

guardian.co.uk

Publisher convicted of insulting Turkey

- Hearing followed book on Armenian genocide
- Five-year sentence likely to be reduced to fine

Robert Tait in Istanbul
The Guardian, Friday 20 June 2008

A [larger](#) | [smaller](#)

The publisher of a book by a British author acknowledging the 1915 Armenian genocide has been convicted under Turkey's notorious Article 301, despite reforms intended to make the law less draconian.

A judge sentenced Ragıp Zarakolu to five months in prison after ruling that *The Truth Will Set Us Free*, written by George Jerjian, "insulted the Turkish republic".

The conviction came despite a letter of support from the author to the court arguing that his book was intended to forge a "new understanding of history between Turks and Armenians".

Translated into Turkish in 2005, Jerjian's book tells the story of the slaughter of up to 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman forces during the first world war through the eyes of his Armenian grandmother, who survived largely thanks to the protection of a Turkish soldier.

Turkey disputes allegations that the Armenians' deaths were a result of deliberate genocide.

Zarakolu, who was acquitted of a separate charge of insulting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the modern Turkish state, has been freed on appeal.

He is not expected to serve time after the judge ruled that his sentence could be reduced to a fine, citing good behaviour.

The case, which has lasted more than three years, prompted MEPs, human rights organisations and the international writers' group Pen to campaign on Zarakolu's behalf.

His conviction is the first since Turkey's Justice and Development party (AKP) government revised Article 301 in April under pressure from domestic and foreign critics, who saw it as the country's most significant restriction on free speech.

The altered law banished the crime of insulting "Turkishness" and reduced the maximum sentence from three to two years.

The law also laid down that all prosecutions need prior approval from the justice minister.

The law was first introduced by the AKP in 2005 and has been used to prosecute 60 writers and journalists, including the Nobel prize-winning author Orhan Pamuk, who was charged after telling a Swiss newspaper that no one in Turkey dared mention the Armenian deaths or those of 30,000 Kurds.

The charges against Pamuk were subsequently dropped.

Article 301 was used to prosecute Zarakolu for the publication of another book on the Armenian question, Dora Sakayan's *An Armenian Doctor in Turkey: Garabed Hatcherian, My Smyrna Ordeal of 1922*.

Zarakolu, 60, whose human rights activities earned him two spells in prison during the 1970s, has faced official harassment for numerous publications over the years. Ultranationalist radicals firebombed the premises of his publishing company in 1995.

The law was also used against Hrant Dink, a Turkish-Armenian newspaper editor who was shot dead by a nationalist extremist in Istanbul last year.

Dink, who campaigned for recognition of the crimes against Armenians, was prosecuted three times and convicted once. The last charges were dropped after his murder.

Zarakolu and his late wife Aysenur established the Belge publishing house in Istanbul in 1977.

guardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2009