



# **FMA REPORT 2020**

**“Socially distanced  
but yet acting together”**

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# INTRODUCTION

The **Foreign Media Association** was inscribed in the official register of associations in Turkey with the Turkish name **Yabancı Medya Derneği** on December 4th 2018.

After months of deliberations within a group of journalists we decided to create FMA due to the hardening conditions for foreign media employees in Turkey and the lack of an organization that represented our interests as they exist in other parts of the world.

Our aim, as stated in our founding documents, is to represent our members, who are professionals of the journalism sector that live in Turkey, and work for media outlets headquartered abroad. Our main mission is:

- Advise, represent and advocate for members with all the official institutions.
- Protect the rights of our members and provide assistance in emergency situations.
- Clarify and challenge statements on misinformation targeting foreign media journalists.
- Assist members with copyright issues.
- Cooperate with international and domestic journalist and media organizations.

During 2020, our second year of life, our focus was to expand the activities and to establish a stronger organization. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic we could not proceed with many of our planned projects and the bureaucratic work was also slowed.

We are aware that some FMA members might not have seen many signs of activity during this difficult previous year but yet, the Board continued working remotely and having discussion on how to best represent our interests. In the following pages you can find a summary of our activities during 2020. Mainly we fought to solve the problems related to official Press Cards, we took on some projects as the FMA Press Cards and digital security training that will become a reality this year, we consolidated the bonds with other press organizations and we streamlined the communication channels with the Turkish authorities in order to make easier our life as journalists in Turkey. And, the most important thing: we worked with our main goal in mind, this is, to make us feel that **we are not alone when dealing with a difficult environment as Turkey presently is for journalists.**

# MEMBERSHIP

We are currently 76 members in the FMA from 21 different nationalities. The most common being Turkish, USA, German, British, Spanish and French. During 2020 we had 16 new members, and two other left the association as they moved outside Turkey.

Roughly half of our members are freelancers and the other half employees. There are journalists, camerapersons, photographers, fixers, producers and editors represented in the FMA.

Given that according to the Directorate of Communications of the Turkish Government there are around 350 foreign journalists accredited in Turkey, we represent close to a fifth of them

## Changes in the Board

During 2020, we had some changes in the Board. Evin Barış Altıntaş left the Board as her commitments in the MLSA made impossible for her to cope with the activity of the Board. A similar issue arose with Batuhan Durmuş, as he assumed some responsibilities in other organizationn incompatible with him being a Board member. They were replaced by back-up Board members Bradley Secker and Jörg Winter.

## Our current board is comprised of the following members:

### FMA BOARD

- Chris Feiland (President)
- Andrés Mourenza (Vice-President)
- Sebnem Arsu
- Bradley Secker
- Jörg Winter

*Back-up Board members:* Sidsel Wold, Thomas Büsch.

### AUDIT BOARD

- Adrià Rocha Cutiller
- Christian Buttkerreit
- Güldenay Sonumut

*Back-up Audit Board members:* Ilya Topper, Jennifer Hattam, Volker Papst.

# BOARD'S WORK

The Board had several online meetings during 2020 and has a chat group where we discuss day to day work and other pressing issues.

Even if not as much as during the first year, bureaucratic work (book-keeping and accounting; filling different forms that the law requires; managing our social media; membership vetting and registering; checking payments...) still consume a lot of time of the Board, and specially the president. Thus we really appreciate that some members outside the Board have taken some responsibilities and lead some projects.

# GOVT. PRESS CARDS

During 2020, all the FMA foreign national members applications for a Government Press Card were approved, except for one first application. For Turkish nationals -which follow a different process- two of our members saw their press cards cancelled. We have worked to try to solve this problems.

2020 was, by far, the worst year in terms of delays in the delivery of press cards. A bit more than half of the foreign national journalists received theirs at the end of February but the other 150 received them from May on to the summer months.

This presented a problems as many of the foreign national journalists depend on this card to renew their residence permits and the permit for their families. Fortunately, after some weeks waiting, the Government accepted at the end of January to process residence permits before approving the press cards.

As FMA we worked a lot to solve this issue even if the Directorate of Communications (İletişim Başkanlığı) refuses to recognize us as a valid interlocutor and its president has yet to answer our petition for a meeting. Anyway we underlined our points in our meetings with Dogan Eskinat in Istanbul and we had constant contact with another official in the Directorate in Ankara to provide our members accurate information on the situation of the press card renewals.

Besides a campaign in our social media complaining about the delays and contacts with press freedom associations and European media that also wrote about this issue, we had several meetings and contacts with European Union representatives and other countries diplomats, in which we urged them to deal with this problem. They raised the issue in their meetings with Turkish authorities, even at the highest level.

So we think that our pressure had some results in the changing of the procedures. The new appointed team in charge of press cards said that they do not want to “weaponize” the issuing of press cards anymore. For the 2021 Press Cards, the Directorate of Communications started to process the applications or foreign journalists in November and by December most of them were approved.

The new team has also appointed specific persons to deal with journalists of a given nationality, helping them to reach the authorities but also following more closely what they write. We are monitoring this.

# SUPPORT TO MEMBERS

## Sharing information

**CONTACTS** The WhatsApp & Telegram groups the FMA has serve to share information, advice, contacts, trip opportunities and job offers in a safer atmosphere than other groups (all the new FMA members are vetted by our vetting team before being accepted).

**PRESS RELEASES** We have set an email list where every member can send press statements and / or information that can help our colleagues in their journalistic work ([press-releases-for-fma-members@googlegroups.com](mailto:press-releases-for-fma-members@googlegroups.com)).

**ADVICE** We also provided some members with help and advice in dealing with the bureaucratic aspects of renewing press cards and residence permits.

**COVID TESTS** One of our members was so kind to compile and share the list of laboratories and hospitals that do COVID-19 tests, and the price and conditions they have.

## Detention of journalists

The FMA Whatsapp group and the phone contact of the Board members has also served as a 24/7 hotline in case of emergencies.

During the refugee crisis in February-March at the Greek-Turkish border, several FMA members were held by security forces (also non-member foreign and Turkish journalists). Most of them were released in less than half an hour but others had to spent hours in Police / Gendarmerie premises. We followed closely all the cases together with our partners of MLSA (Media and Law Studies Association). In one case we had to send an MLSA lawyer to intervene and get our member released.

The reason of these detentions was argued by the security officers to be filming or reporting in “high security border areas”. But many Turkish media did not have the same problems. Thus, it was obviously an attempt to “control” the work of international media.

## Delayed payments and working conditions

Since day one, it was very important for FMA to protect our members, and specially the freelancer ones, from unethical behaviour by media outlets and employers. So we created an easy to fill and identity protective [form](#) to register problems such as delays in payments, copyright issues, unethical treatment or reputation damage. It is open for both members and non-members. Once we receive the complaint, our board members check the facts and try to mediate with the involved actors.

We are currently dealing with three cases of long-standing debts to our members by two Latin American and one French media. In one case we contacted with the relevant embassy, which

offered us support, but unfortunately the media company in question has been less than understanding. A second case was immediately solved once the FMA was mentioned to the media company. The other case is at the beginning stage of contacting. In previous cases we have intervened, the media companies accepted to pay the amount owed to our members.

We also wrote a complaint letter to Al-Monitor when they introduced a new compensation scheme that pegged writers' pay to page views. Some of our members are contributors to this outlet and they asked us for support. However, to the disappointment of both our Board and members, the answer by Al Monitor's editor fell short of addressing the concerns we raised.

### **Expelled journalist**

One of our missions is to press embassies in order for them to press the Turkish authorities to respect the rights of our members and journalists working in Turkey. In this regard, one of the Board members worked closely with the relevant embassy (a European Union member country) to convince the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry and the Communications Directorate to revert the *de facto* ban on a foreign journalist since 2017. The journalist in question, who had to leave Turkey back then, has been issued a press visa and a press card for 2021 and he became an FMA member.



# PROJECTS

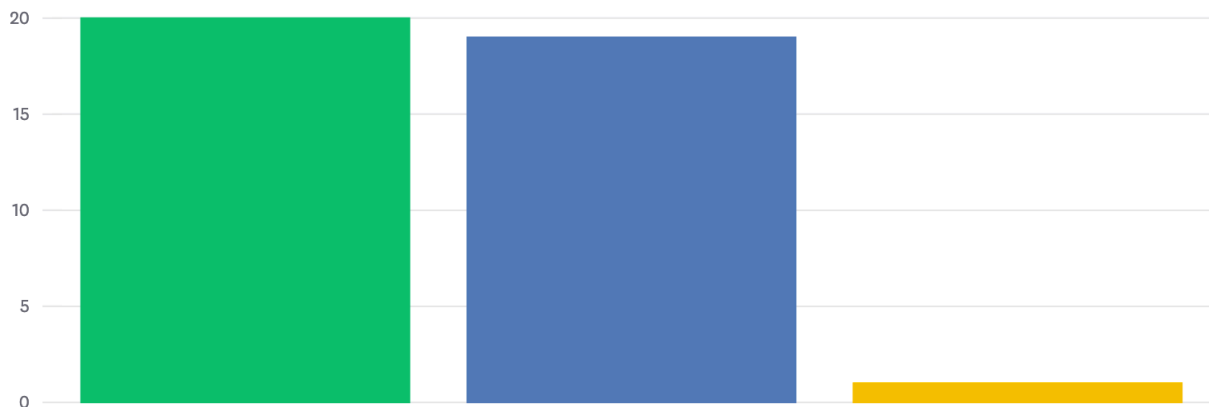
Due to the COVID-19 pandemic we had to cancel some planned workshops and meetings designed for FMA members (with Foreign Ministry officials and the business association MÜSIAD, for instance) and some projects were slowed.

Here there is a summary of the main projects we have been working on in 2020.

## FMA Press Cards

Given the delays in the delivery of official Press Cards and that some of our members got their applications rejected, we discussed the possibility of creating FMA's own press cards. In March 2020 we had a survey between members and the proposal was overwhelmingly approved.

### 1. Should FMA produce its own Press Cards/Membership Cards?



Yanıtlanan: 40 Atlanan: 0

I do not need a FMA Card, but its ok for FMA to produce one	50%	20
Yes, I am all for it	48%	19
I don't think FMA should produce its own card	3%	1

Toplam Yanıtlayan 40

The project advanced slowly because in the meantime we tried FMA to become a member of the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), which would have provided their own internationally recognized press cards to our members. After some months of negotiations and even if we had the

support of other Turkish journalist associations that are already members, IFJ rejected our application arguing that we are not a trade union and that recently they changed their by-laws not to allow associations anymore but only trade unions.

After this rejection we explored two possibilities:

**-Turkish Journalists Association (TGC):** they offered us to become members of their association and have their card. They are members of the IFJ. The problem is that each member has to apply individually and be accepted by their board, which is not a given thing taking into account previous cases.

**-Global Journalism Council (GJC):** is a newly formed association led by journalists close to Foreign Minister. They offered also that FMA become a member of the GJC and they would provide us with their own cards.

The FMA Board voted on these proposals and rejected becoming part of these Turkish associations in order to maintain our independence and avoid being entangled in power fights related to Turkish politics. However, we told both associations that we wanted to keep all the channels open to collaborate with them in different issues.

So then we started the process of preparing the FMA own press cards. We visited Istanbul Governorship as until recently printing houses would require an official document by the Governorship to print association membership cards (it is not the case anymore).

We focused on presentable, solid and secure design as well as quality to prevent possible forgeries. For that we contacted several printing houses and we prepared a budget. We ordered a designer to provide some models that were presented to the members for voting, and one of them was chosen. Separately, we ordered a printing house to print the holograms with the FMA logo that will be pasted to the cards in order to prevent forgeries (plus there will be a QR code). So we are ready to start printing once all the FMA members state if they want or not a card and provide the information that should be written in the card.

## **Digital security training**

This in-person workshop was supposed to take place during 2020 but due to the pandemic the project had to be postponed. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues in 2021 we decided to transform it into an online format. We have contacted the Italian Hermes Center and agreed with them in a series of webinars that will address general and specific issues of online and digital security. It will be offered for free to FMA members as the FMA will cover all the expenses.

## **Funding opportunities**

We are constantly in search of grants and other funding opportunities in order to hire someone that can help with the day-to-day issues and bureaucratic work to streamline FMA work and services to our members.

Unfortunately due to the pandemic these issues have slowed down and it seems difficult to find financing for this concrete aspect as well as getting it from an organization that does not make us a target of Turkish authorities.

# OFFICIAL INSTITUTIONS & CIVIL SOCIETY

FMA and its Board members have good working relations with several Turkish & International institutions, be it the Istanbul Municipality, other countries' embassies and the European Union. With the Directorate of Communications and the Foreign Ministry of Turkey we maintain open informal channels of communication.

Same can be said about the main press freedom organizations, as IPI, RSF or CPJ, which regularly contact us to inquire about the situation of foreign journalists in Turkey.

During 2020 we also strengthened our relationship with the following associations:

## **Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA)**

We continued the collaboration with our partners of the Media and Law Studies Association (MLSA). They helped us with legal matters (and made us a very generous donation) and we participated in one of their online activities, a panel on the issues faced by foreign journalists in Turkey.

## **Global Journalism Council (GJC)**

At the beginning of 2020 we were contacted by Kahraman Halisçelik, former press representative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who now leads a journalists association, the Global Journalism Council (GJC). After the initial contacts we decided to reinforce the cooperation with them as they have good connections with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and to the minister, Mevlüt Çavusoglu. Even if they are an association close to (a part of) the Government, they know how international journalists feel about Government pressure and understand our problems. Our president participated in a trip to Germany with GJC -its expenses were covered by GJC- that provided a good opportunity for networking for the FMA, and two of our members wrote articles for the GJC magazine in which they explained the goals of FMA and the problems journalists working for foreign media face in Turkey.

In exchange, GJC has been helpful in providing us with assistance and mediation to solve some problems of our members. They also provided the opportunity for some of our members to participate in a free of charge trip to Azerbaijan following the conflict with Armenia.

They also have offered us to organize background meetings with officials of the Foreign Affairs Ministry and the minister himself, but that had to be postponed due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, it can be done during 2021 maybe in a different format.

## **MÜSIAD**

The Independent Industrialists and Businessmen Association (MÜSIAD) contacted us to organize a meeting in January 2020. It was postponed by them and then due to the pandemic we had to cancel.

# ATTACKS ON THE PRESS

An attack against one of us is an attack against all FMA, and our commitment is to defend our members against all kind of attacks and obstacles suffered in Turkey due to their journalistic work. Also, through our social media we have shown solidarity to other non-members that have suffered attacks or judicial processes due to their journalistic activity.

Beside security forces harassment in the border areas, one of our members was targeted by a Turkish TV crew. Another was subject to an article defaming her work by a pro-government pundit and we offered her some legal counselling. Other had her WhatsApp account hacked. Another member has been sidelined by the Government and other journalist threatened not to work with him, and we offered our support.

Beside this we are concerned that the new associations law approved in 2020 can have an effect on us if we become a target of the Turkish authorities, a matter that we will follow closely.

# FINANCES

As during 2020 we could not proceed with the intended projects we have saved some funds. We closed the year with a positive balance of 42,566 TL (the exact amount may vary as we keep part of the money in euro in order to overcome the volatility of Turkish lira: on 31/12/2020 we had 4,002 Euro and 6,188 Turkish Lira).

The main income during 2020 was:

· Fees	33,231 TL
· February Get Together	285 TL
· Donations	1,000 € <sup>1</sup> (by MLSA)

The main expenses during 2020 were:

· Office rent <sup>2</sup>	6,700 TL (550-600 / month)
· Aidat	780 TL (65 / month)
· Book-keeper	2,760 TL (230 / month)
· Taxes	1,867 TL
· Holograms for cards	354 TL
· Other cash payments	100 TL

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<sup>1</sup> MLSA transferred it as 8.000 lira but immediately converted to euro: around 1.000 at that time.

<sup>2</sup> As a Turkish legal association we need to keep a physical office. The owner accepted an increase of 50 liras to the previously accorded rent (from 550 to 600 TL) in November

**THANKS FOR READING!**

WE WELCOME ALL YOUR COMMENTS AND CRITICISM

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