

EPSU participates in public hearing trials of trade unionists Turkey - Dismiss the charges



(24 January 2019) In a process against trade unionists arrested in 2012, public hearings took place in the Ankara Court on 23 January. An EPSU delegation attended the hearings. The charges seek to criminalise the unions and construct a story that union work is illegal. EPSU supports that these charges should be dropped and the unionists acquitted.

In June 2012 several trade union leaders of the Turkish public sector confederation KESK and its affiliates were arrested. Also leaders of DISK, another confederation in the private sector were accused. The police and prosecutor said they had engaged in illegal activities and were accused of supporting a terrorist organization. Some of the union leaders spent many months (8 or more) in jail. They were released while the trial continued. An EPSU delegation attended the public hearing in this trial on 23 January. Several of the trade union leaders were asked to state their case. They condemned the prosecutor for criminalising their union work. He reported that their

participation in union meetings was part of a criminal and illegal activity. This was denied by the unionists. There is no support for these claims. Our union work is not illegal. Our unions are legitimate and recognized organizations.

Before the public hearing against 72 union leaders, there was another one in the trial of 15 women arrested in February 2012. This hearing took just 20 minutes and dealt with a request to allow for more time to file some documents. In both trials some of our comrades are missing. They have fled the country seeking asylum fearing that the Turkish judicial system does not allow for justice and judges will be influenced by the authorities in the hands of the AK-party of President Erdogan.

The delegation used the opportunity to meet with several people. We met the German, Dutch and Swedish ambassadors to Turkey. These were constructive and open discussions on the trials, on the inquiry commission regarding the dismissals of close to 150.000 workers in the public sector, on the political, economic and social situation in Turkey, and possible future developments. We thanked the representatives for continuing to monitor the court cases. The European and global union movement has not forgotten about the ordeal for our comrades despite the very long duration of the trials.

We met with the representatives of the confederation KESK and our affiliates SES, BES, YapiYol and Tum-Bel-Sen. Many leaders had stories of arrests, interventions in demonstrations and press conferences. Several were not allowed to travel anymore. The functioning of the inquiry commission was criticized. This commission was established following the first wave of dismissals and as the European Court of Human Rights feared it would be flooded by ten thousands of cases due to the completely arbitrary nature of the dismissals, the lack of due process and no recourse to appeal. After almost exactly two years that this commission has functioned, the flaws have become apparent and Amnesty International and others have detailed its shortcomings. This was further debated with the representatives of the ILO in Ankara. The delegation encouraged the ILO to document the trade union violations and report to the ILO.

Other issues which were debated with the people we met were the role of the European Union, the recruitment of workers into the trade unions and the repressive nature of the various measures that have been taken. Most people were concerned about the municipal elections end of March. Based on past experiences and including reports of the international community and election observers many

are losing faith in a democratic and free process. This is even more true of the towns and cities in the South-Eastern part of the country.

The delegation was composed of EPSU President Isolde Kunkel-Weber (Verdi, Germany), President of the EPSU Standing Committee National and European administration Britta Lejon (President ST, Sweden, member of EPSU Executive), Karin Brunzell (ST, Sweden), Mikael Ruukel (Vision, Sweden), Eric Vermeulen (FNV, Netherlands, EPSU Executive Committee) and the EPSU General Secretary. The meetings took place on 22 and 23 January 2019, in Ankara. The delegation was very grateful for the support and hospitality provided by comrades of KESK.

[For a Russian translation of this article](#)

[For a very comprehensive report on the work of the inquiry commission and the numbers of KESK members dismissed.](#)

[Several reports of Amnesty International on the dismissals and the situation of human rights in Turkey as well as the position of the European Parliament](#)

Earlier stories relating to these trials can be found at:

[9 Women Affiliated with KESK Arrested](#)

[Mobilisation in support of KESK female members facing the court](#)

[Letter of support](#)

[Mobilisation in support of the jailed unionists](#)

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