



MASS SURVEILLANCE TECHNOLOGIES AND THE FUTURE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

An Age Old Debate Revisited: The “Freedom vs. Security” Dilemma in the 21st Century

On September 28, the European Liberal Forum (ELF) organized a Ralf Dahrendorf Roundtable Event with the support of Friedrich Naumann Foundation Turkey office, Freedom Research Association and International Democratic Institute on mass surveillance technologies and the future of liberal democracy. The conference in Istanbul brought together academics, lawyers, legislators, and policy analysts from Turkey and around the world to discuss the increased employment of mass surveillance technologies specifically by the authoritarian governments and the implications on the future of liberal democracy.

This event was designed to provide a forum for the presentation and discussion of:

- (1) potential short-term implications of the use of mass surveillance technologies on the rights and freedoms of individuals;
- (2) the possible policy infrastructure options that would best respond to privacy vs. security dilemma;
- (3) acceptability and applicability of surveillance technologies on security issues;
- (4) how to maintain civil rights, responsibility and individual autonomy in the face of the increased capacity of states to interfere with our lives;

The purpose of the conference was also to generate international media attention to the recent problems in Turkey in terms of the rule of law, especially relating to fundamental rights and judicial independence. The discussions at the conference focused on today’s major challenges and how rule of law can be strengthened in Turkey especially with the help of European structures.



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The event was opened by the Executive Director of Freedom research Association Medeni Sungur . The panel discussion titled “Ralf Dahrendorf Roundtable: An Age-Old Debate Revisited: Freedom vs. Security Dilemma in the 21st Century by European Liberal Forum” was moderated by Nevşin Mengü from Deutsche Welle. The panelists were Dr. Salih Bıçakçı, Assoc. Prof. of International Relations at Kadir Has University in Istanbul, Andreas Haggman from the Information Security Group at the Royal Holloway University of London and Dr. Demir Murat Seyrek, Senior Policy Advisor of the European Foundation for Democracy in Brussel.

Ms. Mengü introduced the discussion by mentioning the control in Turkey of all media by the political authorities through the High Audiovisual Committee which supervises traditional media such as television and newspapers but also online media such as YouTube and Netflix. In doing so, she highlighted the general lack of media coverage of the problems in Turkey such as the fall of the Turkish currency.

Dr. Salih Bıçakçı then took the floor by announcing that we live in risk society and that it is easy to follow someone with the traces she/he leaves on the internet. According to him, we face a new age of technological authoritarianism where each information is being used to influence individuals. Dr. Bıçakçı mentioned the existence of intrusive ads and while he underlined the use of smart phones as helpful tools, he also highlighted their role in providing valuable information to authorities and companies, thus being a burden on individual freedom. These threats on privacy and freedom, whose distinction will be examined later on, raise the question of data sharing and of who is in charge with this data.

Adopting a different stance, Dr. Demir Murat Seyrek stressed that radical organizations are using advanced technologies and that many attacks were prevented thanks to the use of advanced technologies by secret services. He also pointed out that the use of high technology was very accessible and thus warned that banning high technology would lead to a huge black market. Finally rather than demonizing advanced technologies, Dr. Seyrek advised to look for ways to regulate them and to create what he called a ‘new social contract’.

Taking the discussion from a different perspective, Andreas Haggman informed that rather than trying to look for answers, he preferred to look for the right questions and first wondered whether freedom was only a matter of privacy. Turning the conversation around completely, Mr. Haggman asked: "Who is the threat and who is free?" while also reflecting



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on the success of social media and if perhaps people happened to be addicted to surveillance.

Overall, the speakers agreed on differentiating between the will and choice of users of social networks, and the monitoring of individuals without their consent. A point to which all agreed, insisting that the biggest problem was the individual consent to share the data, while mentioning the competition between governments and powerful private companies to hold such consumer data.

The participants which consist of experts from the areas had the opportunity to discuss the topics above and the event created an opportunity for networking and establish a sustainable network of partner and stakeholder organizations who are already or potentially involved with the conference themes.

In terms of providing a platform for the discussion of the stated subject matters in its aim, conference had been fairly successful as it was able to bring together an expert panel of speakers. Also, both the conference preparation process and the actual event were good opportunities to network with people from outside liberal circles but have a large intersection of interests.