TODAY'S ZAMAN

Publisher sentenced over book on Armenian killings

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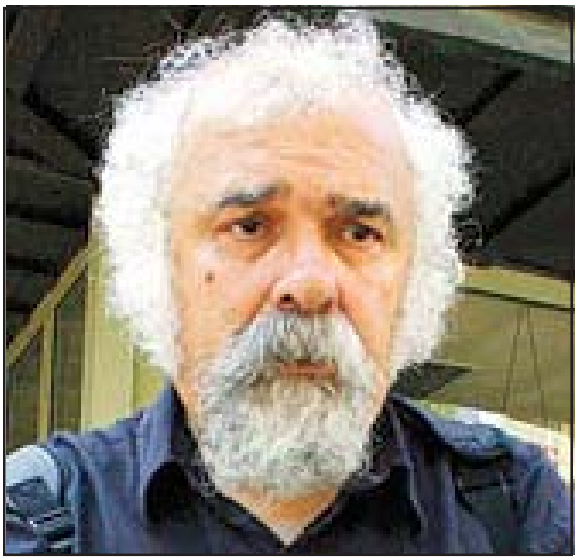

A Turkish publisher has been sentenced to five months in prison for publishing a book by a British author about a mass killing of Armenians in 1915. Rag1p Zarakolu was found guilty of "insulting the institutions of the Turkish Republic" under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) on Tuesday.

The controversial article was recently amended under pressure from the EU to ensure freedom of speech in Turkey. This is the first high-profile verdict to be handed down since then.

Zarakolu's sentence seems to confirm campaigners' fears that changes to the law were merely cosmetic. In April it became a crime to insult the Turkish nation, rather than Turkishness. But insulting the Turkish nation is still punishable by up to two years in jail. Zarakolu was brought to trial for publishing a book by British author George Jerjian on the mass killings of Armenians under the Ottoman Empire in 1915.
Turkey denies the killings were genocide, saying both Turks and Armenians were killed, and the issue remains highly sensitive.

Reading the verdict, the judge told Zarakolu he had insulted the Turkish republic and its founders. His own defense — that he had the right to criticize — was rejected. Zarakolu's case was not referred to the Ministry of Justice, as required under the reforms, and he has said he will appeal against the verdict. His sentence will not be imposed until the appeals process is complete.

Standing outside the court, Zarakolu said such rulings had silenced many writers in Turkey but that he would continue to challenge the restrictions. "I was partly expecting this result. But it is a struggle for the truth and it will go on. I do not consider myself convicted. This is a conviction for official history and for denial," he said.