

Court Rejects Investigation into Kurdish Parliament Speech

Tuesday 21 April 2009, by [Tolga Korkut](#)

The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office has decided not to investigate the speech that DTP co-chair Ahmet Türk made at a party group meeting in parliament.

On 24 February, following International Mother Language Day, Ahmet Türk, the co-chair of the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP) made a speech in Kurdish at a group meeting of his party in parliament.

When it was realised that he was speaking Kurdish, the state channel TRT broadcasting live from parliament was ordered to halt filming.

Immediately after the event, Parliament Speaker Köksal Toptan, announced that he had ordered the cut. In a press briefing on "using any language other than Turkish in Parliament", he said that Article 3 of the Turkish constitution laid down that Turkish was the "official language"; in addition, so Toptan, the Law on Political Parties contained an article (Article 81) banning any other language than Turkish for party activities.

Toptan said that Türk speaking in Kurdish was a violation of the constitution and added, "it is obvious that a meeting which is carried out in a language which it is not legally possible to use cannot legally be broadcast on Parliamentary TV."

Toptan argued that the Parliament Speaker controls the broadcasts of the TV channel: "That is why, as soon as a language other than Turkish was spoken at the DTP group meeting, the broadcast was cut in order not to permit an act that violates the constitution and laws."

Different interpretations

Others disagreed with this interpretations. According to Prof. Dr. Mithat Sancar from Ankara University, Türk's speech didn't violate the constitution, the Law on Political Parties or Parliamentary Statutes. "On the contrary" he said, employing a ban on any language would be considered unlawful.

Prof. Dr. Ülkü Azrak thought that parliamentary activities could be considered as "state proceedings," thus speaking in any language other than Turkish would be a violation of law. "I would prefer a more libertarian interpretation of the law" he added.

Prosecution did not see a problem

According to [cnnturk.com](#), internal regulations of parliament did not contain any rules on what language needed to be spoken, either in general assembly or in group meetings. Article 65 only dealt with the etiquette of speaking, and Article 67 with speaking style, but did not specify languages.

As far as the Political Party Law was concerned, the prosecutor's office argued that a party group meeting could not be considered a propaganda event, and that thus the relevant article banning any other language than Turkish did not apply in this case.

Article 81 of the law bans the use of any language but Turkish in "the composition of statutes and

programmes of political parties, at congresses, at meetings in open or closed spaces, at rallies, and when distributing propaganda” as well as for “written placards, signs, records, sound and video recordings, brochures and declarations.”

Four people, Mehmet Türk, Murat Ateş, Sabit İnce ve Bülent Güven, had filed a complaint against Ahmet Türk and DTP group deputy chairperson Selahattin Demirtaş.

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