

Turkey: Assaults on freedom of expression continue

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Ragip Zarakolu, owner of the Belge Publishing House and chairman of the Committee for Publishing Freedom, is facing up to three years in prison for publishing a book by a British-Armenian author, George Jerjian, entitled *The Truth Will Set Us Free*. The book deals with the mass deportations of Armenians in 1915 and chronicles the life of Jerjian's Armenian grandmother who survived the genocide with the help of an Ottoman soldier.

The court case against publisher Zarakolu was opened last year in April and he is being charged under the notorious Article 301. Dozens of writers, journalists, artists, academics, publishers, translators and others have been tried under Article 301 and court cases against well-known authors such as the Nobel Prize winner Orhan Pamuk and Elif Safak and journalist Hrant Dink attracted considerable media interest in Turkey and internationally. However, non-celebrity victims' court cases have generally gone unnoticed.

In the latest 301 case the prosecutor claims that Jerjian's book "insults" the memory of Turkey's founder Kemal Ataturk by portraying his close advisors as the people responsible for the mass deportation of Armenians.

At a court hearing on October 3 a letter written by author Jerjian was presented to the court. It has been reported Jerjian initially considered coming to Turkey to attend the hearing, but then changed his mind due to the high risk of being attacked.

This risk is not imagined. In many other Article 301-related cases fascist groups, generally accompanied by Maoist-Kemalist members of the misnamed Workers Party, have organised demonstrations denouncing the accused as traitors, spies and "missionary children." They harass defendants and their legal representatives in and outside the court

buildings and have physically attacked them.

In addition there are growing indications that the Turkish police are directly involved in the persecution of dissidents and oppositionists. Clues have emerged linking the police directly to the murder of prominent Turkish-Armenian journalist Hrant Dink, a victim of a 301 case who was shot dead outside his bilingual newspaper's Istanbul office this year by a fascist assassin. There are also allegations implicating the police in the bloody killings of three Christian missionaries in Malatya.

Zarakolu and his late wife Ayse Zarakolu, who died in 2002, as well as authors, editors and translators working for his publishing house, have faced frequent legal harassment for publishing books on minority and human rights in Turkey.

In a climate of nationalism and chauvinism spearheaded by the Turkish military and fuelled by the bourgeois parties (both right-wing and the nominally "left-wing") and the news media, state prosecutor offices and police departments, which are dominated by fascist and Islamist elements, continue to level charges against writers, journalists, artists, academics and publishers with dissident views.

Recently a prosecutor launched an investigation targeting a book written by British writer Richard Dawkins, an expert in evolutionary biology, entitled *The God Delusion*. The aim of the investigation is to establish whether the book incites religious hatred. The inquiry was initiated following a complaint that the book defamed "sacred values." This investigation is a good example of the utterly hypocritical attitude of the ruling Islamists with regard to freedom of expression.

The Islamist AKP (Justice and Development Party) government has also been conducting a virtual war to expel evolution theory from Turkish schools. There is

growing pressure on teachers to teach creationism alongside the theory of evolution and some teachers don't teach evolution at all.

Just two months ago, the Kurdish nationalist *Gundem* newspaper was closed for a month for publishing two articles authored by the outlawed PKK (Kurdistan Workers Party) leader Murat Karayilan. Under the Anti-Terrorism Law the daily was accused of spreading PKK propaganda. This was the forth closure of the paper this year.

A recent study on media freedom across Europe entitled "Goodbye to Freedom?" published by the Association of European Journalists (AEJ), gave some idea of the extent of the campaign against basic rights in Turkey. The report concludes: "In 2006 a total of 293 people faced legal action based on the country's illiberal laws on free expression. In some cases the army itself has brought prosecutions against journalists who investigated or criticized the military's involvement in politics."



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