

## Case Against 4 Turkish Journalists Dropped

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ISTANBUL, Turkey (AP) -- A court on Tuesday dropped charges against four Turkish journalists accused of insulting the country's courts, but decided to press ahead with the trial of a fifth journalist, a report said.

All five journalists were standing trial for criticizing in print a court's decision last year to shut down a conference in Istanbul about the mass killings of Armenians by Turks during the Ottoman Empire.

Prosecutors said their writings were illegal attempts to influence the outcome of a trial and insulted the court system.

On Tuesday, the court dropped charges against journalists Hasan Cemal, Ismet Berkan, Haluk Sahin and Erol Katircioglu, on grounds that prosecutors had not filed charges within the required two-month period following the publication of the articles, the state-run Anatolia news agency reported.

The court, however, decided to proceed with the trial of Murat Belge, a columnist for the liberal Radikal newspaper, the agency said.

The trial is seen as a test of Turkey's readiness for membership in the [European Union](#). Turkey, which embarked on membership talks in October, is under heavy pressure from the EU and human rights organizations to address its infringements on freedom of expression.

The five had faced between six months to 10 years in prison. Charges on the grounds of insulting the republic, state institutions or "Turkishness" are frequently leveled against journalists, scholars and dissidents.

The discussion of what happened to Armenians in Turkey between around 1915 and 1923 is extremely sensitive in Turkey, which vehemently denies that mass killings and deportations of the then-sizeable Armenian minority constituted an organized genocide.

The conference in September went on despite the court order to close it down after organizers changed the venue at the last minute. It was the first time the issue was publicly discussed in Turkey.

A case against Orhan Pamuk, the country's best-known novelist, for "insulting Turkishness," was dropped earlier this year after Turkey came under harsh criticism from the EU.