

EPSU: Free speech and other human rights need defending in Turkey - support for DISK president



(9 April 2019) A leading Turkish trade unionist faces three years imprisonment for 'provoking people to be rancorous and hostile' just for having taken part in a public panel debate. EPSU supports her and wants the charges dropped.

Arzu Çerkezoğlu, a medical doctor and President of PSI/EPSU affiliate Dev Sağlık-İş (Progressive Union of Health Workers) was charged in 2016 following comments made a public debate in Sapanca, near Istanbul. The debate, that was aptly titled 'Quo Vadis Turkey?', was organised by the CHP (social democratic Republican People's Party). Alongside Arzu Çerkezoğlu other speakers included Fikri Sağlar (CHP) and Ayşenur Arslanoğlu, a well-known journalist.

EPSU/PSI, ITUC and UNITE were at the Court in person in Sapanca on 2 April as a sign of solidarity and protest against the trial and to listen to the charges brought against the trade union President. Other international unions sent solidarity

messages and so did affiliates and unions from Sweden, Germany, Spain and UK. Representatives of EU Embassies are also following the trial.

In the hearing the Dev Sağlık-İş President - who is also first female President of DiSK Confederation since May 2018 - defended her right to freedom of expression, the important role of trade unions and the need to continue to criticize the Government where necessary. The defence lawyers reminded the Court of the guarantees for freedom of speech under the Constitution and the Articles of the European Convention on Human Rights. The lawyers requested an acquittal immediately. However, the judge adjourned the hearing to 9 July in order to expand the investigation and further detail the evidence.

Commenting on her trial, the President said after the hearing "We would like to thank all comrades for their interest and solidarity. Such lawsuits and intimidations will not prevent us from doing and saying what we know is right."

EPSU/PSI and the European and global union movement have been monitoring the developments in Turkey for many years, and especially since the failed coup attempt in 2016. The dismissal of public servants, the arrests of voices critical to the current Government and so on have been well documented. EPSU has intervened several times on behalf of unions in Turkey. Our presence on 2 April in Sapanca follows a larger mission of EPSU representatives on 23 January to Ankara to attend a public hearing in a trial of KESK and DISK trade union officers that pre-dates the coup attempt. In these cases further hearings are expected on 8 May.

EPSU calls for all the charges against trade unionists and other human rights activists to be dropped and for the Turkish Government to take clear steps towards strengthening - and not weakening - human rights, social and economic justice, good governance and the rule of law.

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