freedom of expression regarding the protests of PKK supporters in Sweden. As the Turkish authorities condemned and declared the incidents as propaganda of terrorism, Sweden declared it to be regarded in the frame of freedom of expression. The relation between propaganda of terrorism and freedom of expression has always been a knife-edge discussion. By analyzing the existing international regulations and literature on the propaganda of terrorism and freedom of expression, this article follows a qualitative method. As a result of the analysis, it is concluded that freedom of expression cannot be considered a justification for malign propaganda of terrorism.

Keywords: *Propaganda, Freedom of Expression, Terrorism, PKK/YPG, NATO, Sweden.*

TERÖR PROPAGANDASI VE İFADE ÖZGÜRLÜĞÜNÜN TERÖR ÖRGÜTLERİ TARAFINDAN İSTİSMARI: İSVEÇ ÖRNEĞİ

ÖZET

Bu makale ifade özgürlüğünün habis terör propagandasının bir bahanesi olarak İsveç'te PKK ve yandaşları tarafından istismar edilmesini incelemektedir. Çalışmada ayrıca terör, propaganda ve ifade özgürlüğü kavramları incelenmiş, bu kavramlar arasındaki ilişki üzerinde durulmuştur. 24 Ocak 2022 yılında başlayan Rusya Ukrayna savaşından sonra, Finlandiya ve İsveç Rusya'dan duydukları güvenlik kaygıları gerekçesiyle NATO'ya katılmak için harekete geçtiler. Ancak bu ülkelerin terör örgütleri PKK/YPG ve FETÖ'ye verdikleri destek ve himaye nedeniyle üyelikleri Türkiye tarafından bu örgütlere karşı belirli yasal

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adımların atılması şartına bağlandı. İsveç'te meydana gelen PKK lehine protestolar terör propagandası ve ifade özgürlüğü gibi kavramların tartışılmasına neden oldu. Türk makamları olayları kınayarak bunun bir terör propagandası olduğunu belirtmeler de İsveç bu eylemlerin ifade özgürlüğü kapsamında değerlendirilmesi gerektiğini belirtmektedir. İsveç örneğinde olduğu gibi, terör propagandası ve ifade özgürlüğü arasındaki ilişki genellikle bıçak sırtı bir tartışma olmuştur. Bu makale bu ikili arasındaki karmaşık ilişkiyi İsveç kapsamında uluslararası düzenlemeleri ve alandaki yazınları inceleyerek nitel bir araştırma ortaya koymaktadır. Bu incelemelerin neticesinde, bu çalışma ifade özgürlüğünün habis terör propagandasının bir bahanesi olarak değerlendirilemeyeceği sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Propaganda, İfade Özgürlüğü, Terörizm, PKK/YPG, NATO, İsveç.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Russian occupation of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 led to unease among some of the European countries sharing borders with Russia. The countries like Sweden, Poland, and Finland, and also the ones that gained their independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union have been feeling serious security threats. Having felt this threat from Russia, Finland, and Sweden resorted to becoming a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which has been functioning as a political and military alliance. Their application process started right after the Russian occupation in March 2022. According to NATO's enlargement policy based on Article 10, all member states must ratify the applicants' membership (Trilateral Memorandum, 2023). Moving from this point, Türkiye, one of the members of NATO since 1952, plays a key role for these applicant countries, which have had political disputes over PKK (the Kurdistan Workers Party) a designated terrorist organization by many countries and international organizations including the United State, the United Nations, and the European Union.

For many years, the support for the terrorist organization PKK and the extradition of the terrorists to Türkiye have been matters of political conflict between Türkiye and the applicant countries, Sweden and Finland. Especially, PKK has been maintaining its existence and propaganda in Sweden without difficulties (Yeşiltaş, 2019, pp. 479-509). Depending on that, Türkiye conditioned the membership of these countries to make legal requirements to prevent support to the terrorist organizations and to extradite the terrorists to Türkiye. Accordingly, Türkiye, Sweden, and Finland agreed upon and signed the trilateral memorandum at the Madrid NATO summit on June 28 of June 2022. In the signed memorandum, Finland and Sweden

pledged their unwavering support to Türkiye in the face of any challenges to its security. Both countries declared that they will not support PKK/YPG, and FETO (the group known as the Fethullah terrorist organization). By stating their support to Türkiye for countering terrorism, Finland and Sweden also pledged to put an end to the PKK's activities as well as those of all other terrorist organizations, their offshoots, and those engaging in affiliations with these organizations (NATO, 2023). Accordingly, after meeting with the Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson in the Vilnius Summit on the 10th of July 2023, President Erdoğan gave Sweden the green light for NATO membership, declaring that they would bring it to the Turkish parliament for approval. They agreed upon the coordination of the two countries in fighting terrorism and cooperation in security areas. Especially, it is stated in Swedish media that Türkiye and Sweden reached an agreement about the prevention of terrorist groups like PKK/YPG in Sweden (“The Common Points”, 2023).

Based on the mutual agreements, it can be stated that the Swedish parliament issued the anti-terror law on the 3rd of May 2023 to meet Türkiye’s demands on the terrorist groups, which might have affected Turkish authorities to revise their decision about Sweden’s membership. The law was put into force as of the 1st of June 2023. According to the new law, the member of a terrorist organization will be sentenced to four years of imprisonment. Those who aid and abet terrorist organizations will also be sentenced to four years (Altuntaş, 2023). Yet the PKK/YPG supporters in Sweden have already launched multiple protests against Türkiye and President Erdoğan, which raised resentment against Sweden both at societal and political levels. Right after the burning of the Koran by a far-right politician, Rasmus Paludan, in front of the Turkish Embassy with the permission of Swedish authorities, a group of protestors called the Swedish Solidarity Committee for Rojava hanged an effigy of President Erdogan implying his execution in one of those protests in Stockholm. The prosecutor, Lukas Erikson, decided that there was no need to start a prosecution against the events by grounding it onto freedom of expression (Chatterjee, 2023). Additionally, the protests by the PKK supporters have not decreased. In another protest on the 4th of June, the PKK supporters protested Türkiye and President Erdoğan by carrying the flags and posters of the terrorist organization (TRT Haber, 2023). In response to the protests, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye published a press release strongly

condemning the protests and accused the government of Sweden of permitting the PKK-oriented groups to carry out such protests which Türkiye called as the propaganda of the terrorist organization (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, 2023). The Swedish minister of Foreign Affairs, Tobias Billstrom, explained that even though they did not agree with the opinions stated in the protests, the protests were legal depending on the wide range of freedom of expression in Sweden (CNN, 2023). All of these protests have raised the tension between Türkiye and Sweden, and it is clear that the events may increase even the risk of the Turkish ratification of Sweden's participation in NATO unless the necessary steps have been taken by the Swedish government. Taking necessary steps regarding Türkiye's concerns would contribute to the fight of Türkiye against terrorism, and it might facilitate the process of membership of Sweden to NATO, in which the two countries are expected to be allies in terms of security concerns. In this sense, preventing the propaganda of the terrorist organization, PKK, has a significant role between the two countries.

Türkiye's description of the events as terrorists' propaganda and Sweden's defining them as the freedom of expression has ventilated the discussions around propaganda of terrorism and freedom of expression. Correspondingly, it raised the question of whether freedom of expression can be used as a justification for malign propaganda of terrorism. While there is a complicated relationship between the propaganda of terrorism and freedom of expression, can the propaganda activities of PKK in Sweden be considered within the context of freedom of expression? By scrutinizing this question, in this paper, a definition of terrorism, propaganda, and its use by terrorist organizations will be put forward. The idea of freedom of expression within the context of international legal frameworks will also be discussed. Based on the regulations by the United Nations and the European Union, it will be discussed in which circumstances freedom of expression can be subjected to restrictions. The paper will also analyze how freedom of expression is abused by the supporters of terrorist organizations as the glorification of terrorism as in the case of Sweden. Although the mentioned discussion about the exploitation of freedom of expression and propaganda of terrorism has been raised in the process of NATO application of Sweden, it is evaluated regardless of the application process of Sweden. The paper uses a qualitative research methodology by analysing current international regulations, laws, and literature on the propaganda of terrorism and freedom

of expression. The study leads to the conclusion that malicious terrorism promotion cannot be justified under the banner of freedom of expression.

2. TERRORISM AND PROPOGANDA

The national and international arenas are both affected by the contentious phenomenon of terrorism. The widespread impact of terrorism forces nations, governments, and organizations to take action and fight it. A suitable or widely recognized understanding of terrorism must first be presented in order to combat the phenomena. However, this brings together a problem of defining terrorism on which there is no consensus yet. The concept of terrorism has found its place in many academic literature and legal texts. Although terrorism has been the focus of numerous studies in the academic and legal literature, the definition studies conducted to comprehend its meaning reveal discrepancies. These discrepancies lead to some important questions together with some definition problems: Who can be labelled as a terrorist? Which kind of acts of violence can be considered terrorism? Is terrorism conducted only by non-state organizations or can states also use terrorism as a method? What makes guerrilla fighters different from terrorists? How can the struggle for self-determination and terrorism be dissociated? The questions can be augmented as much as the definitions differ.

Moving from this point, most of the scholars in the field endeavored to make a proper definition that did not reach an end by definition. Some scholars dwelled on the tactical aspects of terrorism, some on targets, and others on methods. Some of these definitions remain too narrow, and some are too extensive to be abused. As an example of this, the definition of terrorism by the Department of State of the US can be observed. The State Department defines terrorism as planned, politically motivated violence committed by subnational organizations or clandestine agents against non-combatant victims. (Schmid, 2011, p.44) One of the controversial points in this definition is that it refers to political motivation. Yet psychological motives behind terrorist acts are considered to be a key element of terrorism. Also, it is argued that terrorism does not discriminate combatants or non-combatants as targets. Accordingly, the State Department clarified that the non-combatants incorporate both civilians and military personnel who are not on duty (Schmid, 2011, p.46).

Additionally, due to the different points of view of the member nations, international organizations like the UN and the EU appear to have failed in their efforts to define terrorism. For example, the first international efforts to propose a definition of terrorism started in 1937 when the League of Nations convened for the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism. Other efforts followed in 1973, 1976, and 1996 by the General Assembly most of which did not reach the desired aims of the conventions. One of the most important reasons for these failures was that most of the member states wanted to draw borders of terrorism and armed resistance against foreign occupation (Hanhimaki, 2013, p.5). The importance of a clear-cut universal definition of terrorism shows itself in the struggle against terrorism since it can legitimize the counter-terrorism of states that are combatting it (McCann and Pimley, 2020, p.808). Besides, defining terrorism universally is significant in order to regulate international and domestic laws. For instance, as a form of political violence, which is a broadly accepted constituent of terrorism, it is really difficult to make clear distinctions between terrorism and political violence. The discussions over how to classify political violence in all of its varied manifestations such as riots, uprisings, and rebellions are closely related to the discussions about how to define terrorism (Saul, 2006, p.5). Accordingly, the resolution of 1564 of the UNSC provides a definition of terrorism as “criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organization to do or to abstain from doing any act.” (The UNSC, 2004). According to the definition of the European Council, terrorist offenses are acts carried out with an impulsion of seriously intimidating a population, forcing a country or a government or an international organization to act out or refrain from implementing any action, or seriously undermining or destroy basic structures of a nation or a government such as political, constitutional, economic, or social systems (Council of the European Union, 2017).

Ganor provides another definition of terrorism as the intentional use of violence or the threat of violence against individuals or civilian targets in order to achieve political goals (Ganor, 2002, p.294). To differentiate between a terrorist and a guerrilla fighter, Ganor underlines that the target of terrorism is definitely civilians, whereas guerrilla fighters target military

personnel if they are in decision-making positions regardless of whether they are on duty or not (Ganor, 2002, p.288). In addition to the target, another controversial issue in the definition of terrorism is whether it is a non-state activity or it can also be a state activity. As terrorism can be an act of non-state organizations, it can also be an act of a state that tries to use violence and pressure on its own people or a population living in its own territories or using terrorism to influence the population and policy of other states. It also raises the question of which actions are considered to be political violence and which ones are terrorism. What differentiates political violence from terrorism is that political violence executed by states must depend on the law. This is also a disputable area that most scholars and some states do not agree upon since they can be sponsoring terrorism in another country. Moreover, in some definitions, agents of terrorist activities are considered to be organizations or non-state actors. Yet some scholars have put forward that those individuals can also be agents of terrorism like lone-wolves (Schmid, 2011, p.77).

Some academicians tried to overcome the ambiguity of the definition of terrorism by not dwelling on only creating a concrete and universally accepted definition, rather they focused on the constituent elements shared by most of the academicians. For example, Schmid (1984-1988) and Pedahzur et.al. (2004) came up with different responses while working on the same constituent factors of the definition of terrorism. By mailing and having responses to a questionnaire from scholars, Schmid's definition was improved based on responses he gathered from academics. 109 different definitions were initially provided by the respondents. Accordingly, he got twenty-two definitional items from the responses, which Schmid evaluated according to how frequently they appeared in the questionnaires. Some of these top constituent elements of the definition of terrorism are political, violence, tactic (method), fear, threat, and psychological effects. According to Schmid;

“Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi) clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby – in contrast to assassination – the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population, and serve as message

generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperilled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a *target of terror*, a *target of demands*, or a *target of attention*, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought.” (Schmid, 2011, p.61).

For the definition of terrorism, there are many disputable parts that are considered to be incorporated in acts of terrorism. Yet no single definition seems to resolve such a dispute. Drawing lines between political violence and terrorism, targets of terrorism, perpetrators and motivations behind it is difficult work to create a consensus on terrorism.

Likewise terrorism, propaganda is also one of the most disputable terms in social sciences on which there has not been a common ground to make a definition. Propaganda, in the widest sense, can be defined as disseminating or promoting particular ideas. Although the use of propaganda can be dated back to ancient Greek, its existence in social science literature was not as old as the use of the term. Ancient Greek philosophers practiced propaganda in the scope of rhetoric (Gürgen, 1990, p.35). Historically, the propaganda activities of the Roman Catholic Church are considered to be the first examples of systematic use of propaganda in 1622 to spread catholic ideas to the Americas and to oppose the wide effect of Protestantism. In order to disseminate the ideas of the Roman Catholic Church and persuade believers in a peaceful way, the Vatican founded an official organization called the Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide (Auerbach and Castronovo, 2013, p.1). Yet with the foundation of this organization, some pejorative meanings were attributed to the term propaganda. Accordingly, words like lie, manipulation, deception, brainwashing, misperception, and so on have been used as synonyms for propaganda (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2015, p.1). In the 19th and 20th centuries, propaganda reached its utmost with the growth of communication. Although the political atmosphere of the 18th century made propaganda a practical tool to produce political meanings and manipulate thoughts, World War I was a turning point for the use of propaganda techniques in order to influence societies. With the foundation of the Soviet Union and with the rise of Hitler, propaganda was regarded as a scientific field. Modern propaganda techniques were used for the manipulation of masses and societies (Taylor, 2003, p.178).

The term propaganda is based on the word “propagare” in Latin, which means that a gardener puts in the shoots of a fresh plant in the ground to produce new plants. Therefore, propaganda also means producing and disseminating new ideas. Additionally, propaganda is also considered a process of communication by which persuasion, manipulation, and influence of a group or an individual on other individuals or groups are aimed (Atabek, 2003, p. 5). According to one of the most widespread definitions by Qualter, propaganda is a conscious activity of a group or an individual to define, change, shape, and control attitudes of other groups or individuals by making use of communication tools, and hoping that the attitudes and reactions of those groups or individuals will be formed under their desired purpose (Qualter, 1980, p.279). By emphasizing that propaganda is a process of communication, Jowett and O’Donnell define propaganda as a conscious and intentional, systematic effort to manipulate perceptions and beliefs, and it is also a number of methods that are used to influence behaviours in order to evoke reactions that advance the propagandist’s intended goal. What propagandist aims is to transfer their ideology or message to an audience. The range of propagandists can change from a government to a terrorist, from a corporation to a company (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2015, p.7).

In addition to these definitive approaches, Ellul (1973) dwells on the psychological and sociological aspects of propaganda. He emphasizes that propaganda is the whole of methods used by an organized group in order to get the active or passive participation of an aimed group in the activities of the organized group by benefiting from psychological means (p.5). Besides, Harold D. Laswell, one of the prominent figures in propaganda studies concluded that propaganda is a psychological warfare (Jowett and O’Donnell, 2015, p.232). In this sense, it can be stated that the participation of a group in a demonstration or a protesting march actively or passively can be considered a method of propaganda (Gürgen, 1990, p.137). Moving from this approach, it can also be concluded that the demonstrations and protests by the supporters of terrorist organizations, like the PKK, are methods of propaganda.

Propaganda is a crucial tool for terrorist organizations aiming to reach political objectives using fear and violence. In addition to armed propaganda, terrorists use mass communication tools to find internal and external supporters and participants, spread their ideology, and legitimize

their actions. Most of terrorist organizations, from the IRA to FARC, to Al-Qaida or PKK, try to influence the masses by distributing pamphlets, founding TV channels or radios, using social media, or by organizing demonstrations (Bural, 2017). Moreover, carrying flags, signs, and posters of the imprisoned leader of PKK in those demonstrations like in Sweden are by no means practical tools of propaganda. One of the first terrorist organizations that used propaganda tools effectively was IRA (the Irish Republican Army) in the UK. What IRA aimed by using propaganda tools was to legitimize its activities via its publications like Republican News. Besides, the organization aimed to construct a national identity by dwelling on the nationalism, identity, and culture of the Irish people. According to IRA, all Irish people had to fight against the suppression of Anglo-Saxons in order to hold over their historical legacy (Wright, 1990, p.25). Spain-based terrorist organization ETA, the Basque Homeland and Liberty, also resorted to propaganda activities through their pamphlets and magazines in which they claimed liberty for the Basque region in Spain. Another example of propaganda methods of terrorist organizations is the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban is also known for using propaganda methods through its publications, pamphlets, books, and radio channels like Voice of Sharia. Mosques and religious gatherings were also significant for the Taliban's propaganda to try to legitimize its actions against international forces. It aimed to recruit militants and get support from the local people in order to maintain its fight against the enemies of Islam as they called it (Hairan, 2011). Whatever the purpose is, propaganda has always been a significant tool for terrorist organizations. Especially, the rise of the internet as an advanced communication tool paved the way for the use of social media for propaganda by terrorist organizations. For instance, ISIS, a radical Islamist terrorist organization, is one of those organizations that have used social media as a propaganda tool in an effective way. Yet PKK had also been using propaganda tools effectively until ISIS became famous to be using the propaganda methods (Bural, 2017; Gambhir, 2016).

3. PKK AND ITS EXISTENCE IN SWEDEN

This paper proposes that terrorism is a strategy and method perpetrated by political, religious, and ideological groups, individuals, or organizations that try to create a state of fear and anxiety among people, threaten peace and security, and leave its message through violence,

sometimes for revenge and/or for the realization of political aims, by targeting public or private properties, and civilians and civil servants regardless of their duty. In terms of its actions, the PKK fits squarely in the middle of the definition of terrorism. The assassinations it has carried out in Turkey since its establishment, its actions against civilians, its attacks against public personnel, its bombings without discriminating between civilians and soldiers, and its suicide bombings all demonstrate that the PKK is a terrorist organization. It is a known fact that many civilians and innocents have been killed in PKK attacks (Demirel, 2005). PKK which started the terror actions in 1984 in Türkiye is designated as a terrorist group by many countries and international organizations. The UN and NATO listed PKK as a terrorist organization. In addition, the European Union and the majority of its members have designated the group as a terrorist organization. PKK has also been on the terrorist list of the UK and France (Eurlex, 2020). Moreover, as the country at the center of the discussion, Sweden was one of the first countries that designated PKK as a terrorist organization in 1984. Olof Palme, the then prime minister of Sweden, was claimed to have been assassinated by PKK members because his government designated PKK as a terrorist organization (Yeşiltaş, 2019, p. 481). While being on the terror list of many countries, how PKK and its supporters are allowed to abuse legitimate tools is constructing a fundamental problem. What PKK aims is to reach its political objective by creating fear and using force and violence without discriminating the target. Starting its activities as a Marxist organization in the 1970s, PKK has shaped its objectives as founding a separate state, Kurdistan, in the region that the Kurds have been living with the majority, including the southeast and east of Turkey, northern Iraq, the northwest of Iran and northern Syria. The Marxist discourse and ideology have shaped the base of the organization that the Kurds, for PKK, and the region they live were exploited. Yet Türkiye would become the center of the target of PKK since Türkiye was the country that oppressed and exploited the Kurds (Şimşir, 2009, p.549). As a separatist terrorist organization grounded on ethnic identity, PKK has indiscriminately carried out terror activities causing the lives of civilians, women, and children. The violent and armed actions of PKK have created a great deal of sorrow and pain for nearly 40 years in Türkiye. In addition to this, PKK has been continuing its activities with the subsidiaries front organizations such as the

PJAK in Iran and PYD/YPG in northern Syria (The Ministry of Internal Affairs of Türkiye, 2017).

Sweden has been one of the European countries where the PKK-affiliated groups have conveyed their activities freely and intentionally abusing the tolerance of the Swedish government. Starting from the 1980s, the activities of the PKK in Sweden have been intense, and many organizations and associations under the PKK's direction were founded for lobbying, gaining zealots, financial aid, and propaganda. These foundations have been functioning under the name of cultural or ethnic associations. In this respect, the first organizations such as the Swedish Kurdish Association and the Democratic National Association of Kurdistan were founded by the PKK members who fled to Sweden in the 1980s (Yeşiltaş, 2019, p.484). For instance, the group that organized those recent demonstrations to depict their support for PKK and its leader is called the Kurdish Democratic Society Center. The members of this group carried banners that read "We are all PKK" which was a clear sign that demonstrations were carried out to show their support for PKK (TRT Haber, 2023). Accordingly, most of these foundations in Sweden have actively been carrying out their duties in order to support the terrorist organization, and they have been maintaining propaganda activities. In another case before the recent events, for example, the Kurdish Council of Sweden organized protests against the military operations of the Turkish Armed Forces in northern Syria. They claimed that the Operation of Olive Branch was a sign of ethnic cleansing of the Kurds in northern Syria. Additionally, many other gatherings, congresses, conferences, and public speeches have been organized in which some previous PKK members were invited as speakers (Yeşiltaş, 2019, p. 485). In this sense, it can be stated that it is possible to mention a diaspora formed in Sweden claiming that they help the cause of the Kurds and trying to legitimize the actions of PKK (Baser, 2013, p.111; Khayati, 2014).

PKK operations in Sweden have not been stopped despite Sweden being one of the nations that labelled PKK as a terrorist organization. PKK also carried out intra-organizational executions in Sweden, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s. Moreover, these executions led the Swedish government to designate the PKK as a terrorist organization, and it was claimed that Olaf Palme, the prime minister of Sweden, was assassinated in 1986 because he designated the PKK as a terrorist organization (Yeşiltaş, 2019, pp. 481-482).

None of these violent actions have hindered the propaganda of the PKK-affiliated groups in Sweden. One of the reasons why the Swedish authorities are not intervening in the actions is that the activities are being carried out under the PYD/YPG title which is a front organization of PKK. As the Kurdish group in northern Syria, YPG/PYD disguised themselves under the name of Syrian Democratic Forces which has been a Western-supported organization to fight ISIS. The most important reason for PKK supporters to consider their activities within the framework of freedom of expression is that Sweden does not recognize the YPG and PYD as terrorist organizations. However, it should be noted that in almost all of these protests and propaganda activities, banners and images of the PKK and its so-called leader Öcalan are carried by the protesters. As it is clearly stated in a press meeting by the former Foreign Minister of Sweden, Ann Linde, Sweden admits SDF as an organization that must be supported to settle peace in Syria (“Turkey to Europe”, 2020). That is another reason why the propaganda activities of these groups are regarded as legitimate under the concept of freedom of expression by the Swedish government. In another example, the Kurdish parliament member of Sweden, Amineh Kakabahev, whose extradition was claimed by the Turkish government, declared that the PKK-affiliated groups, YPG and PYD, were not to be designated as terror organizations. The groups that were saliently designated as terrorist organizations were claimed to be freedom fighters by the Social Communist Party secretary, Tobias Baudin, who had declared to work together with Amineh Kakabahev (Aggestam et.al., p. 2380).

Terrorist organizations like PKK are always in need of support to maintain their activities. These supports range from financial ones to psychological ones. Maintaining their existence mostly depends on the efforts of legitimizing their activities in the eyes of their supporters. In this case, propaganda plays a significant role for terrorist organizations. Alongside with written and visual publications, the internet, social media, and mass communication are useful means for propaganda activities. Furthermore, public demonstrations, protests, and establishing foundations are also used for propaganda aims. Accordingly, the demonstrations in Sweden by PKK must be considered in this perspective, namely as the propaganda activity of PKK. PKK heavily uses propaganda techniques with its TVs, foundations, and followers in Sweden. Basically, it started the propaganda activities by founding some cultural and language foundations.

The Swedish Kurdish Association, the Swedish Kurdish Cultural Association and the Democratic National Association of Kurdistan are the prominent ones that manage to organize demonstrations, protests and activities in support of the PKK organization (Yeşiltaş, 2019). PKK has also maintained its propaganda activities through mass communication tools. Starting from the 1990s, TV channels have been the most common tools to be used for propaganda activities of PKK. Although some of them were closed down in time for having been accused of terror propaganda or money laundering, they were refounded under different names. Most of these TV channels have been broadcasting all around Europe and the world, which has helped PKK to disseminate its ideology and activities. Roj TV, Med TV, Newruz TV, and Aryen TV are examples of these television channels. Roj TV and Med TV were closed down because of their PKK-affiliated activities (“İsveç’te Yeni Kürt TV’si”, 2006). In Sweden, The Kurdish Media Foundation runs the media arm of PKK propaganda. For instance, Newruz TV, which was founded in 2005, was broadcasting in Sweden by the Kurdish Media Foundation, and it was closed down by the Swedish authorities as the channel directors were accused of money laundering, smuggling, and terror propaganda. Although this channel was shut down, it continues its activities with a new channel under the name of Aryen TV. Another TV channel that goes on broadcasting is Ronahi TV. This channel, like the others, contributes to the propaganda of the organization by featuring the views of its members and leaders. It also includes broadcasts and interviews with members of the organization in terrorist camps. These TV channels also continue to support the organization's propaganda activities by using social media effectively. They share images of the members of the organization on social media to create a positive perception (Yeşiltaş, 2019, p.493).

4. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND ITS ABUSE BY PKK IN SWEDEN

Freedom of expression in liberal democracies has been one of the fundamental rights that have been taken under guarantee with different administrative implementations. Most of democratic countries have legislative codes and laws so that the individuals living in those countries can exercise this liberty. It is an individual's freedom to express his or her views and listen to those of others without feeling compelled to. It

encompasses all kinds of expressions that are now known, including spoken and written words and deeds. Depending on this, all types of expression are protected by the concept of free expression. Among many of them, freedom of expression involves the right to information, freedom of demonstrations, and speech. Freedom of expression is the source of both the right to assemble and the right to protest (Barak, 1990, p. 4). Nevertheless, the border between freedom of expression and the glorification of terrorism or the propaganda of terrorism is so fragile that states frequently claim that, in some cases, it is necessary to restrict freedom of expression in environments and circumstances where there is a greater chance that terrorist operations would be carried out. The justifications given range from the necessity to prohibit incitement to violence to the claim that terrorists and those who support terrorism should not be given access to publicity (Scheinin, 2015, p.428). In contrast, there are other arguments that one of the fundamental aims of terrorism is to prompt governments or countries to overreact by creating a state of fear and anxiety. That is why overreactions or applications of drastic actions by governments, including limiting freedom of expression might help terrorist actions to reach their very objectives like raising sentiments and tension in the targeted society (Heywood, 2016, p.359).

Along with the national governments, international and regional organizations have proposed legal frameworks to protect freedom of expression as one of the fundamental principles of human rights. These frameworks aim to both protect freedom of speech and address the misuse of freedom of expression by terrorists and supporters of terrorism. The United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966 provides the primary legal basis for the human right to freedom of speech on a global scale. The right to freedom of thought and expression is provided by Article 19 and the third paragraph of the article specifies the circumstances in which that right may be subjected to legal constraints. Particularly, when other requirements for their legality are satisfied, the protection of public order and national security are included among the legitimate goals that justify such limitations. Additionally, Article 20 of the same covenant recommends necessary regulations for abolishing war propaganda and incitement to any religious, national, or racial hatred, including discrimination, violence, and hostility (The ICCPR, 1966). In another international document that was put forward by the UN, resolution 1624 in 2005, the issue of incitement to terrorism was introduced. As a

consequence, the resolution issued a call for the governments to reject any attempts at justification or glorification of terrorism or any terrorist acts that would encourage further of these crimes. Additionally, it requests that member nations prohibit incitement to terrorist attacks. The UNSC Resolution 1624 called on the nations to make incitement to terrorism a criminal offense, whether or not a terrorist attack has occurred. This was done to make it an inchoate crime (The UNSC Resolution 1624, 2005).

The European Union, in addition to the UN, makes distinctions between the right to free speech and the promotion of terrorism. Regarding the laws and regulations in the EU, limits on freedom of expression that encourage terrorism are seen as valid constraints (Barak-Erez and Scharia, 2011, p.6). The right to freedom of expression is essentially protected in the first paragraph of Article 10 of the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights. With this article, freedom of speech, rights to receive information, and articulate opinions have been protected under the regulations of the Council of Europe. Although this framework of the European Council leads to strict protections of basic human rights like freedom of expression, the second paragraph of the same article clarifies that these rights might be restricted in such cases of “national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others” (The European Convention for Protection of Human Rights and Freedom of Expression, 1950). In another Convention for the Prevention of Terrorism, in 2005, the Council of Europe urged the member countries to make legal regulations for the actions that incite and glorify terrorist activities. It is clear in this point that freedom of expression can be constrained depending on the condition that it is abused.

Sweden is a European Union country with a constitutional and political culture in which liberal democratic values are practiced to the fullest extent. In particular, two important parts of the four-part Swedish constitution include fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and freedom of the press. For example, one of these parts is the Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, which forms the basis of freedoms in the constitution. In the first article of Chapter 1, it stated that the freedom of expression is taken under guarantee under the Fundamental Law. In the same article, it is stated that the basic aim of the law is to protect the free exchange

of ideas, information and artistic creation (The Fundamental Law on Freedom of Expression, 1991). In this sense, the Swedish judge's view that the burning of the Koran is an act of freedom of expression and therefore does not need to be prevented can be considered within this framework. The Swedish Foreign Minister's assessment of these protests as part of Sweden's broad freedom of expression can also be viewed in this context (CNN, 2023). The first rule in the Swedish human rights list, which protects freedom of expression, is a significant distinction from those of other countries. This is a wide definition that covers freedom of expression, information, assembly, protest, association, and religion, among other things. It is noteworthy that this regulation takes precedence above those guaranteeing the rights to privacy, property, and life. Thus, freedom of speech has a unique position as a superior human right in Swedish legal and political culture. An assumption frequently exists in judicial proceedings favoring the protection of freedom of expression above other interests or values, such as honor or privacy. (Schultz, 2023)

As a member of the European Union, Sweden also is bound to these regulations recommended by the Council of Europe. Freedom of expression can have limitations on the circumstances if it turns out to be the propaganda of terrorism. Moreover, Sweden constitutionally puts forward that some restrictions on basic rights and freedoms might be put forward depending on not violating democratic lines. Democratically accepted restrictions can be implemented according to the Sweden Constitution. If, for instance, the nation's security is at risk or if it could assist in preventing crimes, the freedoms of expression, assembly, and protest may be impeded (Ekiz, 2018, p.87). Accordingly, regarding the demonstrations of the PKK supporters, the Swedish Ministry of Justice issued a press release indicating under which conditions freedom of expression can be restricted depending on the Swedish constitution. As it is stated in the press release, if any threats or agitation against a nation or ethnic group have occurred in the scope of freedom of expression, then restriction to freedom of expression can be imposed (The Ministry of Justice of Sweden, 2023). In this sense, glorifying a terrorist organization that has caused more than forty thousand lives or organizing demonstrations to make its propaganda can be considered an act of slandering and agitating against a nation or a country. What can be derived from the above-mentioned points is that freedom of expression is one of the basic rights that can be restricted in some circumstances without

not going beyond democratic norms. Yet propaganda of terrorism, glorification of terrorism, or incitement to terrorism are not phenomena that a democratic society can tolerate.

5. CONCLUSION

Terrorism of all forms has been a major problem for people all over the world. Even though the ideology and motivation behind terrorism have been fluctuating, the effect that they create does not change. By trying to create an atmosphere of fear and anxiety among societies, terrorist organizations aim to reach their political objectives. This has led nations and governments to take serious precautions to combat terrorism. Yet the methods that terrorists justify their actions remain constant. As it is stated above, propaganda is one of the most influential tools for terrorism in order to get support, recruit militants, and justify its actions. Propaganda is basically the dissemination and promotion of ideas. Thus, there are no terrorist groups in the world that do not apply propaganda tools. With the advance of technology, mass media, and the internet, all terrorist organizations try to use propaganda tools in a way that their acts are accepted to be legitimate in the eyes of their supporters.

Like many other terrorist groups, PKK uses propaganda tools intensively with its TVs, foundations, and supporters, especially in Sweden. They have also been organizing demonstrations and gatherings constantly in which the flags of PKK/YPG, the posters of the founder of PKK, Abdullah Öcalan, and other signs related to the organization have openly been exhibited. Permitting the protests of PKK's supporters and letting those open foundations that openly provide financial and material support for the organization by disguising the nature of freedom of expression have played destructive roles in the relation between Türkiye and Sweden. Especially in the process of joining NATO, Sweden needs the ratification of Türkiye for which it tries to make some internal regulations regarding Türkiye's concerns about the terrorist organizations. Yet the well-known activities of the terrorist organization in Sweden might hinder the process.

Activities by the PKK and its supporters to legitimize the terrorist organization, such as organizing protests and disseminating information through the media, can be considered as terrorist propaganda. Sweden's broad understanding of freedom of expression will not change the fact that these actions constitute terrorist propaganda because they legitimize

terrorism and essentially a terrorist organization and have a negative impact on nations' fight against all forms of terrorism. The Swedish authorities' interpretation of these acts within the framework of their own political and legal understanding of freedom of expression does not change this fact. Freedom of expression does not imply the dissolution of the law, and freedom of protest does not imply the right to break the law, both internally and externally. In this respect, propaganda of terrorism and the concept of freedom of expression are contested and contradicting. Depending on the international legal regulations and efforts for the elimination of terrorism, it can be concluded that freedom of expression cannot be considered an excuse for the malign propaganda of terrorism. The international conventions of the United Nations and the European Union of which Sweden is a part have put forward the scope of freedom of expression and its limitations. Under some circumstances which threaten the security and order of societies, and jeopardize the mutual relations of countries, legal restrictions can be implemented in order to prevent the propaganda of terrorism. Accordingly, the demonstrations in Sweden and the glorification of the terrorist organization, PKK, can be regarded as the propaganda of terrorism which cannot be justified as freedom of speech. Whether or not Sweden accepts, it does not change the fact that PKK/YPG is a designated terrorist organization and its affiliated groups have not been bound to any restrictions in Sweden.

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