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## May Freedom of Expression Triumph

By Sofia Kontogeorge Kostos

Freedom of expression is NOT alive and well for writers in Turkey. The underlying cause is explained by the bestselling Turkish author Elif Shafak who said, *"In my country there is a clash of opinions between those who want Turkey to join the EU and to become a more open society and those who want to keep Turkey as an insular, xenophobic, nationalist and closed society."* Adding she said, "They deliberately want to stop the process. This in no way reflects the society in this country."

The 35 year old author Elif Shafak could serve three years in jail for remarks made by a fictional character in her latest book, "The Bastard of Istanbul". Charges were brought against her publisher Semi Sokmen and her translator Asli Bican as well - all three were charged for - *"insulting Turkishness"*. Shafak wrote her book in English which was later translated into Turkish. 50,000 copies have been sold in Turkey since its publication in March 2006. The English edition will be published by Viking Penguin and is due to come out January 2007. The charges were dropped on the grounds that the characters in her book are fictional, therefore cannot be tried.

In Turkey, *"The Bastard of Istanbul"* sold more than 50,000 copies and became a bestseller for three months. Overall the reception of the book was positive, both in the media and society.

Her novel is about four generations of women, moving between Turkey and the US: It tells the story of an Armenian family and the descendants of a son left behind during the deportations who converts to Islam and lives as a Turk.

Instead of enjoying her book's success, Shafak must face a long legal battle. In June 2006, an ultra-right wing lawyer, Kemal Kerincsiz, filed charges to reopen the case against Shafak using as evidence an Armenian character in Shafak's book that says, *"I am the grandchild of genocide survivors who lost all their relatives in the hands of Turkish butchers in 1915, but I myself have been brainwashed to deny the genocide because I was raised by some Turk named Mustapha! What kind of joke is that?."*

Kerincsiz and others like him (aka the Kemalist elite), consider it a crime to allude to anything that has to do with genocides of the Armenians. After 90 years, Turkish officials vehemently continue to stifle the truth by whatever means possible. For over a period of 28 years, Turkish authorities organized and carried out the systematic butchery of the original inhabitants of Turkey (Asia Minor), not only of the Armenians, but also of the Greeks and the Assyrians.

Back in 1922 headlines throughout the world blared: *"Turks will be Turks"* *"The Unspeakable Turk"* *"Turkish Savagery"* *"Turkish atrocities"* *"Turkish Outrage"* *"Turkish*

*Misrule.* " It is people like the brave Turkish writers and publishers who by exposing the painful truth of their country's past also bring comfort to the wounded psyches of the Armenian, Greek and Assyrians families.

Shafak must reappear in court in September 21st which coincides with the birth of her first child.

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