

## **Democratic values, universal values**

Before I begin, I would like to thank the City Council of Villeurbanne for its support for democratic values, values which are common to all humanity. This all began in the premises the municipality makes available to civic groups.

On February 21, 2019, the association Amitiés Kurdes Lyon-Rhône-Alpes organised a public meeting in the main auditorium of the Labour Hall of the city of Villeurbanne, a meeting duly authorised by the local prefecture. The meeting was entitled "Cizre: The story of a massacre" and concerned the massacre of over 200 civilians in February, 2016, which took place in the basements of three buildings located in the Kurdish city of Cizre, Turkey. During their war against uprisings in the Kurdish cities of Turkey, Turkish security forces had perpetrated numerous war crimes, abuses of civilian populations documented by international HR organisations. The final days of the civilians trapped in the Cizre basements - witnessed by the public at large through the photographs taken on the spot by the victims and to later testimony - were the climax and the symbol of these abuses. A symbol so disturbing that the State responsible for it wanted to erase all trace as quickly as possible. The Amitiés Kurdes Lyon-Rhône-Alpes aimed at fulfilling a duty of remembrance against the dictate of oblivion.

Unsurprisingly, the Turkish consulate in Lyon asked the regional authorities to rescind their authorization for the meeting. This request was dismissed as it was a legal event, organised by a recognised association under French law, in accordance with the right of free speech. Then the consulate focused on more specific targets, namely the Amitiés Kurdes Lyon-Rhône-Alpes and myself.

They called the association "a branch of the PKK", the public meeting "a PKK event" and described me as, quote, "the organiser of the event who had played a leading role in its conduct; also manifesting an anti-Turkish attitude on Armenian and PKK websites." I quote all of these accusations from a letter dated February 27, 2019, which was sent by the Turkish Home Office of the consular authorities to the Turkish Ministry of Interior.

I became aware of this letter much later, as an element of my legal file. My crime consists of my attendance at this meeting and my serving as a translator for a direct witness, Faysal Sariyıldız, a former MP of the HDP party, which is the third largest political party in the Turkish parliament.

On April 12, 2019, I returned to Turkey over the spring break. Upon arrival in my native land, my passport was confiscated with no reason given. My forced stay in Turkey had begun.

One month later, on May 10, 2019, I was arrested; and the next day remanded in custody. Quickly, a case was opened against me. The charge was: membership in a terrorist group.

I spent 80 days in prison. During those days, a huge worldwide movement of support arose and on July 30, 2019, at my first hearing, I was released with no legal or travel restriction whatsoever. Yet my request that my passport be returned was rejected by the administrative authorities. The grounds given were that my acquittal was not final.

And then it was final - in September 2020. At once I asked again that my passport be returned. With the same reply! But this time, no reason was given. Last October, I appealed this decision. And, as at each prior stage of the process, this appeal was supported by an international campaign of letters sent to the relevant jurisdiction or administration. We are still waiting for the answer to come. Je l'ai été en septembre 2020.

Meanwhile, we have filed a legal action at the administrative tribunal, to annul the administrative refusal to return my passport. With no better fortune. The hearing took place on January 12, 2021. According to Turkish law, the decision should have been sent to my lawyers within the next 15 days. And with 40 days gone, silence reigns supreme.

The court's silence is due to an investigation, about which no one seems to know a thing, except Ankara-based prosecutors. But when we ask for details they reply that the investigation is pending and does not impose any restrictions. No restrictions, but no passport either!

My constitutional rights to travel and to work are constantly violated because I attended a meeting dedicated to testimony, to memory, and to reflection upon the responsibilities of the state of which I am a citizen. In my view, what I have done is part of the duties of any citizen wishing for a world of peace, justice, and democracy. Those who share the same convictions have been with me from the beginning: my friends and family, my University, my colleagues, human rights organisations, professional societies, the City Councils of Villeurbanne and of Lyon.

Democratic forces in France, hear my call! The Grey Wolves<sup>1</sup> spreading terror in the suburbs of Lyon; a consul reporting on his own citizens; the state, strangling its best academic institutions and refusing to renew the working permits of French teachers in Turkey's only French-language university---these are but a few faces of one and the same threat against the universal values we stand for. In the name of these values, I ask you to take action, so that my passport no longer be withheld and I can return to my job as a faculty member of Lyon 1 University, which has been my scientific home for nearly 25 years.

Tuna Altınel, February 22, 2021, İstanbul

---

1 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grey\\_Wolves\\_\(organization\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grey_Wolves_(organization))



# FREEDOM FOR TUNA ALTINEL

## **Communication by the "Academic" Support Committee for Tuna Altinel<sup>1</sup> February 22nd Press Conference in the Villeurbanne City Hall, upon the awarding of honorary citizenship to Tuna Altinel**

The support committee is grateful to the City Council of Villeurbanne for today's event, and for its constant support since Tuna was first arrested in Turkey in May 2019. We shall first describe the academic aspects of this arrest, and then the harassment against Tuna and the expressions of support received.

On January 11, 2016, a number of academics in Turkey published a call now known as the petition of the "Academics for Peace". Their text denounces the crimes committed by the Turkish armed forces against civilians in the south-east of Turkey, and calls for a resumption of the peace process. Repression against the signatories arrives swiftly, and worsens after the attempted coup of summer 2016. Then real purges begin. A state of emergency is declared and several thousand civil servants and employees are fired, abruptly deprived of their social and economic rights, and turned into "second-class citizens". At least 400 of the "Academics for Peace" are prosecuted. Some are driven to suicide.<sup>2</sup>

The Turkish authorities do not stop there. At the end of 2017 they initiate a wave of individual trials against signatories, under the preposterous charges of "terrorist propaganda".<sup>3</sup> Our colleague Tuna Altinel is amongst the signatories prosecuted.

The harassment by Turkish authorities, in particular against Tuna, bears heavy individual consequences. But it faces wide mobilisation and could turn out to be a political mistake. Indeed, many Turkish academics join forces with courage and determination. During the wave of trials against the Academics for Peace, the prosecuted are accompanied to the court by their colleagues, and also have international observers in attendance at the hearings. The accused prepare remarkable defences, which turn into indictments of the prosecutors' preposterous texts. The accused become the accusers of a justice on the leash.

And the wave of repression leads to a defeat of the executive power: for the Constitutional Court of Turkey rules that incrimination of the "Academics for Peace" is a violation of their freedom of speech. But for Tuna the matter does not end there.

Tuna has been a professor of mathematics at Lyon 1 University, and thus a civil servant of the French state, since 1996. On the face of it he seems relatively safe. But upon his arrival in Istanbul during a holiday in April 2019, his passport is confiscated with no explanation. A month later, he is taken into pre-trial custody.

Then he learns that the confiscation of his passport and his arrest were consequences of a denunciation by the Turkish consulate in Lyon. The highlight of the consul's report: in February 2019, Tuna took part in a public and legal meeting organised by the Lyon-based association Amitiés Kurdes in the Labour Hall of Villeurbanne. The report also mentions that Tuna served as an observer, in Lyon, of elections for Turkish citizens residing abroad. So Tuna has a record as a

1 <http://math.univ-lyon1.fr/SoutienTunaAltinel/?lang=en>

2 [https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2017/03/09/turquie-de-la-repression-au-suicide\\_1554581/](https://www.liberation.fr/debats/2017/03/09/turquie-de-la-repression-au-suicide_1554581/)  
<http://www.freedomforacademia.org/in-less-than-one-week-two-turkish-academics-committed-suicide/>

3 On Academics for Peace, see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academics\\_for\\_Peace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Academics_for_Peace), and the speech by Christine Charretton at the first rally following Tuna Altinel's arrest  
[http://math.univ-lyon1.fr/SoutienTunaAltinel/doc/19\\_05\\_14\\_Altinel.pdf](http://math.univ-lyon1.fr/SoutienTunaAltinel/doc/19_05_14_Altinel.pdf)

political enemy.

The Turkish judicial system opens a second and far more aggressive case against him, under the charge: membership in a terrorist group.

In Lyon, in France and abroad, rallies take place and various mathematical and academic institutions immediately express their support. A petition quickly gathers over 6,000 signatures (7,500 as of today)---this petition is still open to new signatories.<sup>4</sup>

Lyon 1 University authorises professional protection for our colleague and sends a French lawyer to the hearings. Representatives, local communities support him as well. MP Cédric Villani raises a question to the French government from the parliamentary floor, then organises a meeting at the House of Parliament with the Minister for Higher Education and Research. Senators Gilbert-Luc Devinaz and Annie Guillemot write letters to the government. More MPs help as well...

In the summer of 2019, several scientific conferences express support via group photographs; alumni of Tuna's former high school, Galatasaray, do the same. Last but not least the press informs the public at large.

The determination of Tuna and his lawyers, seconded by this broad mobilisation, inflicts a series of legal defeats on the Turkish political authorities: Tuna is released at the end of July, 2019; the prosecutor finds himself obliged to downgrade the charges from "membership in" to "propaganda for" a terrorist group; Tuna is acquitted in January 2020, an acquittal made final in September 2020 after the prosecutor's appeal is rejected.

And yet his political persecution continues. Legal prosecution is followed by administrative harassment---more insidious, as less subject to oversight. The Turkish authorities still refuse to return his passport, thus violating his freedom of travel, a freedom protected by the Turkish constitution and by European agreements to which Turkey subscribes. We must now put relentless pressure until Tuna's passport is returned.

Can the highest French and European authorities accept that for the space of nearly two years, a French civil servant has not been allowed to return to his duties as a teacher and a researcher? Can they accept that an academic is prosecuted for having exercised his freedom of speech, and is harassed for his actions in defense of Human Rights and democratic values?

We call on the French and European authorities to apply pressure commensurate with what is at stake. Tuna's passport must be returned. Political persecution must end.

---

4 <https://math.univ-lyon1.fr/petitionTunaAltinel/en/free-tuna-altinel/>