

Court fines writers for insulting Turkey

ISTANBUL, 23 DECEMBER A court in Istanbul yesterday fined an author and a journalist for insulting the Turkish state. Writer Zulkuf Kisanak was fined approximately 2.000 euro, because in one of his book he accused the Turkish army for destroying a Kurdish village. The journalist Aziz Ozer who has cast doubt on the official Turkish denial of the Genocide of Armenians, was fined of 4.000 euro. According to the judge they have broken the same Article of the Penal Code as the prominent autor Orhan Pamuk, who is still on trial. He is charged because he wrote about the Turkish Genocide of the Armenian population during the World War I. AP

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Turkish Writers Fined for Insulting State

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ANKARA, Turkey (AP) -- An Istanbul court fined an author and a journalist Thursday for insulting the Turkish state, the latest convictions under a law that European officials say limits freedom of expression and must be changed.

Turkey's government has indicated that it has no plans to change the law, under which the country's most famous novelist, Orhan Pamuk, was also charged.

"Freedoms are not limitless, in freedom there's a definite limit," Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan said in an interview broadcast live on CNN-Turk television Wednesday evening.

Zulkuf Kisanak, the author of "Lost Villages," was sentenced to five months in prison, which was immediately converted to a \$2,200 fine. Aziz Ozer, editor of the far-left monthly magazine Yeni Dunya Icin Cagri, received a 10-month prison term, which the judge later switched to a \$4,400 fine.

Both men were fined under a law which makes it a crime to insult the Turkish republic, "Turkishness" or state institutions. The law has soured relations with the European Union, which insists that Turkey - which began EU membership negotiations in October - do more to protect freedom of expression.

Pamuk was charged with insulting the country after telling a Swiss newspaper in February that "30,000 Kurds and 1 million Armenians were killed in these lands, and nobody but me dares to talk about it."

Kisanak's book tells the story of 14 Kurdish villages that were forcibly evacuated by the Turkish military in the early 1990s, during the height of clashes between Turkish troops and autonomy-seeking Kurdish rebels. Human rights groups say Turkish security forces burned down thousands of Kurdish villages as part of a strategy to clear the countryside and deny the guerrillas local support.

Kisanak said he would appeal Thursday's ruling.

"I do not believe that I insulted the state," he told The Associated Press. "My book was based on concrete events, backed by documents and photographs."

"My book is about villages that were evacuated and the tragedies that unfolded," he said.

Ozer was sentenced for two articles - "80 Years of the Turkish Republic, 80 Years of Fascism" and "No to a Partnership of Invasion in Iraq" that were published in his magazine.

Ozer said he would appeal Thursday's ruling, saying prosecutors have brought against him some 20 lawsuits related to freedom of expression.

Erdogan, in his remarks late Wednesday, said all countries limit freedom of expression in some way and that the much-criticized Article 301 of the new Turkish penal code did that for Turkey.

He also accused those criticizing the law and calling for such cases to be dropped of putting pressure on the courts and thus violating the Turkish constitution, which mandates independent courts.

"People can express their opinions without putting the courts under pressure, but putting the courts under pressure is very, very ugly," Erdogan said.

Last week, a group of observers from the European Parliament demanded that Turkey change Article 301 or risk putting its EU bid in jeopardy.

The EU parliament members have vowed to attend Pamuk's freedom of expression trial until its conclusion. The next hearing is scheduled for Feb. 7.

Pamuk's remarks highlighted two of the most painful episodes in Turkish history: the massacre of Armenians during World War I - which Turkey insists was not a planned genocide - and recent guerrilla fighting in Turkey's overwhelmingly Kurdish southeast.