

Insulting Armenian heritage may be rated as crime in Turkey

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For the first time ever, the use of the word "Armenian" in a derogatory manner has been labeled a punishable crime, Sabah reports.

An Armenian father and son have filed a criminal case against two perpetrators who referred to them as "Armenian infidels". This marks the first time ever the Istanbul Public Prosecution Office has taken on a case in which the use of the word "Armenian" constitutes a crime when used with intentions to degrade another.

Levon Balcioğlu and his son Artun Balcioğlu, both Turkish nationals of Armenian heritage have filed a case against Yusuf Polat for referring to them as "Armenian Infidels". If tried in the case being heard at the Istanbul Criminal Court of Peace, Polat stands to be sentenced to two years imprisonment. If Polat is sentenced, his name will go down in history as being the first perpetrator to ever be charged for "insulting Armenian heritage", Sabah says.



The public prosecution has prepared an indictment which constitutes "Denigrating Armenian Heritage" a crime just six years after Agos editor-in-chief Hrant Dink, who has Armenian roots, was targeted and murdered for being tried with "Denigrating Turkishness" in accordance to article 301.

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In 2002, Hrant Dink was speaking at a conference in Şanlıurfa when he said, "I am not a Turk, I am from Turkey and I am Armenian. Dink was later tried for "insulting Turkishness" and was sentenced to three years in prison after which he was exonerated. In 2004, Dink was tried for the same crime for writing the statement "replace the poisoned blood associated with the Turk, with fresh blood associated with Armenia," in a published article. Dink was once again convicted according to Article 301 and received a suspended 6-month jail sentence, despite an expert witness report that claimed otherwise. It was this ruling that made Dink the target of extreme nationalist circles and on January 17, 2007, the writer was assassinated in Şişli, Istanbul.

Levon Balcioğlu and his son Artun Balcioğlu, who are of Armenian heritage and hail from Sivas had rented out the cafeteria of a private school they run. Although the contract was signed with Filiz Uyar, on April 21, her unofficial partner Yusuf Polat wanted to bring in customers from outside of the school, which both the Balcioğlu son and father objected to due to it being against regulations.

The Balcioğlus proceeded to assign Kemal Batu the duty of preventing customers entering from outside of the school. The perpetrator Yusuf Polat allegedly said to Kemal Batu in reference to the Balcioğlu family, "Don't become their slaves, they are Armenian infidels." Batu responded by asking Polat to not speak in this manner, to which Polat responded by saying, "You are scratching for an itch and I'm going to give you one." Polat then proceeded to threaten Levon and Artun Balcioğlu with breaking their legs and even death and stated "Armenians, this land is ours."

Four days later, Yusuf Polat's brother Mehmet Zahit Polat issue a second threat by stating, "If you touch my brother I will break your feet. We are three people now, if needed we will bring 103."

Istanbul Public Prosecutor Zeynel Sarıbuğa has since opened an investigation into the Polat brothers after receiving a criminal complaint and has filed a case against Yusuf Polat for violating Articles 125/1 and 216/2 and against Mehmet Zahit Polat for violating Article 106/1 of the Turkish Penal Code.