

To the kind attention of :

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Mr Antonio Tajani, President of the European Parliament
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Ms Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union
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Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe
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Brussels, 23 May 2019

Outcome of the trial against the Turkish doctors' leaders

Dear Presidents, dear High Representative, dear Secretary General,

EPSU supports the call of the Standing Committee of European Doctors (CPME) and the World Medical Association (WMA) to take immediate action to demand the Turkish authorities to respect medical ethics and human rights unconditionally. We ask you to use your contacts to express the concerns of the medical and trade union community and we expect of your institutions and seek the release of those doctors recently convicted.

EPSU is Europe's voice of 8 million public service workers including in health and care. We represent doctors, nurses and other medical and non medical staff. Together with the CPME and WMA we represent millions of medical staff in the EU and in Europe.

Our organisations and our members work to safeguard and promote the highest standard of medical ethics and health-related human rights regionally and internationally. We support doctors at risk.

CPME and WMA recently published an open letter to underline their distress with the outcome of a trial against Turkish doctors' leaders. They are now facing prison sentences for defending medical ethics, human rights and peace. We support those concerns.

The trial was brought against the members of the Turkish Medical Association's Central Council of 2016-2018 for the publication of a press release entitled 'War is a public health problem' in January 2018. In this statement, the Turkish Medical Association highlights the human, social and environmental cost of war and calls for peace. In response, the Turkish authorities brought criminal charges against the Central Council for 'propagandising for terrorist organisations'.

This entailed the temporary detention of said doctors and the present trial. On 3 May 2019, the 32nd Criminal Court of Ankara sentenced the eleven Central Council members to 10 months in prison for the press release 'War is a public health problem', and increased the sentence by an additional 10 months for the publication of another press release entitled 'It is quite possible to live in peace and equality on this land' dating from 2016. One doctor was accused of additional charges resulting in a total sentence of 39 months.

The trial is one of many aggressions by the Turkish authorities to which the Turkish Medical Association has been subject in the past years. Also many trade unionists have been facing trial and long prison sentences and including unions representing doctors, nurses and medical staff. We have been following these cases and we confirm our support for these unions and the Turkish Medical Association defending medical ethics and the provision of health-care services accessible to all. The outcome of this trial marks a further escalation of the challenge to these fundamental principles.

Like the Turkish colleagues, the medical professionals we represent, we have the duty to denounce violence and warn on the dramatic immediate and long-term health effects of warfare and armed conflicts. The Turkish Medical Association has done nothing other than express its opinion in support of peace. This is not a criminal offence, but a fundamental freedom enshrined in European and international human rights treaties that Turkey has ratified, hereby committing to protect those rights.

There is an urgent need for action at highest political level. We therefore appeal to you to make use of all contacts with Turkish authorities to underline the imperative to respect medical ethics and human rights unconditionally.

We trust you share our concern and thank you in advance for your support. Together with the global and European medical community we will continue to stand by their Turkish colleagues and defend medical ethics for the benefit of every patient.

Yours sincerely,



Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary