



PARLEMENT EUROPEEN

Hélène Flautre

Co-President of EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee.

Mr Egemen Bagis
Minister for EU Affairs
Mustafa Kemal Mah. 6.Cad. No: 4
06800 Bilkent
Ankara

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Dear Minister Bagis,

I want to share with you my profound concerns about the case of the young student Sevil Sevimli. Binational, she was born in France from Turkish parents and has been educated in France. She entered at the age of 19 years old into a European funded Erasmus program to study in Turkey. A few months later she has been arrested for collusion with the terrorist organization DHKP-C based on doubtful evidences such as demonstrating during the legal 1st of May march, selling tickets for the legal and very popular Turkish band *Grup Yorum*, sticking posters which promoted the idea of free education. For those evidences she might face up to 20 years of prison. Far from being the first, her case reminds the one of two Turkish students, Berna Yilmaz and Ferhat Tüzer, who were facing eight years in jail for making terrorist propaganda after they staged a protest demanding free education. Previous prosecutor of the case, Kasım İlimoğlu, requested the students' acquittal, arguing their act was constitutional and fell within the limits of the freedom of expression, while his successor demanded on March 9 2012 that the students be sentenced on charges of membership of a terrorist organization.

All those cases epitomize the excess of the Turkish anti-terror law which can be used as an instrument of censorship due to its vague definition of terror. Although the recent 3rd reform package adopted by the Turkish Parliament is a very good start, change in the securitarian mentalities of Turkish judges as well as a reform of the present anti-terror law are *sinequanone* conditions to guarantee the rule of law in Turkey and avoid new young victims of the Turkish legal system.



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But the case of Sevil Sevimli is all the more emblematic as it holds important implications within the European arena. Whereas the French and Turkish relationships are just starting to progress thanks to a renewal of the French government, whereas Sevil Sevimli could have been a symbol of French and Turkish alliance praised during the last landmark meeting between French and Turkish Ministers of Foreign Affairs, her trial is putting at stakes not only her fundamental freedoms but bilateral relations. Added to that diplomatic issue, Turkey's successful participation within European Erasmus program, which fosters mobility and exchange of knowledge, will certainly suffer from this case. Being a major tool to fight against mutual prejudices, to build multicultural friendships, increase tolerance and freedom of expression, Erasmus programs have contributed to integrate *de facto* Turkey in the European education space. Within this framework Turkey became one of the most attractive destination for students originated from EU member states thanks to its dynamic economy and society as well as its rich history, but this trial will for sure deter lot of parents from sending their children to Turkey. As a result, Turkey's power of attraction and quest for academic excellence will be put into question.

For all those reasons, as the Co-chairman of the EU-Turkish delegation and as a mother of three students, I urge Turkish government and Parliament to guarantee fundamental rights for any students present on its territory and free Sevil Sevimli.

Hélène FLAUTRE
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