



**INTERNATIONAL PEN
WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE
DAY OF THE IMPRISONED WRITER**

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**Turkey
Hrant Dink
Magazine Editor**

Hrant Dink, editor of the Armenian-Turkish language weekly *Agos* magazine and a well-known commentator on Armenian affairs, has been convicted to a six-month suspended sentence on charges of ‘insult to the Turkish state’ for an article on the Armenian diaspora published in his newspaper. This is just one of a number of cases brought out against him in recent months in an apparent campaign of harassment against him. Some of the trial hearings have been marred by violent scenes inside and outside the courtrooms, instigated by nationalist activists calling for Dink to be punished.

On 7 October 2005, Hrant Dink was convicted to a six-months suspended sentence by the Sisli Court of Second Instance in Istanbul. He had been charged for an article published in *Agos* in which he discussed the impact on present day Armenian diaspora of the killings of hundreds of thousands of Armenians by the Ottoman army in 1915-17. Almost a century later, the issue remains a fraught one, with several countries calling on Turkey to recognise the events as a genocide. Turkey rejects this, saying that the deaths occurred during a civil war during which Turks were also killed.

The court accused Dink of “insulting Turkish identity” in articles which, Dink explains, were part of a series that focussed on Armenian identity and were “a special call to the Armenians in Diaspora who are poisoned by their anger towards the Turks”. He says that his aim is to alleviate the tensions between Turkey and Armenia. Dink appealed the conviction but it was upheld on appeal on 12 July 2006. Dink is taking the case to the European Court on Human Rights. The decision led to hundreds of people signing a petition in his defence.

Still underway is another case against Hrant Dink, who is being tried alongside **Serkis SEROPYAN** co-editor of *Agos* and journalist and author **Aydin ENGIN**. They were charged on 23 December 2005 under Article 288 of the Penal Code (attempt to influence the Judiciary) for an article commenting on Hrant Dink’s October 2005 trial. Dink is accused for an article entitled “Is Democracy to be established with this penal code?” and Engin for his article “One should touch the justice system”. A hearing before the Sisli Penal Court on 16 May 2006 was disrupted by lawyers

supporting the prosecution who heckled journalists and other observers. Some reportedly spat on the defendants. Spectators inside the courtroom shouted and threw coins at the defendant's lawyers after the prosecuting lawyers called for the withdrawal of the judge. Journalists and lawyers were prevented from leaving the court room and required police protection on leaving, describing the events as being an attempted lynching. A hearing on 4 July 2006 saw right wing protests again demonstrating outside the court room. Defence lawyer Deniz Ceylan was punched by one of them and the hearing was disrupted by verbal abuse. The hearing was adjourned to 12 December 2006.

Yet another court case was initiated against Hrant Dink in September 2006 on charges of "insulting Turkish identity" in an interview he gave to the Reuters newsagency on 14 July. He is said to have told interviewers Daren Butler and Osman Senkul that he had no doubt that an Armenian genocide had taken place, that he would not remain silent on this issue, and had no plans to leave Turkey.

Dink, 50, is the editor of *Agos*, an Armenian-Turkish language weekly, established in 1996, with a circulation of around 6,000. *Agos* means 'ploughed furrow', and was chosen by its founders for its association with growth and fertility. In 2001, *Agos* was suspended. He is a well-known commentator on Turkish-Armenian affairs who is often invited abroad to speak on how relations can be improved.

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From Hrant Dink's presentation to the International Publisher's Association/International PEN panel discussion on Freedom of Expression in Turkey held at the UN Commission on Human Rights April 2004

"...Turkey is making special efforts within the framework of the "Struggle Against Unfounded Armenian Claims" against the discourse and studies presented by Armenian diaspora about "Armenian Genocide". An important part of these efforts is devoted to works in schools. For this purpose, a new curriculum has been prepared focusing on the unfoundedness of Armenian claims. Text books prepared about this issue will be distributed in our schools starting at the next school year [2004]. Meanwhile, the Ministry of National Education has sent to all schools, including Armenian ones, a circular letter ... demanding that schools organise conferences and composition competitions dealing with the struggle against "unfounded Armenian Genocide claims". Human rights associations ... have brought suits at the Supreme Council stating that this circular letter is contrary to international agreements and that it can lead to feelings of hostility among children, and demanded that it be annulled and not be executed. But the Ministry did not take back the circular letter.

This is the wrong attitude. It leads generations to be raised as enemies to each other by dictating to children one-sided information about a subject about which even adults have not agreed among themselves. In fact, school should be the place where information is questioned, not dictated. "

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