

# Bonner Querschnitte

## Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

Phone: +49 4106 804806 · Fax: +49 4106 804807  
Email: [bq@bucer.de](mailto:bq@bucer.de) · <http://www.bucer.de/bq.html>

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## BQ 575 – No. 11/2019

### Religious Freedom for Christians in Turkey Restricted once again in 2018

#### IIRF publishes German translation of Annual Report on Human Rights Violations

(Bonn, 27.03.2019) The situation of Christians in Turkey was once again difficult in several respects in 2018. On the one hand, “there was a clear reduction in 2018 in hate crimes committed against Protestant Christians that resulted in physical attacks against Protestants and Protestant churches”. At the same time, however, there was a “significant increase in public hate speech” against Protestants, “purely due to their beliefs”.

Frequently Christians or congregations were mentioned in the same breath as terrorist organisations, unfortunately also more frequently including names, photos and the like, although Turkey also has a law for the protection of personal data. Many Christians fear from past experience that such verbal attacks will sooner or later result in physical violence again.

In 2018, the difficulties for foreign employees or church members seamlessly continued. Some were expelled or refused entry because their residence permits were no longer renewed. The most difficult case was undoubtedly the months in prison and the trial of Pastor Andrew Brunson, who had lived in Turkey for over 20 years and worked as a spiritual leader of a church in Izmir. The proceedings against him have gone through the international press, but are only the tip of the iceberg.

The expulsion of David Byle after almost 20 years of service in Turkey is also incomprehensible. Over the years, he has always scrupulously adhered to the law, and over the years he has been accused several times, but has always been acquitted. Finally he was accused of living his faith “particularly intensively”, which is

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**Text & Technology:**  
Titus Vogt (ViSdP)  
Vorderer Kamp 52a, D-25479 Ellerau  
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Email: [Titus.Vogt@bucer.de](mailto:Titus.Vogt@bucer.de)



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[www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/TN-47-1-Jan-2018.pdf](http://www.worldevangelicals.org/pdf/TN-47-1-Jan-2018.pdf)

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not an offence according to Turkish law. Although he has brought an action against the decision of the Turkish authorities, at the moment there seems to be no realistic possibility of returning to the country and to his family, who still lives in Turkey.

In addition to these particular focal points, a number of long-standing issues remained unchanged on the agenda in 2018:

- There is still no official possibility for the training of spiritual leaders.
- Most of the buildings and premises of the congregations are often legally only designated as the “locale for the association” and not a “place of worship”, which is actually a prerequisite for holding church services. However, there is still no regular way to obtain this status. The current status quo allows congregations to celebrate services in their rooms, but it is a legal grey area.
- Parishes can register as an “association” or “foundation”, but there is still no way to become a legal entity directly as a “church”.
- Although the religious affiliation in the case of newly issued cards is no longer visible on the card, it is stored electronically on the chip. This probably reduces the risk of discrimination. However, Christians have long argued in favour of deleting this entry from the card altogether.
- With regard to religious education, questions still remain unanswered, especially as to how to withdraw from Islamic religious education as a Christian without any problems.

Despite the above mentioned problems, most of the approximately 150 Protestant congregations in Turkey were able to hold their church services and other congregational meetings comparatively undisturbed in 2018. At the end of its annual report, the “Association of Protestant Churches” lists some concrete suggestions for making progress on the issues at hand in the new year. This also includes the central request to the authorities at local and national level to be more ready for dialogue with the representatives of the Protestant congregations: “Experience in this area shows that when the channels of communication are open, many problems are quickly solved.”

*The “Association of Protestant Churches” of Turkey has for many years been publishing a report on human rights violations of the previous year. The focus is on Protestant Christians and churches – not because Orthodox or Catholic Christians have no problems, but only because with the limited resources available one can only assess the situation of one’s own congregations seriously and in detail. The annual report is always published in Turkish and English. The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) takes over the English report and produces a German translation on this basis.*

### Downloads and Links:

- Annual Report 2018 english:  
<https://iirf.eu/journal-books/iirf-reports-english/iirf-reports-2019-1/>
- Annual Report 2018 german:  
<https://iirf.eu/journal-books/iirf-bulletin-german/iirf-bulletin-2019-1/>

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- Annual Report 2017 german:  
<https://iirf.eu/journal-books/iirf-bulletin-german/iirf-bulletin-2018-2/>

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