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Motion

Defending Freedom of Association: The Criminalisation of LGBTI+ Civil Society in Türkiye

Signed by: Youth Organisations Forum (GoFor)

Co-signed by: Belarusian National Youth Council (RADA), Council of the German-speaking Youth of Belgium (RdJ), Croatian Youth Network (MMH), Czech Council of Children and Youth (CRDM), Estonian National Youth Council (ENL), European Confederation of Youth Clubs (ECYC), Flemish Youth Council (VJR), Forum des Jeunes (FJ), German National Committee for International Youth Work (DNK), National Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS), Polish Council of Youth Organizations (PROM), Swiss National Youth Council (SAJV/CSAJ), Youth for Exchange and Understanding (YEU)

Urgency

On 10 November 2026, it became public that the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office was seeking the dissolution of SPoD (Social Policy, Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation Studies Association), one of Türkiye's longest-standing LGBTI+ rights organisations. The first hearing is scheduled for 18 November 2026, days after the European Youth Forum's General Assembly. It is the first dissolution case to emerge from the operations launched against LGBTI+ civil society in September 2026, and its outcome is likely to shape the cases that follow.

The case reflects a wider pattern documented by the UN Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association: the use of criminal, judicial and administrative measures, including raids, dissolutions and the stigmatisation of foreign funding, against associations for carrying out legitimate civil society and human rights activities (A/80/219). In Türkiye, these measures are now being applied together against LGBTI+ organisations, from access blocking and the detention of board members to financial investigations and, with the SPoD case, dissolution.

Background and Context

Across several countries, civil society organisations and human rights defenders are facing increasing restrictions on their ability to operate independently and participate in public life. This trend, reflected in judicial pressure, criminal investigations, administrative interference and restrictions on funding and communication, contributes to the shrinking of civic space. Türkiye is part of this broader pattern.

Over the past five years, the authorities in Türkiye have built a policy and cultural framework that places a single model of the family at the centre of public life and positions LGBTI+ people as a threat to it.

In 2021, Türkiye withdrew from the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention, with the Presidency's Communications Directorate stating that the Convention had been "hijacked by a group of people attempting to normalise homosexuality". The government declared 2025 the "Year of the Family" and, through Presidential Circular No. 2026/4, published in the Official Gazette on 2 May 2026, designated 2026–2035 the "Family and Population Decade", listing the fight against "de-gendering currents" among its priorities. On 18 January 2026, "tabii", the digital platform of the public broadcaster TRT, released "Rainbow Fascism", a documentary presenting the LGBTI+ movement as an ideological assault on the family.

This pattern of judicial pressure predates the September operations. Social policy, official discourse and public broadcasting have thus worked in the same direction: to establish an exclusionary definition of the family as common sense and to recast LGBTI+ organising as a danger to society. Since September 2026, that effort has moved from persuasion to coercion. The concepts first set out in social policy are now applied through police operations, criminal investigations and dissolution proceedings. On 11 December 2025, the İzmir 3rd Civil Court of First Instance ordered the dissolution of Young LGBTI+ Association (Genç LGBTİ+), a member organisation of GoFor, over social media posts. The decision remains under appeal, while criminal proceedings against 11 former executive and supervisory board members con-

tinue before the İzmir 47th Criminal Court of First Instance. At the hearing on 14 October 2026, the court decided to await the outcome of the appeal and adjourned the case until 21 April 2027.

On 14 September 2026, the Ministry of Justice instructed 175 chief public prosecutors' offices across all 81 provinces to investigate activities deemed to promote "de-gendering" under obscenity and organised-crime provisions. These instructions reinforced the ongoing crackdown on LGBTI+ organisations, further enabling the criminalisation of legitimate human rights advocacy and freedom of association.

The "My Family is Safe" Operation

On 12 September 2026, the Istanbul 7th Criminal Judgeship of Peace issued Decision No. 2026/9559, blocking the websites and social media accounts of LGBTI+ and youth organisations, student groups, media outlets and activists. This was followed, in the early hours of 13 September, by coordinated raids on association offices and private homes across several provinces. Board members, founders and activists were detained, most of whom were young people, digital equipment was seized and defence lawyers' access to case files was restricted. A police report prepared three days before the raids described the targeted activities as contrary to the "Turkish-Islamic family structure" and as part of a "foreign-based policy of moral corruption and division".

Further waves of detentions followed in October and November. According to ILGA-Europe, 78 people remained in pre-trial detention as of 15 October 2026, including 19 LGBTI+ rights defenders or individuals affiliated with LGBTI+ organisations. The crackdown continued with further operations, resulting in 19 additional arrests on 26 October and seven more on 6 November.

Youth organisations were directly affected by the crackdown. GoFor member organisations, including Kaos GL and Young LGBTI+, were targeted by raids and detentions, while the websites of Young LGBTI+ and ÜniKuir, as well as university LGBTI+ student groups' accounts, were blocked. GoFor itself was also targeted, with its official X account blocked on 16 September 2026.

The Dissolution Case Against SPoD

The indictment, dated 2 November 2026 and accepted by the Istanbul 27th Criminal Court of First Instance, seeks SPoD's dissolution and one to three years' imprisonment for four individuals under the Law on Associations; two of them have been in pre-trial detention since 16 September. It invokes family protection and public morality, and cites fifteen years of ordinary civil society work as evidence: workshops, film screenings, university cooperation, legal and psychological support, social policy proposals, anti-discrimination training for lawyers and social media posts.

The criminalisation of these legitimate activities sets a dangerous precedent, threatening not only LGBTI+ organisations but the freedom of association of civil society as a whole. Reporting on the indictment indicates that it identifies no specific criminal act in SPoD's counselling, publication or solidarity work. Provincial authorities have also reportedly asked prosecutors to consider dissolution proceedings against LGBTI+ organisations and HIV organisations.

The Case Against Kaos GL

Kaos GL, one of Türkiye's longest-standing LGBTI+ rights organisations and a member organisation of the Youth Organisations Forum (GoFor), has also been directly targeted by the ongoing crackdown on LGBTI+ civil society. An indictment prepared by the Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office charged 17 people, including members of Kaos GL's board of directors, including one of the former board members of GoFor, and supervisory board, association members and journalists, in connection with the organisation's activities and publications. The charges reportedly concern alleged violations of the Law on Associations and provisions relating to obscenity, based on content published on Kaos GL's website and social media accounts. On 11 November 2026, three members of Kaos GL's supervisory board were released from pre-trial detention. However, four members of the association's board of directors and one journalist remained detained. The first hearing is scheduled for 24 December 2026 before the Ankara 27th Criminal Court of First Instance. The prosecution of Kaos GL's members and the criminalisation of its legitimate human rights activities constitute a serious attack on freedom of association and expression, threatening not only the organisation itself but also the broader LGBTI+ movement and independent civil society in Türkiye.

Targeting of International Funding

The authorities have linked the investigations directly to how LGBTI+ organisations are funded. The Minister of Justice announced that the Financial Crimes Investigation Board (MASAK) is examining transfers from public institutions and foreign organisations, and pro-government media published the names of individual donors with the amounts they gave. The SPoD indictment lists grants received between 2012 and 2026 from the United Nations, the Council of Europe, embassies and consulates and international human rights organisations, without any separate finding of financial wrongdoing. The inclusion of these lawful funding activities in criminal proceedings raises serious concerns about the criminalisation of international cooperation and financial support for civil society in Türkiye.

Receiving funding from abroad is lawful for associations in Türkiye under Article 21 of the Law on Associations, subject to prior notification and existing state oversight. If lawful, declared grants from the Council of Europe and the United Nations can be presented as evidence in a dissolution case, then every youth organisation in Türkiye that cooperates with European institutions, including through the European Youth Foundation and EU youth programmes, is exposed to the same risk. The consequence extends to the participation of young people from Türkiye in European youth cooperation as a whole.

The ability of associations to seek, receive and use resources, including from domestic and international sources, is an essential part of the practical enjoyment of freedom of association. Scrutiny or stigmatisation of lawful grants, donors and international cooperation can undermine the operational independence and sustainability of civil society organisations. It may also discourage organisations from cooperating with international institutions, participating in youth programmes or accessing resources needed to carry out legitimate activities.

Relevance to the European Youth Forum

The European Youth Forum's mandate rests on the right of young people to organise freely. The measures described above target that right at every level: the legal existence of associations, their governing bodies, their online presence and their funding. In its motion Safeguarding Independent National Youth Councils and Guaranteeing the Stability of Youth Policy in Europe (Kandersteg, November 2025), the Forum has already called for legal safeguards protecting National Youth Councils from administrative obstruction and political pressure. Furthermore, in a joint statement issued with GoFor on 17 September 2026, the European Youth Forum condemned the crackdown on LGBTI+ organisations and young human rights defenders in Türkiye. The ongoing operations and the dissolution case against SPoD further underline the importance of maintaining and strengthening the collective commitment to protecting fundamental rights and freedoms. The present measures also engage Türkiye's obligations as a member of the Council of Europe, including under Articles 10, 11 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5.

Recommendations

We, as the European Youth Forum:

1. **Condemn** the criminalisation of LGBTI+ civil society in Türkiye and express our full solidarity with the affected organisations, rights defenders and young people.

2. **Call on the authorities of Türkiye** to withdraw the dissolution case against SPoD; to release all persons detained solely in connection with legitimate human rights and association activities; to lift the access restrictions imposed on LGBTI+ organisations, youth and student groups and civil society accounts; and to end the use of lawful domestic and international funding as grounds for investigation or public targeting.

3. **Call on the Council of Europe,** including the Commissioner for Human Rights, to raise these developments with the authorities of Türkiye with a reference to the Council of Europe Strategy for Equal Rights for LGBTI People (2027-203) and to state publicly that grants from Council of Europe bodies cannot be treated as evidence of wrongdoing.

4. **Call on the institutions of the European Union** to raise the case in their dialogue with Türkiye and in future enlargement reporting, and urges the EU Delegation and the diplomatic missions of EU Member States in Türkiye to observe the hearing on 18 November 2026 and subsequent proceedings.

5. **Call on United Nations human rights mechanisms,** including the Special Rapporteurs on the situation of human rights defenders and on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, to continue their engagement with the authorities of Türkiye.







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