

Press release, Istanbul, 31 July 2013-08-02

Cowardly Court Adjourns Case against Akhanli

After just a one-hour trial, the Istanbul Criminal Court announced in the late morning that it would hold another hearing on October 4, on the charges against Dogan Akhanli accused of involvement in a case of armed robbery in 1989.

[Dogan Akhanli, a prominent German-Turkish author and human rights activist, was acquitted by the Istanbul Criminal Court in November 2011. In April 2013, a higher Court of Appeals in Ankara, issued a call to reopen the case, although no new evidence had been presented. In its session on July 31 the Istanbul court was to rule on how it would respond.]

At that point in October it will be clear whether or not the court will continue the cowardly course followed in today's session. At the onset of the trial, the defense had again critically and in detail analyzed the decision of the Appeals Court as catastrophic from a professional standpoint and untenable from a legal standpoint. The Prosecuting Attorney acknowledged that he had not really read the documentation, but nonetheless would agree with the demand of the higher court in Ankara to reopen the case against Dogan Akhanli and to call for a life sentence.

The Court in Istanbul did not dare stand up against the demands of the Appeals Judges and declined today to confirm its acquittal of November 2011.

A delegation from Germany of twenty people, including Günter Wallraff, representatives of the SPD, Green and Left parties as well as spokesmen of numerous trade union, human rights, artists' and writers' organizations, was on hand to observe the proceedings and was disappointed in the outcome. Now the case will be dragged out unnecessarily. The witnesses who testified in his defense, and the fact that testimonies against him in 1992 were proved to have been made under torture to do so, was irrelevant for the court today.

Since from a formally juridical standpoint, any further hearings in the case call for the presence of Dogan Akhanli, the Court has issued an international arrest warrant against him. The defense attorneys left open the question of whether or not their client would expose himself to the hardly predictable danger of attending the trial on October 4.

An event that occurred a day before the trial made clear how closely linked this case is with the current repression against the new democratic movement in Turkey. One member of the observer delegation was arrested in Gezi Park, when he protested against the police order for stones commemorating five people who died during the conflict to be thrown into garbage cans. Following the intervention of lawyers and the German Consulate, the person was set free.

There is no other motive for the case against Dogan Akhanli than the attempt to curtail the right to freedom of opinion. Unfortunately this applies to hundreds of political cases in Turkey. The delegation will continue to follow the case against Akhanli and energetically renews its demand for a second acquittal.

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