

Repression: Turkish academic Uraz Aydin to be tried for signing peace petition

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Some 150 academics who signed a petition calling for peace in Turkey's Kurdish regions are now facing trial. Uraz Aydin, the editor of the leftwing journal Yeniyol faces additional charges of terrorist propaganda.

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A few days before his trial resumed, DW met 41-year-old Uraz Aydin in an Istanbul café. Nearly a year ago, he was among a group of academics who signed a peace petition. Shortly thereafter, he, like many others in the group, lost his job as a research associate at Marmara University's Faculty of Communication. A new law under the state of emergency that went into effect in February 2017 [1] provided the grounds for his dismissal.

It was a hard blow for Aydin. He enjoyed his job at the university and now longs for everything he had to leave behind after his eight years of research. He himself had studied communication sciences at Marmara University before going on to write his doctoral thesis at the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales (INALCO) in Paris.

Aydin's doctoral thesis explored how leftist liberal ideas are conveyed through Turkish columnists. "I am active in the union and have never concealed my leftist identity. But I did feel the consequences of this. While some of my students even got teaching positions at the university, I did not have such a position at the university."

Life-changing signature

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Turkey: Human rights defenders show support

But Aydin could never have imagined how signing the peace petition would impact his life. He signed the appeal at a time when he and other academics felt they could no longer accept the prevailing conditions. "My friends and I have asked ourselves whether our signatures drove the

country to where it is now. We set the agenda for the country. And then it took control of our lives.”

Last year, after many years of work as a research assistant, Aydin applied for a position as a lecturer and was actually promised a job. The next day, however, he found out that the names of the academics who signed the peace petition were passed on to the university council. “So my joy lasted only one day,” he said.

From that day on, he began waiting for the release of a list of names gathered under the state of emergency law. When he found his name on the list, he was relieved. “It was already clear to us that passing our names on to the university council would mean our dismissal. The waiting was a strain. It just makes you think, ‘Come what may.’”

Strength in solidarity

Aydin’s eyes light up when he recalls the day he went to the office to gather his belongings. The solidarity he received made him emotional. He was not able to take all the books he had accumulated in the past 29 years. Now in his forties, he felt a deep shock at having to leave the university he came to at the age of 19.

“The state accuses you of terrorist propaganda and you receive tremendous solidarity. It gives you the strength to carry on. But at times, you feel you’re the victim of a great injustice. Who is tearing me out of this place where I’ve spent so many years, and with what right?”

Uraz Aydin’s trial began immediately after his dismissal from the university. The prosecution states that the published petition is terrorist propaganda. A statement by Bese Hozat, co-chairman of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK), dated December 27, 2015, is also being used as evidence. The KCK is considered to be the extended arm of the PKK, which Turkey has classified as a terrorist organization.

No fresh start abroad

Uraz Aydin has not considered starting a new life for himself abroad. He does not want to force his young son to experience what he himself went through. Aydin grew up in Paris, after his father had to leave Turkey following a military coup on September 12, 1980. It was not until the amnesty of 1991 that Aydin’s family was able to return to Turkey.

He says that while times are tough for academics in Turkey [2], he is convinced that he is on the right side. Then, suddenly, he pulls out a book: Nuriye Gulmen’s Turkish translation of “The Hesse/Mann Letters,” an exchange between Nobel laureates Thomas Mann and Hermann Hesse. The translator was also a signatory who lost her job and she is currently on a hunger strike. The quote that Aydin reads out loud from the book summarizes his opinion on the trial: “We are experiencing malice in all its horror. This experience, which we were forced to accept, makes us discover the good in our lives.”

P.S.

* <http://www.dw.com/en/turkish-academic-to-be-tried-for-signing-peace-petition/a-41647581>

Footnotes

[1] <http://www.dw.com/en/turkey-extends-state-of-emergency-by-three-months/a-39720340>

[2] ESSF (article 42618), [Repression: Academics flee Turkey for Germany as Erdogan targets teachers](#).