

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2013		71	Turkey	<i>Ayşe Berktaş</i>
	2013			<i>follow-up 1</i>

### *Announcement*

PEN International reports that Turkish historian Ayşe Berktaş was released pending trial yesterday. The next hearing in her trial will be held on 30 January 2014. Please find below a NCH summary of the case and the update by PEN International.

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### **NCH SUMMARY OF THE CASE**

On 3 October 2011, **Ayşe Berktaş** was arrested as part of a crackdown related to the Party for Peace and Democracy (BDP) [For background to the BDP affair, see the PEN International description below]. Berktaş was an author and translator of historical works, a women’s rights activist and a founding member of the World Tribunal on Iraq. Among her works were *History and Society: New Perspectives* (2008) and *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around* (with Suraiya Faroqhi; 2007); among her translations *The Imperial Harem: Gender and Power in the Ottoman Empire, 1520–1656*, by Leslie Penn Pierce, and *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922*, by Donald Quataert. Over the past decade, Berktaş conducted work at the History Trust (where she was part of the Prime Minister’s Advisory Board on Human Rights); the Women’s Human Rights Trust; the Compatriots for Peace Initiative; the Truth Behind Diyarbakir Prison Research and Justice Commission (where, in 2008, she met with individual prisoners that had been detained from 1980 to 1984); and the Women for Peace Initiative. The police arrested her and raided her home, seizing personal papers and materials, although no arrest or search warrant had been issued. She was charged under the Anti-Terror Law with “membership of an illegal organization,” “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” and “participating in illegal meetings or demonstrations,” for allegedly “planning to stage demonstrations aimed at destabilizing the state, plotting to encourage women to throw themselves under police vehicles so as to create a furor, and attending meetings outside Turkey on behalf of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK).” On 20 December 2013, Berktaş was released pending trial.

*Sources:*

International PEN, *Half-Yearly Caselist—January to June 2012* (London 2012), 59, 62; International PEN Writers in Prison Committee, *Half-Yearly Caselist to December 2012* (London 2013), 59; International PEN Rapid Action Network, *RAN 22/13* (7 May 2013); International PEN Rapid Action Network, *RAN 23/13* (12 June 2013); [Update 1] (24 September 2013); [Update 2] (20 December 2013); International PEN, *Update* (11 September 2013); Petition ([http://ifex.org/turkey/2013/05/06/free\\_ayse\\_petition/](http://ifex.org/turkey/2013/05/06/free_ayse_petition/)); Profile (<http://www.pen.org/defending-writers/ay%C5%9Fe-berktay>); Network of Concerned Historians (<http://www.concernedhistorians.org/ca/71.pdf>).

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**PEN INTERNATIONAL (WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE)**

**RAPID ACTION NETWORK: 20 December 2013 RAN 23/13 update #2**

**Turkey: Writer Ayşe Berktaş Freed Pending Trial after Two Years in Pre-Trial Detention**

The Writers in Prison Committee of PEN International is delighted at the news of the release pending trial of writer, translator, scholar and women's rights activist Ayşe Berktaş, who has been held in pre-trial detention as part of the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK) investigation for over two years. Berktaş—who has been the subject of campaigns by PEN International, English PEN and the PEN American Centre, and whose trial has been observed by PEN Turkey and the Norwegian PEN Centre—was released this afternoon on 20 December 2013 by the Istanbul 15th High Criminal Court along with five others. While PEN welcomes the news of her release, we remain concerned that her trial will continue, and that translator and PhD candidate Deniz Zarakolu remains in pre-trial detention.

Berktaş has been detained for the past two years on what PEN International believes to be trumped-up charges of “membership of a terrorist organisation” and “making propaganda for a terrorist organisation”. PEN International calls for the dropping of all charges against Berktaş, and the immediate and unconditional release of Deniz Zarakolu, neither of whom have any material links to terrorism or the plotting of violent acts.

**BACKGROUND**

Ayşe Berktaş is a writer, translator, women's rights and anti-war activist. Her published work largely centres on the role of women in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic.

Police arrested Ayşe Berktaş and raided her home at 5:00 a.m. on 3 October, 2011, seizing personal papers and materials, though no arrest or search warrant had been issued. Berktaş was eventually charged with “membership of an armed organisation” under Article 314/2 of the Turkish Penal Code; “membership of a terrorist organisation” under Article 5/1 of the Anti-Terror Law; “making propaganda for a terrorist organisation” under Article 7/2 of the Anti-Terror Law; and “participating in illegal meetings or demonstrations” under Article 23/b of the Meetings and Demonstrations Law.

The anti-terror investigation that Berktaş has been implicated in centres around the alleged urban wing of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), known as KCK. This investigation has been used by Turkish prosecutors as a means to pursue those with ideological sympathies for and affiliations to Turkey’s pro-Kurdish political party, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP). The prosecutors allege that there is an organisational tie between peaceful civilian actors and armed PKK militants, an argument which appears to stem solely from the fact that they a joint ideological interest in pursuing greater rights for Turkey’s Kurdish citizens. Berktaş is a BDP member, and is one of thousands of peaceful Kurdish and pro-Kurdish civilians in Turkey with no link to violence or the planning of violent acts that have been categorised as terrorist activity in the KCK investigation. The work she conducted and the meetings and demonstrations she attended on behalf of BDP form the evidence against her.

The next hearing of Ayşe Berktaş’s trial will be held on 30 January 2014. The main KCK trial in Diyarbakir, which includes human rights lawyer and advocate Muharrem Erbey, recommences on 13 January 2014. The next hearing of another KCK-related trial—of 46 journalists in what is known as the ‘KCK Press Wing trial’—is set to begin on 14 January 2013.