

**Speech of Andrew Finkel from P24 on the occasion of the Opening of the Exhibition**

**“Expression Interrupted” in the European Parliament on 2nd of May 2017**

I have been asked to say a few words – and I assure they will be few—about this exhibition.

At one level, it couldn't be more self-explanatory. In front of you is a sample of the over 160 Turkish journalists who are now behind bars.

These are not people who have been convicted of some terrible crime. Indeed, most of them have not been convicted of anything. Most of them have spent months and months behind bars without even seeing a prosecutor's indictment. This is sadly all too understandable. When the indictments finally appear, they are long on barefaced assertions and digressions. Some are copy and pasted from other indictments – and in cases, the prosecutor has forgotten to change the name. To be perfectly honest, the accusations are so banal as to be sort of embarrassing. I have spoken to the defence lawyers who almost feel embarrassed to be fighting cases with such lack of substance.

Juridical theorist come up with basic reasons to put free men and women behind bars. The first is to protect us from people who would do harm. The second is to deter others from doing terrible things and thirdly there are people who commit acts so immoral that our collective sense of natural justice demands that they receive punishment.

As you go around the exhibition, you will make up your own minds. But my own conclusion is that the only crime these people have committed it to think and to try to make others do the same.

The threat they represent is to people who would prefer to live in a society where no one thinks or at least no one thinks differently from themselves. The society they would create is not one based on consensus or a belief in fairness and equality confident but one which is disciplined by an atmosphere of fear – the sense of arbitrary and inexplicable retribution – where owning a particular kind of dollar bill makes you liable for punishment.

This is a justice system turned on its head. It doesn't protect free speech it deters people's basic human right to free expression. These are not people who have offended our sense of justice but whose very treatment offends our sense of justice. We see them and we feel compelled to do something in their defence.

The punishment being deleted to the people behind the faces you see is not the result of the deliberation of an impartial court but at the point of first contact with the judicial system – the way they are held in police cells incommunicado for long periods without appearing before a judge or the way they have to wait until the prosecutor finally get around to bringing a charge. I know it is by no means the worst thing they have suffered but I was shocked to

learn the other day that those people awaiting trial on absurd charges even have to pay for the electricity they use in their cells!

As you go round this exhibition you will have a chance to meet Ayşenur Paydalak, herself a 26-year old law student who waited 6 months to appear before a judge and who now faces 15 years imprisonment for being a member of a terrorist organisation when in fact she was a courtroom correspondent herself for a newspaper the government no longer likes.

You can meet Ahmet Altan, Europe's only imprisoned novelist, and a brilliant polemicist who faces multiple life sentences after being originally suspected of giving subliminal messages on a television chat show.

We were able to get a message from him from his prison cell, despite the fact that he is allowed to physical contact with the outside world – he cannot for example receive or send letters.

In the prison of a country whose courts have been turned into the slaughterhouse of law, I remain happy and hopeful. My trust in people and in humanity has never been shaken and never will be. Because of my trust in them, no matter what happens I will live happily and with hope behind bars.

He tells us. His brother Mehmet is just around the corner there - a professor of economics and noted columnists is not quite so upbeat:

When a land is not governed humanely, oppression and cruelty are the result. In the year 2017, it was our turn to go down this dead-end street of despair. Turkish history is full of examples of what we are living through. People who use their brains have always been oppressed. I used to think those days were over and this ugly sense of despair would not recur but I was mistaken.

Another professor Şahin Alpay –just marked his 73 birthday and 9 months in jail. He is, a Swedish trained social democrat who if the prosecutor has his way will never leave prison, all because of a handful of columns he wrote. Nazli Ilicak is also 73. I think I am correct in saying that one of the item on the charge sheet against her is something she wrote four decades ago. Mizgin Çay has been in jail since October 2016. She is accused of hosting a Kurdish radio station in Sanliurfa in southeast of Turkey in which some local HDP politicians were invited to speak. And God only knows why Murat Aksoy is in prison. He used to be the slightly odd one out in a pro-government newspaper was fired, wrote columns elsewhere and became an advisor for the main opposition CHP. Clearly the judges at his first hearing hadn't a clue either. The prosecutor asked for his release and the court decided that he and 20 others should be let out of jail. Murat's wife and two children waited for him to come home but he was rounded up along with the others released on his way out the prison gate, re-detained and is now charged with the more serious charge overthrow the government and the constitutional order. The prosecutor by the way who asked for his release and he three judges are now all suspended from their duties.

What this exhibition draws attention to is not this point of view or that opinion. There are as probably as many ideas represented here as there are posters. No single point of view is now exempt from persecution. There are Kurdish nationalists, Turkish nationalists, liberals, conservatives, men and women in their 70s and those in their 20s, leftists, rightists, atheists, agnostics and people of deep religious conviction. There are those who write exciting prose, who come up with ideas and observations we could never have made ourselves and there are a few, let's face it, whom might be a little bit predictable or maybe just a little bit too fond of their own voice. This may be the one time in their whole lives that they find themselves in the same room together – even in rollup form.

If we are quiet for a moment you can imagine the cacophony of them all speaking at once - arguing or imperiously turning their backs, lecturing us or laughing at us, reassuring us in our prejudices or pulling the rug out from under our feet. In fact, it is not all that different from the sound in our own heads of our own thoughts as we try to make up our minds on important issues. And of course the issue confronting us now is how do we get these people out of jail?

I know it is a question that vexes the politicians who helped sponsor this exhibition and I'd very much like to thank them on your behalf.

It means much to the journalistic community in Turkey and not just those behind bars that the rest of the world supports them in their struggle speak out. The title of this exhibition is Expression Interrupted, for reasons that are sadly self-explanatory. We look forward to the next exhibition. Expression Continued. In fact we would prefer it be an installation when the people you see here in two dimensions will be with us in the flesh.