

Istanbul Bar Trial  
Hearing of 24 February 2014

*Istanbul 25 February 2014*

The President and the Board of the Istanbul Bar Association were acquitted on 24 February 2014 of the charge of unlawfully influencing the court in the Balyoz (sledgehammer) trial. The judgment was greeted by shouts of joy and relief by the public packed into the courtroom and those outside for whom there was no room inside.

Proceedings opened with a roll call of the accused and their lawyers, and also, of the international observers whose names were included in the protocol. This was apparently the first time in Turkish legal history that the names of international observers had ever been recorded by a Turkish court.

The public prosecutor asked for jail sentences of between two and four years. Defence counsel spoke eloquently for acquittal. Each of the accused also spoke, not without some humour, explaining why the prosecution case had to be dismissed.

This took about three hours and just as one was preparing for an afternoon session the judge acquitted the accused.

This outcome strengthens the Istanbul Bar Association. It demonstrates that the public prosecutors do not always have it their own way and that the courts can function properly.

The judgment also shows how important the presence of international observers at trials such as this is, because they are a silent but powerful reminder to the judges that whilst they judge the accused they in turn are being judged by the profession abroad.

The ELDH has followed this trial from the very beginning and has been represented not only at every hearing but also at the preparatory meeting of the Istanbul Bar Association in March 2013 before the trial started.

The Istanbul Bar Association is effusive in its gratitude to all the international observers and included them in the celebrations following the judgment.

The case may not be over, however. An appeal is possible and cannot be excluded given the dislike of the current regime for lawyers who defend their opponents.

Continued vigilance is required, but for now we can say that justice was done.

Scott Crosby