

MURDER IN ANATOLIA

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES AND TURKISH ULTRANATIONALISM



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CAST OF CHARACTERS

The victims (killed 18 April 2007)



Aydin



Geske



Yuksel

Necati Aydin was a Christian convert from Izmir. He moved to Malatya with his wife and two children in November 2003 and became general director of the Christian publishing house Zirve. Since 2005 he had worked as priest of the small Protestant community in Malatya.

Tilmann Geske, a German missionary, worked as a pastor of a Protestant Free church in Germany. In 1997 he moved to Adana (southern Turkey) and in 2002 to Malatya (with his German wife and three children). He taught English, translated, and preached in the local community.

Ugur Yuksel was from an Alevi family in Elazig (a province east of Malatya). He studied in Western Turkey (Izmit), where he came in contact with the local Protestant community and converted. Since 2005 he had worked with Necati Aydin for Zirve Publishing in Malatya.

The main suspects (trial since November 2007)



Gunaydin



Aral

On 18 April 2007 five men raided the office of the Christian publishing house Zirve and killed Necati Aydin, Ugur Yuksel and Tilmann Geske. They were arrested on the spot.

Emre Gunaydin is the alleged leader of the group. He was born in 1988 in Malatya. According to the other suspects, Emre Gunaydin had close relations with the Malatya police and his family had links to well-known ultranationalist organised crime figures.

Salih Gurler, **Hamit Ceker** and **Cuma Ozdemir** prepared for the university entrance exam. They met Emre Gunaydin in early 2007 and claim that he intimidated and threatened them to take part in the crime. **Abuzer Yildirim** met Emre back in 2005. He had worked at the Malatya cotton mill prior to the killing.

Varol Bulent Aral, who described himself as a destitute day labourer, met Emre Gunaydin in fall 2006. Emre testified that Aral told him about the threat of missionary activities and that if Emre did something to stop them “we will guarantee you state support.” Aral’s personal notebook contained the phone numbers of ultra-nationalist lawyer Kemal Kerincsiz (see below). In October 2010 two

witnesses (Orhan Kartal and Erhan Ozen, see below) claimed that Aral organised the crime on behalf of the secret Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-terrorism Department (JITEM) and was in contact with JITEM's alleged founder Veli Kucuk (see below).

Key witnesses

Ruhi Abat is an academic at the theology faculty at Malatya University. From 2005 on he undertook research on missionary activities as part of a large team of local academics. He was in close contact with the Malatya gendarmerie: police established that 1,415 phone calls had been made between Ruhi Abat and the gendarmerie in the months prior to the murder.

Metin Dogan is a prison inmate who told the court in 2008 that the head of the Malatya branch of the ultranationalist *Ulku Ocaklari* (Grey Wolves) organization had offered him money in 2005 to kill “whoever there is at Zirve”, the Christian publishing house. A former MHP (Nationalist Action Party) Member of Parliament from Malatya and a member of the military were also allegedly present when the offer was made. Metin Dogan was later imprisoned for murdering his brother's murderer in an unrelated incident and claims that because of this the job of killing the missionaries was transferred to Emre Gunaydin. Dogan also told the court that he knows Emre well from Ulku Ocaklari.

Orhan Kartal joined the Kurdish terrorist organization PKK in 1990. Between October and December 2008 he shared a prison cell with Varol Bulent Aral (see above) in Adiyaman. Aral allegedly told Kartal that he was “a leading power behind the Zirve publishing house incident, that he was in contact with certain state circles, that one of them was JITEM leader Veli Kucuk (see below).”

Erhan Ozen, currently in prison, worked for JITEM between 1997 and 2005. Ozen claimed that the Malatya operation was undertaken by the Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Department (JITEM) “to create conditions for a coup”. He also told the court that Varol Bulent Aral (see above) played a key role and that it was all coordinated by three retired military, Veli Kucuk, Levent Ersoz and Muzaffer Tekin (see below). Erhan Ozen also testified during the Hrant Dink murder trial in May 2010. There he said he had known about plans to assassinate Dink since 2004.

Veysel Sahin was arrested in Malatya in May 2008 when police found hand grenades and explosives at his house. He is a former informant for the military who later became head of the Malatya office of the Iraqi Turkmen Front (ITF), the main Turkmen political party in Iraq. He claimed that he met Mehmet Ulger (see below), the head of the gendarmerie in Malatya, in March 2006. Ulger wanted to monopolize the distribution of all bibles to have control over who received them and allegedly ordered members of the gendarmerie to threaten the Christian publishing houses. Ulger also allegedly put Sahin into contact with Dogu Perincek (see below), the leader of the ultranationalist Workers' Party who was later arrested as a member of an alleged terrorist network called Ergenekon planning to undermine the government.¹

Mehmet Ulger was the Malatya Gendarmerie Commander between January 2006 and July 2008. He was incriminated in two anonymous letters. One in summer 2007 claimed that the crime was planned by the gendarmerie and university researcher Ruhi Abat (see above). Ulger confirmed that he had contacts with Abat in 2006. Another detailed letter in 2009 by an alleged (anonymous) Malatya Province Gendarmerie Intelligence officer claimed that Ulger knew about the attack, gave a briefing to the president of the Gendarmerie Headquarters Supervisory Board a few weeks before the murder, “giving detailed reports about the people who were later killed, as well as about their activities”, and also removed personally one of the suspect's SIM cards. Ulger was arrested in Ankara on 12 March 2009, interrogated by an Ergenekon prosecutor and then released.

¹ For background on *Ergenekon*, an alleged terror network planning to destabilize Turkey and undermine the Turkish government to prepare conditions for a military intervention, please go here: ESI Briefing Turkey's Dark Side (2008) - [Ergenekon arrests 2008](#)

Huseyin Yelki is a Christian convert who was baptized in June 2002. In 2009 he was incriminated by Emre Gunaydin as an instigator of the attack together with Varol Bulent Aral. Emre told prosecutors that “Yelki would help us escape with some money.” Then Emre withdrew his statements. The charges were dropped.

Ergenekon suspects with alleged links to Malatya

Levent Ersoz is a retired Brigadier General, and former gendarmerie commander, who was based in Sirnak and Diyarbakir as head of JITEM between 2002 and 2004. He is also a former head of gendarmerie intelligence. A key figure in the Ergenekon investigation, he was arrested in January 2009 and charged with plotting against the government and trying to provoke an armed revolt. Erhan Ozen (see above) referred to him as one of the people preparing an attack in Malatya together with Veli Kucuk and Muzaffer Tekin.

Sener Eruygur is a retired general and former head of the Turkish gendarmerie from August 2002 to August 2004 and as such also responsible for the operations of JITEM, which two witnesses have accused of standing behind the murders. After his retirement he became the president of the ultranationalist *Ataturk Thought Association* (Ataturkcu Dusunce Dernegi) from 2007 to 2010. He was arrested in 2008 and indicted for planning to stage a military coup in 2003/2004, coordinating efforts with ultranationalist civil society groups and university rectors.

Fatih Hilmioglu was rector of Inonu University in Malatya from 2000 to 2008. Hilmioglu was arrested on 13 April 2009 and charged in the third Ergenekon indictment with helping to prepare the ground for a military takeover under the leadership of the head of the gendarmerie, General Sener Eruygur (see above). Hilmioglu was also a leading member of the hardline *Ataturk Thought Association*, headed by Sener Eruygur (see above) after 2007. Witness Erhan Ozen (see above) claimed that Hilmioglu supported monitoring of the missionaries in Malatya by university staff and that he was in contact with Muzaffer Tekin (see below), the retired captain of the Turkish Armed Forces and Ergenekon suspect.

Muzaffer Tekin is a retired Captain of the Turkish Armed Forces and member of the ultranationalist Worker’s Party of Dogu Perincek (see below). He was arrested in the first wave of Ergenekon arrests because of his close link to Oktay Yildirim, who had hidden grenades in a house in Umraniye (Istanbul). Both Yildirim and Tekin were indicted, among other things, for instigating the attack on the Ankara Council of State where one judge was killed in 2006. Witness Erhan Ozen (see above) claimed in October 2010 that Tekin also planned activities targeting minorities and that he often came to Malatya.

Veli Kucuk is a retired gendarmerie general and according to another indictment issued in 2008 one of the founders of JITEM. Kucuk participated in many anti-Christian demonstrations, including demonstrations against the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Hrant Dink, between 2005 and 2006. He was arrested on 22 January 2008 as part of the Ergenekon investigation and is currently standing trial in Istanbul. He has long been associated with ultranationalist circles in Turkey. Witness Ozen (see above) claimed that he had a leading role in planning the Malatya murders.

Turkey’s anti-Christian campaign (2001-2009)

Sinan Aygun is the chairperson of the Ankara Chamber of Commerce. He is an outspoken opponent of the government, the EU and the work of Christian missionaries, about which the chamber issued a special report. Aygun was arrested in July 2008 and charged with being part of a conspiracy to overthrow the government. Police found 2.5 million Euro in his house. The money was allegedly planned to be used to finance activities by the Ergenekon network. Aygun was in contact with Veli Kucuk (see above), the retired gendarmerie general and allegedly one of the founders of JITEM. He regularly visited leading generals, including the head of the gendarmerie, Sener Eruygur (see above).

Sevgi Erenerol is the spokesperson of the Turkish Orthodox Patriarchate, an institution with a long history of ultra-nationalist activism which is not recognised by any other church. The “church” run by her family and without congregation was always intensely hostile towards all other Christians, including the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate. In recent years the Turkish Orthodox church became a meeting place for many ultranationalists who were later charged with being part of the Ergenekon terrorist network. Together with Ergun Poyraz (see below) Sevgi Erenerol set up the ultra-nationalist *Ayasofya Dernegi* (Hagia Sophia Association) in October 2006. She spoke often at conferences warning that “missionary activities in Turkey are aiming at more than religious goals.” Erenerol also briefed senior military about the “missionary threat” in 2006. She was arrested in January 2008 as a member of the alleged Ergenekon network.

Kemal Kerincsiz was Ergun Poyraz’ lawyer and head of the ultranationalist Great Union of Jurists (*Buyuk Hukukcular Birliđi*) since its foundation in April 2006. He instigated most Article 301 Penal Code trials for denigrating Turkishness, filing charges against Orhan Pamuk (Nobel Prize laureate 2006), writer Elif Safak, Hrant Dink and others. He also organized demonstrations against the Ecumenical Patriarchate and Turkish Armenians together with others accused of forming the Ergenekon network: Veli Kucuk, Muzaffer Tekin and Sevgi Erenerol (all: see above). He also led the legal campaign against two Turkish Protestant converts, who were arrested in October 2006, charged with slandering Turkishness and then stood trial for almost four years. Kerincsiz was arrested in January 2008 and charged with being part of the Ergenekon terror network.

Tuncer Kilinc is a retired general. He was the Secretary General of the National Security Council (NSC) from August 2001 until 2003. In 2001 a report prepared for the NSC warned that the real goal of missionary activities was the “division of Turkey”. Kilinc made the same claim many times in public. In a speech in 2002 he accused the EU of being “a Christian Club, a neo-colonialist force, determined to divide Turkey.” He also attended meetings in the Turkish Orthodox Church. Sevgi Erenerol (see above) also visited Kilinc in Ankara. In January 2009 he was charged in the third Ergenekon indictment with maintaining links to members of Ergenekon and providing confidential documents to Ergun Poyraz, the author (see below).

Ergun Poyraz is an ultranationalist writer who published “Six Months among the Missionaries” in 2001. An anti-Christian, anti-AKP and anti-EU bestselling author, he was arrested in 2007 for his links to the alleged Ergenekon network accused of plotting to undermine the government. Many confidential military documents were found in his house. During a search of the Workers’ Party office in Izmir a document was found indicating that he was also paid by JITEM.

The lawyers of the victims’ families



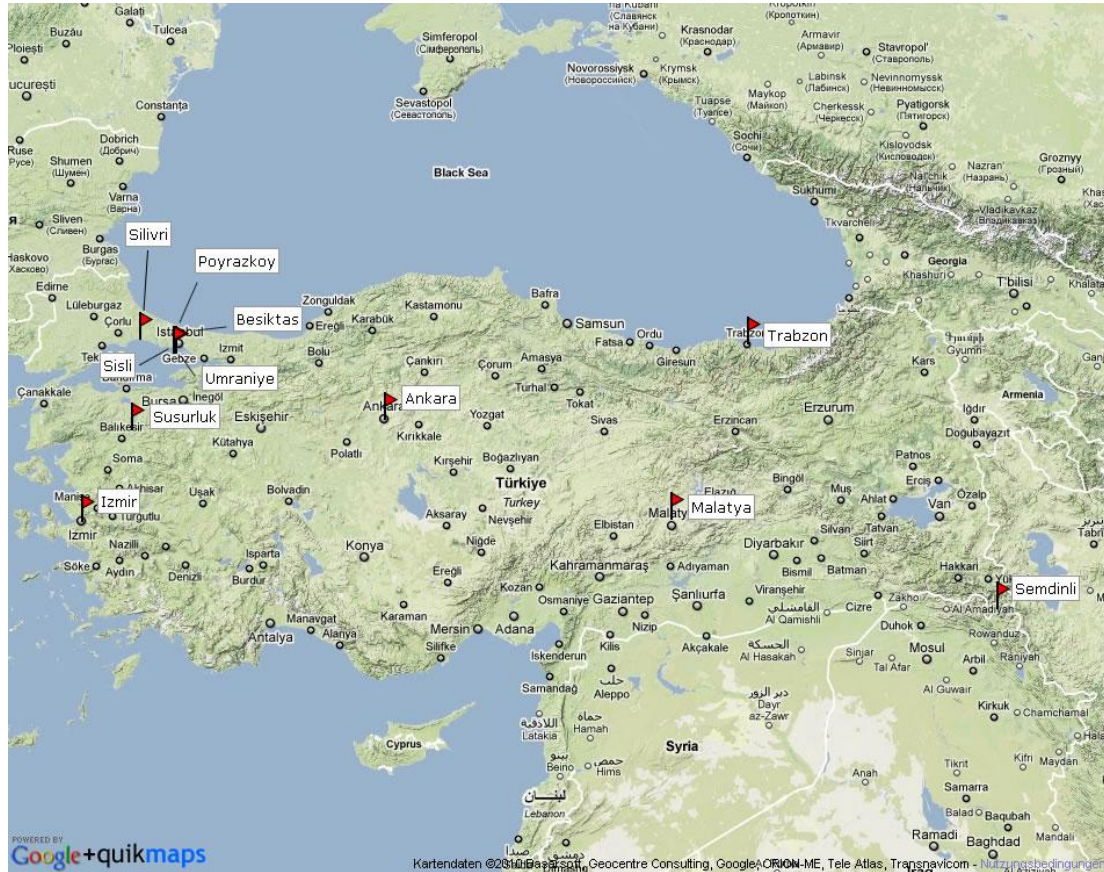
Cengiz



Dogan

A whole team of distinguished human rights lawyers has been following the Malatya court case on behalf of the victims’ families. Two of the most visible and outspoken are **Orhan Kemal Cengiz** and **Erdal Dogan**. Cengiz, who is based in Ankara, is the legal advisor of the Protestant Association, a columnist and one of the founders of Amnesty International in Turkey. In 2003, he set up the Human Rights Agenda Association (HRAA). Erdal Dogan, an Istanbul-based lawyer, had defended Hrant

Dink and his family over many years. Other lawyers include **Sezgin Tanrikulu** who came from Diyarbakir, where he had defended Kurdish victims of human rights abuses, **Hafize Cobanoglu** from Izmir, **Ergin Cinmen** and **Fethiye Cetin**, who represented the Dink family in the Hrant Dink murder trial.



- Ankara** (murder of Council of State judge, May 2006)
- Istanbul – Besiktas** (trial of Hrant Dink murder case since 2 July 2007)
- Istanbul – Poyrazkoy** (weapons found in April 2009, linked to Cage Plan indictment)
- Istanbul – Sisli** (murder of Hrant Dink outside his office, 19 January 2007)
- Istanbul – Umraniye** (weapons found in June 2007, beginning of Ergenekon investigation)
- Izmir** (home of victim Necati Aydin)
- Malatya** (murder of missionaries, April 2007)
- Semdinli** (killing of civilians in operation by gendarmerie intelligence unit members, November 2005)
- Silivri** (different trials related to alleged Ergenekon network and coup allegations since October 2008)
- Susurluk** (car crash in November 1996, revealing close links between state security institutions and organised crime in Turkey)
- Trabzon** (murder of Catholic priest Andrea Santoro, February 2006; home of the murderer of Hrant Dink)

1. INTRODUCTION

In April 2007 a gruesome triple murder took place in the Central Anatolian city of Malatya. The victims, tortured, stabbed and strangled, were two Turks and one German. All three were Protestant Christian missionaries who had recently moved to Malatya. Five young men, armed with knives and covered in blood, were found at the scene of the crime only moments after it happened.

What made the Malatya killings different from an ordinary murder case was the suspicion, present from the outset, that this was not an isolated attack by a group of nationalist youngsters. As the investigation unfolded, serious questions began to emerge, which have not yet been answered. Were anti-government elements of the Turkish state – or, more specifically, secret networks within the Turkish gendarmerie and ultranationalists linked to them – involved? Was the murder of missionaries in Malatya an operation by Turkey’s so-called “deep state” to destabilise an elected government by targeting Christian “enemies” of the Turkish nation?²

This has certainly been the impression of the team of lawyers, a who-is-who of Turkey’s most prominent human rights defenders, who have been representing the families of the victims in the Malatya trial that began in November 2007. From the very beginning these lawyers have drawn attention to the anti-Christian and anti-missionary campaigns in Turkey that were supported by a number of ultranationalist associations and writers and which had gained intensity in the period leading up to the Malatya murder. They also underlined that the murdered Christians had in fact been under permanent close observation by the gendarmerie and that the main murder suspect, Emre Gunaydin, had close contacts with the police. They pointed out that the gendarmerie was monitoring missionary activity in close cooperation with academics at Malatya University, whose rector was an outspoken ultranationalist, regularly meeting with leaders of the Turkish military.

As the Malatya trial unfolded, many more links have emerged between the Malatya murders and ultra-nationalists elsewhere in Turkey who have since been arrested for plotting to overthrow the government, for which, prosecutors have argued, they had formed a terrorist network called Ergenekon.³ Witnesses in Malatya explicitly linked the murders of the missionaries to an infamous institution much discussed in Turkey in the 1990s as being responsible for a series of mysterious assassinations, the secret Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-terrorism Department (*Jandarma Istihbarat ve Terorle Mucadele*, or JITEM) together with one of its alleged founders, a Turkish ultranationalist and retired gendarmerie general, Veli Kucuk. Kucuk himself played a leading role in anti-Christian campaigns in Istanbul which preceded the assassination of Turkish Armenian journalist Hrant Dink.⁴ Both in Malatya and in Istanbul the local branches of the ultranationalist Grey Wolf youth

² For background on Turkey’s power struggles in 2007-2008 see also: [ESI Briefing: Turkey’s dark side. Party closures, conspiracies and the future of democracy](#), April 2008.

³ For background on Ergenekon see also: [ESI Briefing: Turkey’s dark side. Party closures, conspiracies and the future of democracy](#), April 2008.

⁴ In 2006 Veli Kucuk was part of a group of aggressive ultranationalists holding up a banner outside a court room in which Hrant Dink was tried on the charged of insulting Turkishness, which accused Dink of being “the son of a missionary.” See also: [Fethiye Cetin and Deniz Tuna, Third Year Report on Hrant Dink’s Murder](#), p. 4. To understand the background to the Hrant Dink case this is essential reading, as is the most recent [Fourth Year Report on Hrant Dink’s Murder](#). Read also this 2009 briefing on the trial by the former member of the European Parliament, Joost Lagendijk: [Hrant Dink – A Victim of Intolerance and the Quest for Justice](#), July 2009. For more on Hrant Dink go here: http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=311&film_ID=10&slide_ID=24.

organisation (*Ulku Ocaklari*) had also organised demonstrations against Christians. In 2008 both Veli Kucuk and Levent Temiz, the head of the Istanbul branch of the *Ulku Ocaklari*, who had personally threatened journalist Hrant Dink, were arrested and put on trial, charged with being members of Ergenekon.

The lawyers representing the Malatya victims' families have also pointed to similarities between different attacks on Christians in 2006 and 2007. Hrant Dink was killed in Istanbul in early 2007, shortly before the Malatya murders, by another young ultranationalist, who had in fact been under permanent observation by the gendarmerie and police. The alleged instigator in the Hrant Dink murder case, Yasin Hayal, who is currently on trial, had numerous links to the gendarmerie. Yasin Hayal paid regular visits to the Trabzon branch of the gendarmerie intelligence department, whose branch director supposedly described Hayal as "a solid boy, a clean one, [who] will do good work in the future."⁵ This notwithstanding the fact that in 2002 Yasin Hayal had beaten the Catholic priest in the Santa Maria Church in Trabzon so badly that the priest was in coma for days (in 2006 the successor priest in Santa Maria Church, Italian Andrea Santoro, was killed by another ultranationalist youth). In addition Hayal's brother-in-law had been a gendarmerie informant who warned his superiors in the gendarmerie in Trabzon in 2006 that Hrant Dink would be murdered.⁶

The lawyers representing the Malatya victims' families argued in a long letter to the court in April 2010 for the missionary murder case to be merged with one of the Ergenekon trials. They also pointed to the Cage Operation Action Plan ("Kafes Operasyonu Eylem Planı"), an alleged plot prepared by parts of the Turkish military to intimidate and assassinate non-Muslims in Turkey in order to create an atmosphere of chaos. The plan was made public in 2009. The first sentence of the plan refers to the killings of Priest Santoro (in Trabzon in 2006), the murder of Hrant Dink (in 2007) and the Malatya murders as "operations".⁷ The judges in Malatya have not yet made a decision on this request by the lawyers.

So far 30 court hearings have taken place in the Malatya trial. At the most recent hearing in December 2010 a new defence lawyer representing the suspects once again accused the murdered Christians of "planning to eliminate our religion, dividing up our country, bribing our people and financially supporting terror organisations." He also tried to intimidate the judges, shouting that "this is a Protestant court."⁸ The next hearing will take place on 20 January 2011. Considering the seriousness of the charges, it is striking how little attention has been paid to the Malatya trial in recent months in Turkish and international media. For anybody who is genuinely interested in understanding contemporary Turkish politics, and the spectacular court cases which currently look into the dark world of ultranationalist associations and their links to different parts of the state, the Malatya murder trial is a very good place to start.

⁵ Fethiye Cetin and Deniz Tuna, Third Year Report on Hrant Dink's Murder, p. 8.

⁶ For more on the Turkish gendarmerie and the Hrant Dink case read the excellent chapter in a recent publication by one of Turkey's leading think-tanks, Tesev: Almanac p. 180.

⁷ Full text of the plan: [http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/turkey%20-%20Operation%20Cage%20\(Kafes\)%20Action%20Plan%20\(English%20translation\).pdf](http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/turkey%20-%20Operation%20Cage%20(Kafes)%20Action%20Plan%20(English%20translation).pdf).

⁸ Protocol of the 30th court hearing, 3 December 2010; statement by lawyer Mert Eryilmaz.

2. FEAR OF CHRISTIANS

a. A wave of fanaticism?

The year 2006 witnessed a series of seemingly random attacks against Christians throughout Turkey. On 8 January Kamil Kiroglu, a Protestant church leader in Adana, was beaten by five young men.⁹ On 5 February Andrea Santoro, an Italian Catholic priest, was shot dead in the Santa Maria church in the Black Sea city of Trabzon by a 16 year old boy shouting “God is Great” (Allah-u-akbar).¹⁰ A few days later a Catholic friar was attacked in Izmir by a group of young men who had threatened to kill him.¹¹ On 12 March Henri Leylek, a Capuchin priest, was attacked in the Mediterranean city of Mersin.¹² On 2 July Pierre Bruinessen, a Catholic priest, was stabbed in Samsun.¹³ In December the priest of the Tepebasi church in Eskisehir was attacked.¹⁴

It appeared that a sudden wave of extreme anti-Christian sentiment had appeared as if from nowhere to grip the country – all the more striking as it erupted just a few months after Turkey finally succeeded in opening accession talks with the European Union in October 2005. Turkey’s small Christian community lived in growing fear. “We are no longer safe here,” said the then Vicar Apostolic for Anatolia, Luigi Padovese.¹⁵ In November 2006 the *Minority Rights Group*, an NGO, warned that “Christians have borne the brunt of rising religious intolerance.”¹⁶ Felix Korner, a German Jesuit whom the Vatican had sent to Ankara to encourage a Christian-Islamic dialogue, noted that the “basic level of anti-Christian sentiment has increased.”¹⁷

For some observers, in Turkey as well as abroad, this wave of violence was a reflection of a rise in violent Islamism. This fear was reinforced by another shocking incident. On 17 May

⁹ *Compass Direct* “Turkey: Convert Christian Beaten Unconscious”, 20 January 2006, <http://archive.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=4175&backpage=archives&critere=Kamil%20Kiroglu&countryname=&rowcur=0>.

¹⁰ *Compass Direct*, “Turkey: Catholic Priest Gunned Down”, 7 February 2006, <http://archive.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=4207&backpage=archives&critere=Santoro&countryname=&rowcur=0>.

¹¹ Annette Grossbongardt, “Fear Prevails after Priest's Murder”, *Spiegel Online*, 4 December 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,411043,00.html>.

¹² *Compass Direct*, “Turkey: Intruder Threatens Catholic Priest and Youth”, 16 March 2006, <http://archive.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=4267&backpage=archives&critere=Leylek&countryname=&rowcur=0>.

¹³ *Compass Direct*, “Turkey: Catholic Priest Knifed in North”, 5 July 2006, <http://archive.compassdirect.org/en/display.php?page=news&lang=en&length=long&idelement=4450&backpage=archives&critere=Santoro&countryname=&rowcur=0>.

¹⁴ “Turkey: International Religious Freedom Report 2007,” website of US State Department, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2007/90204.htm>.

¹⁵ Annette Grossbongardt, “Fear Prevails after Priest's Murder”, *Spiegel Online*, 4 December 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,411043,00.html>. Padovese was himself killed by his driver on 3 June 2010. See *Die Welt*, “Der erschütternde Tod des Bischofs Luigi Padovese” (The shocking death of bishop Luigi Padovese), 4 June 2010, <http://www.welt.de/politik/ausland/article7909574/Der-erschuetternde-Tod-des-Bischofs-Luigi-Padovese.html>.

¹⁶ Nurcan Kaya, “Turkey’s Christians and other religious minorities face discrimination and rights violations“, *Minority Rights Group International*, 28 November 2006, <http://www.minorityrights.org/676/press-releases/turkeys-christian-and-other-religious-minorities-face-discrimination-and-rights-violations.html>.

¹⁷ Annette Grossbongardt, “Trouble in Turkey, Fear Prevails after Priest's Murder“, *Der Spiegel*, 4 December 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,411043,00.html>.

2006, a lawyer, Alparslan Arslan¹⁸, stormed into the Council of State (*Danistay*, Turkey's highest administrative court) in Ankara shouting "I am God's soldier, God is great!"¹⁹ Arslan shot at judges sitting in their chamber, killing one of them.²⁰ Arslan later stated that he was motivated by a court ruling from February 2006 when the judges had decided not to promote a primary school teacher because she wore a headscarf outside class.²¹ On the day of the judge's funeral in Ankara on 18 May 2006, tens of thousands of people demonstrated against the AKP government which they accused of abetting such attacks. The presiding judges of the most important courts (Constitutional, Council of State, Court of Appeals), joined by the president of Turkey's Bar Association and state prosecutors, demonstrated at Ataturk's mausoleum. Thousands joined the demonstrations, chanting "Turkey won't become Iran, the murderer is the government" and "Turkey is secular and will stay so."²² "A bullet for secularism", ran the headline in *Milliyet*, a Turkish daily.²³ In September 2006, *Der Spiegel* asserted that "a deep chasm is opening up in Turkish society" between a secular and modern upper class on the one hand and "fanatical masses" on the other. Often, the author noted, "one spark is enough to set the fanatical fire alight."²⁴

In 2007, things went from bad to worse. On 19 January Hrant Dink, founder and editor-in-chief of the weekly *Agos* and one of the advocates of Turkish-Armenian rapprochement, was assassinated in front of his office in Istanbul's Sisli district. His murderer, like that of Father Andrea Santoro, was a 16 year old young man from the Black Sea town of Trabzon.²⁵ Then another gruesome attack on Christians took place in April 2007 in the Central Anatolian city of Malatya.²⁶

On 18 April at around 12.30 pm Gokhan Talas, a graphic designer, arrived with his wife at the office of Zirve, a Christian publishing house in Malatya, which he shared with Necati Aydin, a Turkish priest, and Ugur Yuksel, both Turkish converts to Christianity. Trying to enter the premises, Talas and his wife found the door locked from the inside. They became suspicious and called the police. Having arrived on the scene, police officers entered the office to find three men – Necati Aydin, Ugur Yuksel and Tilmann Ekkehart Geske, a German missionary – in a pool of blood, covered with stab wounds, their throats slit, their

¹⁸ *Milliyet*, "Dindar ve ulkucu bir kişi" [A religious and fascist person], 18 May 2006, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2006/05/18/guncel/gun01a.html>. In Turkey female civil servants are not allowed to wear the headscarf at work. This particular teacher took her headscarf off before entering the school property but wore it outside the school.

¹⁹ *Hurriyet*, "Allah'ın askeriyim" dedi vurdu [He said I am God's soldier and shot], 18 May 2006, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=4432607&tarih=2006-05-18>.

²⁰ The name of the judge was Mustafa Yucel Ozbilgin.

²¹ *The Sunday Times*, "Judge shot dead after blocking promotion of teacher who wore Muslim headscarf", 18 May 2006, <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article720515.ece>.

²² *Hurriyet*, "Ata'ya sikayet" [complaint to Ataturk], 19 May 2006, <http://hurarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/goster/haber.aspx?id=4438801&tarih=2006-05-19> and *BBC*, "Turks protest over judge shooting", 18 May 2006, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4993444.stm>.

²³ Cover page printed fully in Mehmet Altan, *Puslu Demokrasi*, Etkilesim Yayinlari, 2009p. 16.

²⁴ Dilek Zaptcioglu, "Goldenes Kreuz unter der Bluse" [The golden cross under the blouse], *Spiegel Online*, 17 September 2006, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,437512,00.html>.

²⁵ ESI Briefing: "Turkey's Dark Side. Party Closures, conspiracies and the future of democracy", 2 April 2008, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=104. See also: Sarah Rainsford, "Turkey's nationalist hotbed", *BBC*, 1 March 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6403813.stm>. On nationalism in the Black Sea region see: *Radikal*, "Papazini vuran kent: Trabzon" [The city shooting its priest: Trabzon], 19 February 2006, http://www.radikal.com.tr/ek_haber.php?ek=r2&haberno=5559.

²⁶ For a list of attacks in 2007 see the report prepared by the Association of Protestant Churches, http://www.protestankiliseler.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1137&Itemid=459.

hands and feet bound with rope. Geske and Aydin were declared dead at the scene of the crime. Yuksel died shortly after reaching the hospital.

The police did not have to look far for suspects. Three young men, Hamit Ceker, Salih Gurler, and Cuma Ozdemir, were apprehended on the spot, covered with blood. Abuzer Yildirim was found on a balcony one floor below as he tried to escape. A fifth man, Emre Gunaydin, had fallen from the third floor and was lying, injured, on the pavement in front of the building.²⁷ Emre Gunaydin turned out to be the alleged leader of the group. All suspects were between 19 and 20 years old.

The Malatya murders shocked the entire nation. Was this another terrifying case of religious-inspired fanaticism? At first glance it seems so.²⁸ British expert on Turkey Gareth Jenkins, writing in 2009, described the Malatya case as the “brutal murder of three Christian missionaries by *Islamist* youths.”²⁹ An American documentary about the murders reported that Emre Gunaydin told Necati Aydin during the fatal encounter to repeat that “there is no God but Allah.” When Aydin defended his Christian belief, according to the film, “the violence exploded.”³⁰ The five suspects had left identical notes, which they apparently wrote upon Emre Gunaydin’s suggestion.³¹

“We are brothers. We go to death, we might not return. If we die, we will become martyrs, those that stay alive should help each other. Give us your blessings. We five are brothers, we are going to death, we might not return.”³²

b. The EU’s “missionary army”

Back in 1999 Turkey had obtained official candidate status from the European Union in return for a commitment to carry out human rights reforms, among other things. This also meant taking steps to improve the legal situation of many of Turkey’s minorities, including its tiny Christian community (less than 150,000 in a population of 72 million people), as well as giving cultural rights to Kurds and reining in the power of Turkey’s all-powerful armed forces.

Turkey’s minorities have long been perceived by the state, including the military establishment, as a potential threat to national unity. The National Security Policy Document (NSPD or Milli Guvenlik Siyaseti Belgesi) is a secret document drafted by Turkey’s National

²⁷ From the Indictment Nr. 2007/75, Malatya Zirve Trial, p. 5.

²⁸ Many misleading reports reinforced this early impression of an Islamist background. One report stated that “particularly the slicing of fingertips has convinced observers of the consciously religious motivation of the assassins. The perpetrators seem to have been following the instructions of Sure 8:12, from the Koran. There it states ‘I will strike terror into the hearts of unbelievers. Flay their necks (with a sword) and strike every finger’ ... the Azhar and Ahmadeyya translation says, ‘chop off every finger tip.’” In fact, as the autopsy report noted, nobody’s fingers had been cut. *Culture Watch*, “Christian Martyrs and the Power of Forgiveness”, 1 May 2007, <http://www.billmuehlenberg.com/2007/05/01/christian-martyrs-and-the-power-of-forgiveness/>, also in <http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/19604.htm>.

²⁹ Gareth Jenkins, “Between Fact and Fantasy”, 2009, p. 27.

³⁰ Documentary “Malatya”, 2009. Website: <http://malatyafilm.com>.

³¹ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 5.

³² *Sabah*, “Olume gidiyoruz’ diye not biraktilar” [They left a note saying we are going to die], 19 April 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/04/19/haber.72F5B52E38DD439C890A042CA1526599.html>.

Security Council.³³ Throughout the years, every edition of the NSPD has featured a list of internal and external enemies of the Turkish state. These have included Armenians and Greeks, traditional sources of trouble and suspicion; Kurds, seen as a separatist threat since the beginning of the Republic; leftists and communists, particularly during the Cold War; and, after the fall of communism, Islamists and religious “reactionaries”. All these internal enemies were said to be even more dangerous because of their external supporters: the Turkish Greek citizens found them allegedly in Greece; the Armenians in their diaspora; Kurds in neighbouring countries; communists in the Soviet Union; and Islamists in Iran. It was only in the National Security Policy Document’s most recent revision, which was adopted in November 2010 and drawn up by the government itself, that most internal enemies were removed from the list.³⁴

For decades, Turkey’s Protestants were not seen as a serious threat by the National Security Council. Their number is tiny: some 3,000 out of a total population of 72 million people in Turkey. There are many more Buddhists in Austria (some 10,400 out of a total population of 8 million) than Protestant Christians in Turkey.³⁵ Nor has Turkey ever been easy terrain for missionaries. Statistics by Jehova’s Witnesses give the following numbers of baptisms in 2008: 643 in Greece, more than 3,600 in Germany, more than 6,000 in Ukraine but only 91 in Turkey. A few dozen missionaries among some 3,000 Protestants did not appear to be a priority concern for Turkey’s national security establishment – that is, until 2001.

In 2001, Turkish author Ergun Poyraz published *Six Months among the Missionaries* (“Misyonerler Arasında 6 ay”), an exposé of a web of connections between Turkey’s alleged enemies. According to Poyraz, missionaries were a genuine threat to his country, all the more so since they enjoyed the backing of a dangerous outside power: the European Union. For Poyraz, the reforms demanded by the EU were in themselves cause for alarm. The first sentence of Poyraz’s book is clear: “In this book I take into account the desire of Christian and Jewish missionaries to get their hands on the lands of our country ... in an unarmed crusade.”³⁶ Theirs is a crusade using “books, schools, hospitals, movies, and all sorts of propaganda methods. A big missionary army has invaded our country.”³⁷ It is important to note that in Turkey missionary activity is legal.

Since the 1990s, Poyraz has published books on subjects that reflect the concerns of Turkey’s national security establishment.³⁸ In 1998 his book *Refah’s Real Face* was used during a trial

³³ Until recently the National Security Policy Document was prepared in the office of the chief of the general staff. See: Ahmet Insel and Ali Baramoglu (editors), *Almanac Turkey 2006 – 2008, Security Sector and Democratic Oversight*, Tesev Publications, August 2010, p. 97. Gerassimos Karabelias, “Dictating the Upper Tide: Civil-Military Relations in the Post-Ozal Decades 1993-2003”, *Turkish Studies*, Volume 9, Issue 3, September 2008, p. 460.

³⁴ *CNN Turk*, “Milli Güvenlik Siyaset Belgesi kabul edildi” (The NSDP was accepted), 22 November 2010, <http://www.cnnturk.com/2010/turkiye/11/22/milli.guvenlik.siyaset.belgesi.kabul.edildi/597105.0/index.html>. Concerning the debate about Armenians in Turkey and the role of the National Security Council in the recent past in this debate see also: http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=156&document_ID=108.

³⁵ Census in Austria, religious affiliation, http://www.statistik.at/web_de/statistiken/bevoelkerung/volkszaehlungen_registerzaehlungen/bevoelkerung_nach_demographischen_merkmalen/022894.html.

³⁶ Ergun Poyraz, *Misyonerler arasında alti ay: dunden bugune Hirstiyanlik ve Yahudilerin analizi [Six months among the missionaries]*, Toplumsal Donusum Yayinlari, Istanbul 2004, p. 11.

³⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 32 and 37.

³⁸ Other books by him include: *Amerika’daki Imam* (The Imam in America, November 2009) about Fetullah Gulen, *Tarikat, Siyaset, Ticaret and Cinayet Masonlarla El Ele* (August 2009), *Musa’nin Mucahiti* (July 2007),

against the Refah (Welfare) Party, which ended in the party's closure.³⁹ In 2007, on the eve of another closure case – this time, against the governing AKP – he wrote *Children of Moses: Tayyip and Emine* (“Musa'nin Cocuklari: Tayyip ve Emine”), a bestseller about Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan and the supposed threat to Turkey posed by his party (and his wife, Emine, who is wearing a headscarf).⁴⁰ Poyraz accused Erdogan and his conservative allies of being crypto-Jews with secret ties to the conspiratorial forces of “global Zionism.”⁴¹

In his 2001 book on missionaries, Poyraz spins a familiar nationalist tale: how Western missionaries instigated the Ottoman Armenians to rise up against the Turks during World War I; how later, in the 1980s, Christian missionaries again “reached out to the Kurds and instigated them to rebel.”⁴² As to what now made the missionaries so dangerous, Poyraz is explicit: “the most important reason why the missionaries have been given limitless freedom in their activities is the European Union.”⁴³ He adds, “As you know, the West has not digested that the Turks conquered Istanbul and eliminated Byzantium, because Istanbul and Anatolia are holy lands for Christians.”⁴⁴ In the 1920s, Poyraz notes, Turkey was led by Ataturk and was able to defend itself against the Western powers' plans to split up Turkey through the Treaty of Sevres.⁴⁵ Today, warns Poyraz, Turks must get ready for a new anti-colonial battle. He concludes his book with a threat,

“I think it is useful to remind the missionaries of the following: This land has been Turkish for thousands of years. Its price was paid with blood. Those dreaming of getting back these lands should foresee paying that price.”⁴⁶

Poyraz's analysis was picked up in 2001 by the National Security Council (NSC), at the time widely considered the most powerful institution in Turkey. The NSC's Secretary General was General Tuncer Kilinc, one of the most outspoken opponents of Turkey's EU aspirations, who repeatedly and publicly accused the EU of working on dividing Turkey and supporting Kurdish terrorists to this end. In December 2001 an article in the daily *Sabah*, under the title “Missionary Alarm”, referred to a special report prepared for a meeting of the National Security Council:

“Missionary activities were put on the December meeting agenda of the National Security Council. A report prepared for the NSC warned that the real goal of missionary

Kanla Abdest Alanlar (March 2007), *Patlak Ampul* (March 2007), *Musa'nin Gulu* (2007), *From the Kaliphate's Army to the Arab Kurdish Party* (Hilafet Ordusundan Arap Kurt Partisine, 2005).

³⁹ Refah (Welfare) became the largest party under Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan in 1996. However, the coalition government was forced out of power by the Turkish military in 1997, due to being suspected of having an Islamist agenda.

⁴⁰ Mustafa Akyol, “The Latest Jewish Conspiracy: ‘Moderate Islam’ & AKP”, *The White Path*, 5 May 2007, http://thewhitepath.com/unveiling-turkey/the_latest_jewish_conspiracy_moderate_islam_akp/.

⁴¹ Poyraz' latest book, published in August 2010, is omnipresent in Turkey's bookshops in November 2010: *Takunyali Fuhrer* (Reactionary Fuhrer), whose cover shows Erdogan as Adolf Hitler.

⁴² Ergun Poyraz, *Misyonerler arasinda alti ay: dunden bugune Hirstiyanlik ve Yahudilerin analizi [Six months among the missionaries]*, Toplumsal Donusum Yayinlari, Istanbul 2004, p. 31.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 38.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 204.

⁴⁵ The Treaty of Sevres, signed by the defeated Ottoman government after World War I in 1920, saw Anatolia split up into different territories controlled by different allies – Greece, England, France and Italy – as well as an independent large Armenia and an autonomous Kurdish region.

⁴⁶ Ergun Poyraz, *Misyonerler arasinda alti ay: dunden bugune Hirstiyanlik ve Yahudilerin analizi [Six months among the missionaries]*, Toplumsal Donusum Yayinlari, Istanbul 2004, p. 448.

activities was not religious propaganda, but the ‘division of Turkey’. [The report] emphasised that legal measures were not adequate to prevent such activities.”⁴⁷

The report submitted to the National Security Council alleged that 8 million bibles had been distributed for free in Turkey during the previous three years. It highlighted in particular the dangerous role played by Christian publishing houses and their links to the terrorist PKK. “Although these publishing houses have published separatist maps of Turkey, nothing has been done against them,” the report alleged. “During the last year alone, 19 churches have been opened in Istanbul.”⁴⁸ Tuncer Kilinc, the NSC’s Secretary General, warned in a public speech in 2002 that the EU was “a Christian Club, a neo-colonialist force, determined to divide Turkey.”⁴⁹

In December 2004 Turkey received a date for the launch of EU accession negotiations in one year’s time. Strikingly, this coincided with an ever more aggressive campaign against Christian missionaries. In 2004 Poyraz’s book was reprinted by a nationalist publishing house.⁵⁰ The same year, the Ankara Chamber of Commerce issued its own report on missionaries.⁵¹ Sinan Aygun, who has led the Ankara Chamber since 1998, publicly warned that the reforms promoted by the EU were helping missionary activities. As Aygun explained on the Chamber’s website:

“At this moment, Turkey is under attack by missionaries. In the capital, Ankara, they can be found in every corner. They are gaining sympathisers through social events such as picnics and house visits, as well as educational activities such as religious services, winter schools, seminars and conferences ... They use religion as a weapon. What else do they need? There is a famous African saying: ‘When the Christians arrived in Africa, the Africans had their land and the Christians had their bible. The Christians told us to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened our eyes, they had our land and we had their bible.’ Let us be careful about not experiencing a similar situation in Turkey.”⁵²

The Chamber’s report is full of surprisingly specific details. It notes, for example, that 15 people joined the Ankara Kurtulus Church in 2003, bringing the overall size of the flock to 130.⁵³

⁴⁷ Mehmet Cetingulec, “Misyoner alarmi” [Missionary Alarm], *Sabah*, 7 December 2001, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2001/12/07/p06.html>.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Quoted in Gamze Avci, “Turkey’s Slow EU Candidacy: Insurmountable Hurdles to Membership or Simple Euro-skepticism?” *Turkish Studies*, p. 164.

⁵⁰ *Toplumsal Donusum Yayinlari* (social transformation publishing). Its owner Durmus Ali Ozoglu was indicted in March 2009 as part of the Ergenekon investigation and charged with making propaganda for the Ergenekon organization (Second Ergenekon Indictment p. 1,569 ff). Ozoglu was also spokesperson of the ultra-nationalist National Forces Association (Kuvvai Milliye Dernegi or KMD). To join the KMD, which had cells throughout Turkey, members had to swear an oath: “We are ready to die, be killed and kill for our cause.” Most of its leaders, retired military, were arrested and indicted as part of the Ergenekon investigation in 2008.

⁵¹ *Ankara Chamber of Commerce (Ankara Ticaret Odasi)*, “ATO’dan ‘Misyonerlik’ Raporu” [Missionary Report by the Ankara Chamber of Commerce], 5 June 2004, <http://www.atonet.org.tr/yeni/index.php?p=189&l=1>.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.* The report also explains that the Christian community controls “more than 300 churches, many bookstores, one library, 6 journals, tens of foundations, publishing houses, 5 radio stations, many monasteries, 2 coffee houses, one agency, 7 companies, one hotel, one translation office, 7 newspapers, one historic building, 4 ruins, one fortress and tens of associations.”

Then Ilker Cinar, a Turkish convert who had been working as a Protestant missionary in Turkey for over ten years, added his voice to this chorus. In 2005 Cinar turned his back on Christianity and, after stating publicly how wonderful it felt to return to the Muslim faith, he explained on television the true intentions of Turkey's Protestants: the Christians wanted "to re-conquer the holy land" and to work with the Kurdish PKK.⁵⁴ In 2005 he published a book with the title "I was a missionary, the code is decoded – former Bishop Ilker Cinar reports" (*Ben bir misyonerdim, sifre cozuldu – Eski Baspapaz Ilker Cinar anlatiyor*). There he describes how missionaries are trying to destroy Turkey.

In 2007, the author Ergun Poyraz was arrested due to alleged close links to a group of ultranationalists who had been hiding grenades in Istanbul and whom prosecutors charged with having murdered a judge in Ankara in 2006, a false flag operation that was supposed to look like an Islamist crime (see page 4). When Poyraz was captured, the police found many confidential military documents in his home containing information which he used for his books.⁵⁵ According to original documents included in the Ergenekon indictment, he had also been receiving money from JITEM, the secret Gendarmerie Intelligence and Anti-Terror Organisation.⁵⁶ Sinan Aygun, the head of the Ankara Chamber of Commerce, was also arrested. He had been in close contact with key Ergenekon suspects⁵⁷, including general Sener Eruygur, the head of the gendarmerie who allegedly planned to carry out a military coup in 2003-2004.⁵⁸ Police found 2.5 million Euro in cash in Aygun's house, which prosecutors claim would have been used to finance activities by this ultranationalist network.⁵⁹

Tuncer Kilinc, the anti-European former general secretary of the National Security Council, was also arrested in 2008 and indicted for being a member of the same conspiratorial network. Prosecutors found that he had also attended numerous meetings with other alleged anti-government and anti-Christian conspirators in the Istanbul Turkish Orthodox Church, where many of the crimes were allegedly discussed. Members of that very group had played a prominent role in the hate-campaign against Christians and in particular against Armenian journalist Hrant Dink.⁶⁰

Finally, it emerged in 2008 that Ilker Cinar had not in fact ever been a genuine convert. He had been on the payroll of the Turkish military since 1992, even while posing as a Protestant pastor and infiltrating Turkey's small Protestant community.⁶¹ In fact, as became clear during the Malatya trials, the intense interest of parts of the state, in particular the gendarmerie, in the activities of Christian missionaries had turned this small group into one of the most closely watched groups in the country.

⁵⁴ Ilker Cinar on Flash TV in February 2005; quoted in Kai Strittmatter, "Falscher Christ wollte die Turkei retten" (False Christian wanted to save Turkey), *Tagesanzeiger*, 16 June 2008, <http://sc.tagesanzeiger.ch/dyn/news/ausland/890253.html>.

⁵⁵ I. Ergenekon Indictment, pp. 683, 684.

⁵⁶ I. Ergenekon Indictment, p. 667.

⁵⁷ Such as the spokesperson of the Turkish Orthodox Church, Sevgi Erenorerol, ultra-nationalist lawyer Kemal Kerincisiz and retired general Veli Kucuk, one of the alleged founders of JITEM.

⁵⁸ II. Ergenekon Indictment, p. 1,063.

⁵⁹ II. Ergenekon Indictment, p. 1,063.

⁶⁰ III. Ergenekon Indictment, p. 626.

⁶¹ See also Ilker Cinar, "Ben bir misyonerdim, sifre cozuldu", *Ozan Yayincilik*, 2005.

3. MALATYA

a. The lives of missionaries

Malatya is one of the oldest cities in Anatolia, dating back to Hittite days (1180 – 800 B.C). It lies on a fertile plain by a tributary of the Euphrates, at the foot of the Taurus mountain range.⁶² The region is famous for apricots, producing 95 percent of Turkey’s dried apricots (Turkey is the world’s leading apricot producer). The town has a population of roughly 400,000 people.

Old Malatya has several historic landmarks. One of them is a Seljuk Mosque (Ulu Camii) built on an earlier Arab foundation. Another is a 13th century caravanserai. The town also has a long Christian heritage. “Until the 1900s there were 33 Armenian churches in the province of which 10 were in the city centre,” one resident recently recalled.⁶³ There were also many Armenian schools.⁶⁴ After World War I and the deportations and killings of Armenians there were almost no Christians left in Malatya. The few who remained moved to Istanbul in the 1960s. One of them was Hrant Dink who was born in Malatya in 1954. In the period when Dink moved with his parents to Istanbul in 1961, Christian life in Malatya came to an end.

This changed in 2002 when a small group of foreign missionaries arrived in Malatya, setting up two Protestant publishing houses, Kayra and Zirve. Tilmann Geske, a German, moved to Malatya in 2002 with his wife and three children. Geske had studied theology in Germany. He came from Lindau, an idyllic city on Lake Constance, where he divided his time between a job at a warehouse and his duties as a pastor at “New Life”, a Protestant Free church. It was at the church that Tilmann met his wife Susanne, who had studied for three years at a Bible school in Switzerland. She later recalled that she put up several conditions when Tilmann proposed to her:

“You want to marry me? Ok. A potential husband has to fulfil three criteria. First he has to be a Christian. Second he must have been a Christian for longer than I have. And third, I want to live in a Muslim country.”⁶⁵

Tilmann accepted. Before going abroad as missionaries, he and his wife took courses in the UK and Germany. Tilmann trained as a certified English teacher. In 1997 the young family moved to Adana, where Tilmann registered a translation office called “Silk Road”. The Geskes learned Turkish. As Susanne Geske later explained, their ambition was to “reach the unreachable, to go further East, to the Turkish Islamic heartland.”⁶⁶ When they moved with their children to Malatya in 2002 Susanne called it a “bigger challenge.”⁶⁷ Even before the Geskes’ arrival, the couple received front-page coverage in the local press. A South African

⁶² *Malatya Aktuel*, “Malatya’nin Nufusu Azalmis” [Malatya’s population decreased], 21 January 2008, http://www.malatyaaktuel.com/inx/haber-3897-Malatya_nin_Nufusu_Azalmis.html.

⁶³ As Hosrof Koletavitoglu from the Association of Malatya Armenians told Agos in October 2010, the region was once known as “Little Armenia”.

⁶⁴ Sahag Guryan, “Malatyali Ermeniler Dernegi kuruldu” [Association of Malatya Armenians founded], *AGOS*, 29 October 2010, p. 18.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Carswell and Joanna Wright, *Susanne Geske: Ich will keine Rache, das Drama von Malatya* [*Susanne Geske: I don’t want revenge*], Brunnen Verlag, 2008, p. 40.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 60.

⁶⁷ *Berliner Tageszeitung*, “Die Fremden” (The strangers), 29 June 2007, <http://www.berlinonline.de/berliner-zeitung/archiv/.bin/dump.fcgi/2007/0629/seite3/0001/index.html>.

missionary who had arrived in Malatya earlier in 2002 to run the Kayra Christian publishing house in Malatya told them:

“Congratulations! You made it onto the cover page of a local newspaper ... In this way one learns that Christians are dangerous and are coming to Malatya.”⁶⁸

In Malatya Tilmann taught English, translated, and preached to a Protestant community of about 15-20 adults.⁶⁹

Necati Aydin was a Christian convert from Izmir. He moved to Malatya with his wife and their two children in November 2003, becoming general director of the Zirve publishing house (which also has offices in Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir and Van). Necati converted after falling in love with Semse, an Orthodox Christian from Antakya (the ancient Antiochia) who herself had converted to Protestantism. German missionary Wolfgang Hade, who was married to Semse’s sister, later recalled Semse’s reaction when Necati initially expressed doubts about converting: “She said: ‘It is over! I talked to Necati on the phone and he told me that he wanted to remain a Muslim. If God does not bring him back, then the story is over.’”⁷⁰

The couple married in 1997. A year later Necati began to lead a community of converts in Izmir. The group, whose meetings took place in the two lower floors of an apartment building, had problems with the authorities. On one Sunday morning in September 1999, most of the Christians were arrested by the police. They were released the same evening. On 1 March 2000 Necati and another colleague were arrested by the gendarmerie after distributing bibles and Christian literature in a small town near Izmir. When the case went to trial, the witnesses called by the prosecution all withdrew their previous testimonies, admitting that “people from the gendarmerie had urged them to make false statements” against Necati and his colleague. The pair was released after spending 30 days in prison.⁷¹

Things did not change after Necati arrived in Malatya. Here too, he was repeatedly stopped by the gendarmerie while distributing Christian literature in the countryside. The local media launched a hate campaign against Christians. In February 2005, the local newspaper *Bakis* alleged that there were 48 “home churches” in “every part of the city.”⁷² On 19 February 2005 the head of the Kayra publishing house issued a public statement: “There is open agitation against Christians and foreigners in Malatya. Despite the fact that there is no evidence that Christians living in Turkey are promoting [Kurdish] separatism, there is no end to these accusations.”⁷³

On 5 December 2005 a group of young ultra-nationalists demonstrated in front of the offices of a transport company that had delivered a shipment of bibles to Kayra. One daily reported that Burhan Coskun, the head of the Malatya chapter of *Ulku Ocaklari* – a nationalist youth organization commonly referred to as Grey Wolves – participated in the demonstration. “Do

⁶⁸ His name was Martin de Lange. Jonathan Carswell and Joanna Wright, *Susanne Geske: Ich will keine Rache, das Drama von Malatya [Susanne Geske: I don't want revenge]*, Brunnen Verlag, 2008, p. 74.

⁶⁹ Wolfgang Hade, “Mein Schwager – ein Martyrer; eine Geschichte des türkischen Christen Necati Aydin [My brother in law – a martyr; a story of the Turkish Christian Necati Aydin], Neufeld Verlag, 2009, p. 92.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 35. Hade lives in Izmit near Istanbul.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 54.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 81. See also: *bianet*, “Subat 2005te Hedef Gosterildiler” [in February 2005 they were shown as a target], 19 April 2007, <http://www.bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/94780-subat-2005te-hedef-gosterildiler>.

⁷³ *Milliyet*, “Provokator dun Malatya'daydi” [The provocator was yesterday in Malatya], 19 April 2007, <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/2007/04/19/guncel/agun.html>.

we live in England?” he was said to have yelled.⁷⁴ Local newspapers chimed in. “Now it is the turn of the Vatican representation” ran one of the headlines, alluding to the attempt by Mehmet Ali Agca, himself a native of Malatya province close to the Grey Wolves, to kill Pope John Paul II in 1981.⁷⁵ The Kayra office closed in 2005.⁷⁶

The third victim, Ugur Yuksel, moved to Malatya in 2005. Ugur came from an Alevi family in Elazig province, which is close to Malatya. He studied engineering in Western Turkey where he converted to Christianity. After financial problems forced him to give up his studies, he moved back home, where he tried to earn money by running a phone shop. For almost a year he was “the only Christian in the region, with no Christian community, not even a group of Christians who prayed or read the bible together.”⁷⁷ Ugur moved to Malatya, where he found a job at the Zirve publishing house. Wolfgang Hade described his sorrows:

“For a long time he has been planning to marry. But there are repeated obstacles: finances, religion, and parents’ approval. Necati and Semse sometimes told him jestingly, ‘You will get married in heaven.’”⁷⁸

b. Emre’s world

Emre Gunaydin, the alleged leader of the group charged with the murders, was born in 1988 in Malatya. He lived with his father Mustafa, who worked as a technician at Malatya University. Mustafa Gunaydin also owned a martial arts centre. The father later told the court,

“I am known in Malatya for having *ulkucu* [ultra-nationalist] views. But this is based on my thinking during my youth. Now I am not linked with anyone.”⁷⁹

Emre finished school in 2006. He wanted to become a lawyer. Having twice failed the very competitive university entrance exam, Emre persuaded his father to find him a place at a private dormitory for students from outside Malatya. It would help him prepare for his third attempt, he explained.⁸⁰ According to Mustafa Gunaydin, his son said that

“There were students with good grades in the dormitory. If he studied with them that would be useful. That is why I registered him in January 2007 in the dormitory of the Ihlas Foundation. He chose that dormitory himself. After one and a half to two months the director of the dorm called me and said that Emre was not obeying the rules, that he was loud at night, switching on the lights, and that I should take him from the dorm, which I did.”⁸¹

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Hurriyet*, “Malatya Katliami azmettiricisini ariyor” [The instigator of the Malatya crime is searched for], 8 June 2008, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/pazar/9125156.asp>.

⁷⁶ The head of the Kayra office in Malatya, Martin De Lange could not extend his work permit in 2005 so he returned to South Africa. When he wanted to return to Malatya to attend the funeral of the three missionaries in April 2007 he found that his name was blacklisted. “South Africa: Barred Pastor: Church Complains”, *Aksie 1*:8, 24 April 2007, http://www.aksie18.co.za/pdf/turkiye_moorde.pdf.

⁷⁷ Wolfgang Hade, *Mein Schwager – ein Martyrer; eine Geschichte des türkischen Christen Necati Aydin [My brother in law – a martyr; a story of the Turkish Christian Necati Aydin]*, Neufeld Verlag, 2009, pp. 64-65.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

⁷⁹ Protocol of the 16th court hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 5.

⁸⁰ Emre Gunaydin’s father Mustafa in the Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 3.

⁸¹ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 4.

The three other suspects, Salih Gurler, Hamit Ceker and Cuma Ozdemir, lived in the same dormitory. Salih Gurler had moved into the dorm in December 2006, having arrived from a small town about 60 km from Malatya.⁸² Hamit Ceker and Cuma Ozdemir had also come from neighbouring provinces.⁸³

Emre later told prosecutors that he had heard about missionary activities for the first time in the fall of 2006, during an internship at a local newspaper.⁸⁴ It was there that he met a mysterious man, Bulent Varol Aral, who worked for only a few days at the paper. Emre told prosecutors:

“[H]e knew almost everything, there was no topic he didn’t know about ... He said that Christianity and missionary activities were bad, and that they had links to the PKK ... He explained that Christianity and missionary work had the goal of destroying the country. Then I said, ‘Someone has to say stop to this,’ and he answered ‘Then come on and say stop’. When I said, ‘How will this work out?’, he said ‘Then we will guarantee you state support.’”⁸⁵

Emre subsequently contacted a Christian internet site, he told prosecutors, to ask whether there were Christians in Malatya. Emre left his mobile number. A few days later he was contacted by Necati Aydin.⁸⁶ Emre began to visit Necati regularly, feigning interest in becoming a Christian. The two met at the Zirve office on six different occasions. Emre later told prosecutors about his plans at the time: “As a result of my investigations I thought to myself that there had to be a counterresponse to the things they were doing. So I had the idea that I should take them hostage and question them about their activities to get more information.”⁸⁷

Emre also started discussing his plans more intensively with Salih, Hamit and Cuma.⁸⁸ As Hamit told prosecutors,

“About four months [before the murder in April 2007] Emre Gunaydin called us, Salih, Cuma and me, to the smoking room of the dorm to tell us about the increase in missionary activities ... Emre did all the planning and we implemented it.”⁸⁹

Abuzer Yildirim, the only suspect who did not live in the dorm, had already met Emre back in 2005. He had been working at the Malatya cotton mill. In his testimony he stated:

“Emre told us that missionary activities were many and dangerous, that only in Malatya there were 50 churches and that they already bought two mosques to turn them into churches. If we did not stop them we would lose our religion and they would kill our children. These words influenced me a lot and made me sad. Emre said that he planned to

⁸² The town is Dogansehir. As Emre’s family also comes from Dogansehir, Salih had known Emre for several years. Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 15.

⁸³ Protocol of the 2nd Court Hearing, 14 January 2008, p. 9.

⁸⁴ Malatya Birlik Newspaper.

⁸⁵ Malatya Indictment, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Malatya Indictment, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Malatya Indictment, p. 8.

⁸⁸ Salih Gurler in the Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 15.

⁸⁹ Malatya Indictment, p. 8.

eliminate those doing missionary work in our country, but that he would do this more on his own.”⁹⁰

Abuzer Yildirim also told the prosecutors that Emre was clear about his intention to kill Wolfgang Hade, the German missionary who was Necati’s brother-in-law and lived in Western Turkey.

“Emre told us that he would go to Konya and kill Wolfgang, whom he presented to us as the leader of missionary activities in Turkey. According to Emre’s statements, the missionary churches were secretly involved in terrorist activities and supporting terrorism.”⁹¹

The last time that Emre met members of the Malatya Christian community before the murder was at an Easter celebration in the Altin Kayisi (Golden Apricot) Hotel on 8 April 2007. He was welcomed at the door by Ugur Yuksel and Tilmann’s wife Susanne. A few days later he purchased gloves, ropes and three guns, and rented a car. On 16 April Emre met Hamit, Salih and Abuzer at the Eftelya coffee house. Some of them also brought guns. Cuma Ozdemir told prosecutors later that he had wanted to drop out:

“Prior to the event I struggled hard to tell them that I would not participate and even tried to dissuade them. Emre strongly rejected my suggestions and threatened to shoot me if I dared to leave. He also threatened to kill members of my family, relatives and acquaintances. He threatened Hamit in the same way.”⁹²

On 18 April, a Wednesday, Emre got up early. He later told prosecutors:

“At seven in the morning on the day of the incident I met with Cuma, Hamit, Abuzer and Salih for breakfast at a cafe near Zirve. Abuzer and I went upstairs to Zirve, but it was closed. Then we went to my father’s sports centre. Thinking that something could happen to us I said, ‘I will write a farewell message to my relatives.’ The friends also wrote something; then we prayed and went to Zirve again. Abuzer and I went upstairs. Abuzer had a knife and a gun, I had a knife. We rang the door bell and someone opened the door; inside were Necati, Ugur and the German.”⁹³

4. THE TRIAL UNFOLDS

a. A small terrorist group?

The first hearing took place on 22 November 2007 in a crowded courtroom of the Malatya Third High Criminal Court. The presiding judge was seated on an elevated platform.⁹⁴ Next

⁹⁰ Abuzer Yildirim also told prosecutors: “In March, Emre told me that he got the information from someone who came to the sports centre and who wrote a report for the state on Alevis, Missionaries and Christianity. He mentioned that his name was Ruhi. So, I made a joke that this must be the Crazy Ruhi from the Hayat TV series, but Emre said, ‘no, his name is Ruhi Polat.’” Ruhi Polat was a provincial council member of Malatya in the MHP. It later turned out that he and Emre also spoke on the phone in the months before the murder (Protocol of the 9th Court Hearing, p. 14).

⁹¹ Malatya Indictment, p. 26-27.

⁹² Malatya Indictment, p. 16.

⁹³ Malatya Indictment, p. 9.

⁹⁴ The court protocols refer to the presiding judge as “baskan” (president, head) and the other two judges as “uye” (members).

to him sat the two state prosecutors who had put together the 47-page indictment, submitted on 5 October 2007.

According to the indictment, the victims died as a result of severe wounds caused by a sharp object, which resulted in perforation of veins, arteries and internal organs, as well as internal and external bleeding. One of them, Necati Aydin, was also strangled with a rope.⁹⁵

Seven people were indicted at first. The indictment considered the five main suspects as having formed an “armed terrorist organization.”⁹⁶ All five – Emre, Salih, Hamit, Cuma and Abuzer – were charged with “killing more than one person in the framework of the terror organization’s activities.”⁹⁷ Emre was additionally charged with being the organization’s leader and founder.⁹⁸ The prosecutors demanded a triple life sentence in solitary confinement with no possibility of parole for each of the five main suspects.⁹⁹

Two other people were indicted but not arrested. One was Kursat Kocadag, who had kept a gun for Emre. Kocadag was supposed to take part in the raid but, as he claimed, had pulled out four months before the murders.¹⁰⁰ In his testimony Kocadag notes that Emre was telling people “that they [Christians] planned to kill three out of five children and that he [Emre] would kill them after getting to know them better. When he asked whether I would be part of that, I said no.”¹⁰¹ The seventh accused was Mehmet Gokce, who was allegedly meant to copy the hard drive of the computer from the Zirve office. Kursat Kocadag and Mehmet Gokce were both charged with abetting a terrorist organisation.¹⁰²

At the opening hearing the seven defendants sat in front of the judges, accompanied by the gendarmerie. The defendants’ lawyers were initially all from Malatya and assigned by the court. Behind the accused sat friends and relatives of the victims, journalists, national and international observers, and diplomatic representatives.

There were also 17 lawyers representing the victims’ families.¹⁰³ The Association of Protestant Churches had approached a number of lawyers known for their commitment to minority rights. The legal team assembled in Malatya turned into a who’s who of Turkish human rights defenders. There was Orhan Kemal Cengiz, the legal advisor of the Protestant Association and a columnist for Turkish daily *Zaman* and English-language *Today’s Zaman*, who came from Ankara. Sezgin Tanrikulu came from Diyarbakir, where he had defended Kurdish victims of human rights abuses. Ergin Cinmen and Erdal Dogan, who represented the Dink family in the Hrant Dink murder trial, came from Istanbul. So did Fethiye Cetin,

⁹⁵ Malatya Indictment, p. 36.

⁹⁶ Malatya Indictment, p. 41.

⁹⁷ Malatya Indictment, p. 2.

⁹⁸ Malatya Indictment, pp. 2-5.

⁹⁹ Malatya Indictment, pp. 43-44.

¹⁰⁰ Malatya Indictment, p. 32.

¹⁰¹ Malatya Indictment, p. 14.

¹⁰² Malatya Indictment, p. 44.

¹⁰³ The lawyers were Ibrahim Kali, Oya Aydin, Murat Dincer, Ali Koc, Ergin Cinmen, Orhan Kemal Cengiz, Nalan Erken, Abdulkaidr Gulec, Sezgin Tanrikulu, Tahir Elci, Ozkan Dogan, Fethiye Cetin, Ismail Cem Halavurdu, Hafize Cobanoglu, Erdal Dogan, Serhat Eren, Ayse Batumlu. According to Turkish Article 236 and 237 of the Turkish Penal Code law any person who has been damaged by a crime can participate in the trial as co-plaintiffs for civil claims, such as compensation. See: http://www.justice.gov.tr/basiclaws/Criminal_Code.pdf.

another human rights lawyer close to the Dink family and a leading voice in the debate on Turkey's reconciliation with its past.¹⁰⁴

The lawyers representing the victims' families did not see this as an ordinary murder case; as far as they were concerned, much more was at stake.

b. "They are just puppets"

Having worked for the Association of Protestant Churches as a lawyer, Orhan Kemal Cengiz wrote the first report commissioned by the association back in 2002.¹⁰⁵ In it, he examined the discrimination of Christians in Turkey.¹⁰⁶ He later wrote a handbook on proper documentation and litigation of torture cases, a manual on combating torture for judges and prosecutors, and a booklet on freedom of thought, conscience and religion.¹⁰⁷ In 2003, he set up the Human Rights Agenda Association (HRAA).¹⁰⁸ All throughout, he defended the rights of the Greek Orthodox community, of conscientious objectors, of Turkish Armenians, and of Kurds not only in court rooms but also in his newspaper columns.¹⁰⁹

For Cengiz, the Malatya case was personal. As he wrote in his first op-ed following the murder, "Necati Aydin had been a client of mine for the last seven years and I know very well what a nice, lovely person he was." At the same time, Cengiz viewed the crime in Malatya as a turning point for Turkish society as a whole:

"Turkey, more than at any other time in its history, is under a dangerous threat ... This threat is Turkey's rising intolerance and inability to accept others, more than at any time before ... We know this won't be the last incident. But we hope with all our hearts that it ends here."¹¹⁰

In another column, published on 1 May 2007, he wrote:

"For a long time I had been expecting that something would happen ... There had been signs. Christians were beaten, their churches were stoned and set on fire and they had received threats every day. Every single day there was news about the treacherous plans of missionaries in the local and national newspapers and on TV stations ... For a long period of time the seeds of intolerance, racism and enmity against Christianity have been sown in Turkey. Now those seeds are being harvested one by one. The murder of Father Santoro, Hrant Dink, and the Malatya massacre are in a sense connected."

Cengiz pointed out that the security forces should have been able to prevent these crimes:

¹⁰⁴ ESI on Fethiye Cetin, http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=311&film_ID=10&slide_ID=5.

¹⁰⁵ Homepage of Association of Protestant Churches (Turkey) <http://www.protestankiliseler.org/>.

¹⁰⁶ Orhan Kemal Cengiz, "Rights Violations Experienced by Protestants in Turkey Evaluated in Light of Human Rights Law", published by the Association of Protestant Churches (Turkey), 2002.

¹⁰⁷ See Orhan Kemal Cengiz, *Turkey and the World Around It*, Liberte Publishing, July 2008, p. v-vi.

¹⁰⁸ Homepage of the Human Rights Agenda Association <http://www.rightsagenda.org/index.html>.

¹⁰⁹ For a collection of his articles see Orhan Kemal Cengiz: "Turkey and the world around it – from a democracy and human rights perspective", 2008. Cengiz writes a regular column at the English language daily *Today's Zaman*. www.todayszaman.com All his articles are on his facebook page.

¹¹⁰ Orhan Kemal Cengiz, "After Malatya Massacre", *Human Rights Agenda Association*, 27 April 2007, http://www.rightsagenda.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=300:aliasafter-malatya-massacre&catid=86:aliasracism-and-intolerance&Itemid=125.

“In all the cases security forces had some intelligence and prior knowledge about the perpetrators and their plans, but somehow they did not follow up on the signals and warnings.”¹¹¹

On 22 November 2007, the day of the first court hearing, Cengiz repeated his accusation:

“If state officials keep saying every day that Turkey is in imminent danger, that there are internal enemies of this country, that missionaries are the agents of foreign states who try to break up Turkey and so on, such horrible crimes are inevitable.”¹¹²

Some of the other lawyers suspected that state institutions had a more direct role in the killings. Erdal Dogan, an Istanbul-based lawyer who had also defended Hrant Dink, suspected a link to the “deep state” from the very outset. “I read the first documents about the trial, the indictment, the statements of the suspects,” he said. “If you are of normal intelligence, you see that there is something bigger behind that.”¹¹³ In November 2009, after two years of court hearings, Cengiz was to come to a similar conclusion:

“It is crystal clear. There is a much bigger agenda and much more complex connections. Everything had been planned, but not by them, by other people. They are just puppets.”¹¹⁴

c. “I did not stab anybody”

The interrogation of the suspects in court started on 14 January 2008. The accused all denied that they had intended to kill anyone – despite having brought guns and knives – when they entered the Zirve office. On 9 June 2008 even Emre denied direct involvement in the killings. “I did not tie up anybody,” he said. “The three persons who died were tied up by Cuma and Hamit. I did not stab anybody.” Emre also claimed that he did not know why the others wanted information from the Zirve office.

“Abuzer and Salih said that they needed the information from the publishing house for themselves, Cuma and Hamit said that they would pass it on to the press. I didn’t ask them why they needed it.”¹¹⁵

The accused told the court that before the murder the victims had admitted to working with Kurdish terrorists and intending to “kill Muslims”. Emre gave prosecutors an account of the discussion that took place in the Zirve office moments before the triple murder:

¹¹¹ Orhan Kemal Cengiz, “Culture of Fear, Hate and Denial – Santoro, Dink, Malatya”, *Human Rights Agenda Association*, 11 May 2007, http://www.rightsagenda.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=280:aliasculture-of-fear-hate-and-denial-santoro-dink-malatya&catid=79:aliasdiscrimination&Itemid=118.

¹¹² Orhan Kemal Cengiz, “What is going on in the Malatya Massacre Case?”, *Human Rights Agenda Association*, 22 November 2007; http://www.rightsagenda.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=283:aliaswhat-is-going-on-in-the-malatya-massacre-case&catid=79:aliasdiscrimination&Itemid=118.

¹¹³ ESI Interview with Erdal Dogan on 6 August 2010.

¹¹⁴ *Compass Direct*, “Court Seeks Help to Link Murders in Turkey to ‘Deep State’”, 17 November 2009, <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/turkey/11771/>.

¹¹⁵ Protocol of the 7th Court Hearing, 12 May 2008, p. 9.

“We started talking. Necati said bad things about Islam. He said that Christianity was good and praised the PKK. I got mad at what he said ... Ugur said America and Israel were behind them and that the goal was to get rid of the Koran. He said: ‘We took Iraq, we will take Syria. Kurdistan will be independent; and of every five born Turkish children three will be killed’.”¹¹⁶

Abuzer also blamed Ugur Yuksel for provoking him and the others.

“Ugur said they will rape our sisters and mothers and then kill them. Emre said, ‘Let’s see who will kill whom,’ and walked towards him. Ugur was still cursing. I punched Ugur in the face. I got blood all over me. My stomach was upset. I went to the bathroom. A little later Emre came. His hand and knife were bloody. He washed his hand. They would have killed our children. He asked, ‘What kind of man are you?’ I didn’t understand. When I got back I saw Necati lying in his blood. When I told Emre, ‘What’s that?’, he said they should die instead of our children ... Later I went to the room next door. I thought my life was over and I cried and put the CDs on the table. When I returned to the room where my friends were, Emre was pressing a towel to the face of the foreigner with one hand, and holding a knife with the other. The knife was bloody. I went to the room next door. There I put all the CDs in the PC bag. I told Emre ‘I found everything, let’s go!’”¹¹⁷

Salih told the court a similar story:

“Emre went to the bathroom again. When he got back, he told Necati that he was doing the wrong thing by dividing the country. Necati told Emre, ‘Fuck you, faggot!’ Then Emre took his knife out and told them to lie down and threatened to kill them if they didn’t. He pressed the knife to the German’s neck. At that moment we also took our knives out spontaneously. Then everybody lay down. While Necati was lying on the floor he told Emre that he would fuck his mother and sister. In response to this, Cuma tied Necati’s hands behind his back, and then the German’s. Emre tied up Ugur.”

“Emre gave me a rope and pointed to Necati and told me to kill him ... Because I was afraid of Emre, I put the rope around Necati’s neck. I strangled him a little. Then I said I couldn’t do it and stopped doing it. Then Emre went towards Necati. I stood up and tried to hold Emre back. I told him to calm down. At that moment the knife in Emre’s hand cut my hand. Then Emre stopped. A little later Necati cursed again. While Necati was cursing Emre started stabbing him in the neck. After a short while Emre jumped on the German’s head. Later I saw that Emre was stabbing the German in the back and neck.”¹¹⁸

During the court hearings, Emre’s associates all claimed not to have been aware that Emre planned to kill the Christians. According to Salih, Emre “said that the ropes were necessary to tie people so that they would surrender information more easily and that we needed the knives to protect ourselves.”¹¹⁹ Cuma added his account of the day before the murders:

“I asked them the reason for buying the knives. They said they were going to use these knives to threaten. When I asked Emre what we would need the weapons for, he said he would explain this later. After we left the hardware store, Salih parked the car. I saw a

¹¹⁶ Malatya Indictment, p. 9.

¹¹⁷ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 11.

¹¹⁸ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, pp. 16-17.

¹¹⁹ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 16.

gun, rope and gloves in the trunk. I asked what these were and what they were for. He said that he was going to use them to frighten them and that I didn't need to worry."¹²⁰

Abuzer testified that "Emre said that on Monday we would go to Zirve Publishing, that we would get information from the missionaries there, and then go to Wolfgang [Hade] in Konya to resolve their links to the PKK."¹²¹ The suspects' testimony in court, however, was at odds with their earlier statements. Shortly after their arrest in April 2007, Hamit had told prosecutors:

"I understood from what Emre told us that his fight against this group would be very decisive and if needed would continue until death or until they would be eliminated ... He said that after killing the missionaries in Malatya, the actual goal was killing Wolfgang [Hade], and that he would do this on his own if necessary. He added that doing this would bring us great financial benefits ... From time to time Emre told us about his plans how to kill and eliminate the missionaries. We wanted to eliminate this harmful group because of our love towards our country and nation."¹²²

d. "I was afraid of the powers behind him"

The other four suspects all described Emre as extremely aggressive. As Cuma put it, Emre intimidated everyone from the very outset:

"We told [Emre] that we would not accept his offer and that we had come to Malatya to study. He told us there was no turning back; otherwise he would put a bullet in our head and kill our families. He said we would die. He threatened us. I never saw him with a gun, but he carried a knife. It was a small knife with a wooden handle. Emre spoke harshly and yelled."¹²³

They also described Emre as someone who enjoyed close connections to the local police. Hamit told the court:

"If I had not accepted his invitation, I thought he would have harmed me and my family ... We thought about going to the police because of what Emre had told us. But Salih told me that Emre was closely acquainted with the police director. That's why we didn't do it."¹²⁴

All suspects told the court about Emre's immunity from police scrutiny prior to the murder. Abuzer told prosecutors that he "did not dare to inform the police because Emre was close to the police director and got help with the knife stabbing incident."¹²⁵ He was referring to an event in February 2007, which Salih described during the fifth court hearing:

"Emre once came to us after having stabbed a man he saw together with his girlfriend. He told us about the stabbing. He quickly changed clothes, went to the barber to get a shave and took me and Cuma with him to the Sumer police station. There he talked at the door with a policeman. He went inside and came out soon. Then he came over to us. The

¹²⁰ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 3.

¹²¹ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 5.

¹²² Malatya Indictment, pp. 11-12.

¹²³ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 2.

¹²⁴ Protocol of the 2nd Court Hearing, 14 January 2008, p. 12.

¹²⁵ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 13.

policeman told Emre that they would not know that he did it and that the file would be closed as if the attacker had been unknown. They told him, ‘If they make a search and find out that you did it, we will let you know.’ This is what Emre told us. That’s why we stopped short of telling the police what Emre was planning.”¹²⁶

Cuma recalled the same incident:

“Salih, Emre and I went to the Sumer police station. We waited across the station and Emre went in. He [Emre] said there were police he knew and that he’d managed the situation and the case was closed.”¹²⁷

One month later, in March 2007, Emre stabbed a student inside the dormitory. Hamit, who was in the dorm at the time, later testified:

“I saw Emre and another student, Fatih, taking Onur down to the study room. I heard that Onur had borrowed money from other students and hadn’t paid back his debt. Later I heard Onur crying and screaming. When I arrived I saw Emre hitting Onur in the face with a bread knife and Fatih hitting him with his fist. Emre stabbed his body several times and Onur fell to the floor. Emre and Fatih escaped ... This event was not taken to trial. I understood from this behaviour that Emre would use violence if someone was not doing what he wanted. After this event Emre was kicked out of the dorm.”¹²⁸

Emre had spent a total of two months at the dorm.

After the second hearing on 14 January 2008, Orhan Kemal Cengiz pointed to links between Emre and the chief of police in Malatya.

“However prepared the defendants’ statements were, it was still possible to find out details such as the close relationship between Emre Gunaydin and the chief of police. Of course, the question is whether, despite this information, we will be able to go beyond the current picture.”¹²⁹

But Emre’s personal links to the police were not his associates’ only source of concern. As Salih, who came from the same village (Dogansehir) as Emre’s family, told the court,

“Emre also said that there were seven files about him at the police, that he had been in prison, and that his elder brother was with Sedat Peker. [Emre’s] uncles were among the leading mafia groups in Turkey. I heard in Dogansehir that his uncles were in the mafia. After he came to the dorm, I started to go wherever Emre went. I didn’t object because I was afraid. When we said no, he would yell at us.”¹³⁰

Sedat Peker, born in 1971, was a household name in Turkey, having become one of the most famous and flamboyant organized crime figures of his generation. Between 1988 and 2002 Peker had spent more than 2 years in prison on charges ranging from organised crime to armed assault. In 2004 he was arrested again and sentenced three years later to 14 years for

¹²⁶ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 15.

¹²⁷ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 3.

¹²⁸ Protocol of the 2nd Court Hearing, 14 January 2008, p. 12.

¹²⁹ *Bianet*, “Malatya Murders: More People Involved?”, 16 January 2008, <http://www.bianet.org/english/english/104194-malatya-murders-more-people-involved>.

¹³⁰ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April, 2008, p. 15.

involvement in organised crime.¹³¹ Peker is claimed to have served with Veli Kucuk, a retired general and alleged founder of the secret Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Department (JITEM), in the gendarmerie in Kocaeli in the 1990s.¹³² Peker, known for his Pan-Turkic ideas, has many supporters among Turkey's Grey Wolves ultra-nationalists. He maintains a website, featuring hundreds of messages from his fans since 2008. More than 25,000 members are listed on his Facebook site. In 2008 both Veli Kucuk and Sedat Peker (already in prison for another crime) were charged with belonging to the alleged Ergenekon terror group.

Hamit Ceker also told prosecutors that

“Emre had no worries about us getting caught. He always said we would not be caught, but if we were caught, he would accept all the guilt and that especially his uncle, whose name I don't remember and who has mafia contacts, would be of great help for us, and we were convinced by these statements.”¹³³

Abuzer Yildirim also claimed that he was “not afraid of Emre, but of the powers behind him.”

“The Saturday before the incident when I was sitting at the Rainbow Teahouse, Emre came. He said we would go to the Zirve publishing house on Monday and we would get information from the missionaries ... When I said this would not happen, he said ‘I am not offering it to you. You have to. Your family is known by the state. If you don't come, things you can't even imagine will happen to your family’.”¹³⁴

e. “I was supposed to kill them”

On 5 February 2008 a 24 year old inmate named Metin Dogan sent a letter to the Malatya Public Prosecutor from a prison in Southern Anatolia.¹³⁵ Dogan was serving a 16-year sentence for murder. In the handwritten letter he introduced himself as somebody who knew Emre Gunaydin from the time they spent together in the Grey Wolves organisation (*Ulku Ocaklari*), an ultranationalist youth organisation close to the nationalist National Movement Party (Milliyetci Hareket Partisi, MHP).¹³⁶

“From my childhood I grew up in the Malatya Ulku Ocaklari. I did many activities for them. I took active jobs. So I was the most trusted, the number one man in the eyes of the organisation.”¹³⁷

¹³¹ *Sabah*, “Sedat Peker'e 14 yıl” [14 years for Sedat Peker], 31 January 2007, <http://arsiv.sabah.com.tr/2007/01/31/gun107.html>.

¹³² A number of books have been written about Peker. In 2004 Hakan Turk published the book “Sedat Peker Kimdir?” (Who is Sedat Peker). 2006 “The chief in the mirror/ the extraordinary life of Sedat Peker” (Aynadaki Reis/Sedat Peker'in Siradisi Yasami) was published. In 2005, while standing trial, he became the chairman of the Turkish football club Antalyaspor.

¹³³ Malatya Indictment, p. 12.

¹³⁴ Protocol of the 5th Court Hearing, 14 April 2008, p. 9.

¹³⁵ Elbistan Prison in Kahramanmaras.

¹³⁶ Homepage Ulku Ocaklari, <http://www.ulkuocaklari.org.tr/>.

¹³⁷ Metin Dogan's letter to the Malatya Public Prosecutor, 5 February 2008.

Dogan wrote that in 2005 Burhan Coskun, the head of the Malatya chapter of the Ulku Ocaklari called him to the provincial office of the MHP.¹³⁸ There, Coskun and others present asked Dogan to kill the Christians at the Zirve office.

“Namik Hakan Durhan, the former MHP Member of Parliament from Malatya, told me that ‘You will call the Zirve Publishing house and threaten them.’ I called them, Adnan from Zirve answered and I threatened him.¹³⁹ After threatening I hung up the phone.”

“‘This job suits you my lion, you will do it. You will kill whoever there is at Zirve,’ [they told me]. Then the man who had introduced himself as major general said we will save you, don’t worry at all. Namik Hakan Durhan explained how to finish the job and that in the end they would give me 300,000 USD. He said that they would inform me about the place and the date of the murder.”¹⁴⁰

During a hearing in May 2008 Emre denied even having heard of Metin Dogan.¹⁴¹ Still, the court called Dogan as a witness.¹⁴² He testified on 4 July:

“I am quite close with Emre. We were together in the Ulku Ocaklari. I am also an athlete. I was involved in tae-kwon-do, Emre was involved in kickboxing. He is lying. He knows me. I have a lot of information about the event. I was involved in it when Emre was not yet in. I grew up in Ulku Ocaklari.”¹⁴³

In court Dogan described again the meeting where he was allegedly invited to kill the Christians:

“Burhan Coskun, the Ulku Ocaklari Malatya president, called me on my mobile in August 2005. He said that I should come to the MHP building [*the office of the Nationalist Movement Party*]. I went. The MHP provincial president Ekici, the ex-MP Namik Hakan Durhan (MHP) and a 50-55 year old man named Hikmet Celik who introduced himself as a major general and whom I had not seen before, and Burhan Coskun were there. I sat down. We had discussed the distribution of bibles and the deceit of the young before in Ulku Ocaklari ... I should get two strong youngsters and raid the publishing house with them, but those youngsters shouldn’t know them. They asked me not to take them from Ulku Ocaklari. They told me to find them in Tastepe [a quarter in the northeast of Malatya].

¹³⁸ Coskun had participated in the protests against the Christian publishing house Kayra in Malatya.

¹³⁹ Umut Sahin from the Association of Protestant Churches told ESI that according to missionary Martin de Lange convert Huseyin Yelki [see Cast of Characters] sometimes used the name Adnan when answering the phone in the Zirve office, ESI-Interview, 5 October 2010. Martin de Lange worked from 2003 to 2005 with Huseyin Yelki in the Kayra office in Malatya.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from Metin Dogan, 5 February 2008; Dogan also told the court why he did not come forward with his information before: “The farmhouse of my relative Abdullah Suluk was shot at twice because of the Zirve Publishing house murder ... There are still broken windows, and bullet shells on the ground from shots in the walls and doors ... Their only goal is to threaten. The reason is that Abdullah Suluk who is my relative is protecting me and I am next to him in his prison cell.” Abdullah Suluk was one of the leading names in Turkey’s mafia wars in the 90s. *Hurriyet* called him a “mafia godfather” in 1998. *Hurriyet*, “Olum ucgeninde kelepceli infaz” [Handcuffed execution in the death triangle], 14 August 1998, *Milliyet* dubbed him a “death machine” in 1999. *Milliyet*, “Olum makinesinin cezasi onandi” [The sentence against the death machine approved], 4 April 1999. <http://www.milliyet.com.tr/1999/04/04/haber/hab09.html>. He was involved in 14 murder cases and numerous injuries. He was sentenced to death in 1998. The penalty was then commuted to a lifelong sentence. <http://webarsiv.hurriyet.com.tr/1998/08/14/61028.asp>.

¹⁴¹ Protocol of the 7th Court Hearing, 12 May 2008, p. 11.

¹⁴² Protocol of the 8th Court Hearing, 9 June 2008, p. 10.

¹⁴³ Protocol of the 9th Court Hearing, 4 July 2008, p. 6.

“They said we should raid with weapons. I asked what we should do if there were others present there ... They told me that we should also kill them. They said I would not be caught if I listened to them, but if I didn’t listen to them and we were caught, we would be released within two years. Later I should bring the two youngsters to Santral Hill and kill them too.”¹⁴⁴

Dogan explained that a second meeting followed with ex-MP Namik Hakan Durhan and Burhan Coskun, the local Ulku Ocaklari president. “They said they were going to have me carry out this activity: the world would think it was them but that no one would be able to prove it,” he told the court.¹⁴⁵ One and a half months after these meetings, Metin Dogan went to Mersin, where his brother happened to be killed in an unrelated incident. Dogan killed his brother’s murderer and went to jail. He told the court about a message he received from a prison guard in January 2007:

“This guard approached me in prison in Mersin. He said that Namik [Hakan Durhan, the former MHP Member of Parliament] had sent his greetings and asked whether I needed anything. He also told me that he and Namik had no secrets and that the job that I was supposed to do will be done by Emre Gunaydin and that I should be quiet.”¹⁴⁶

Metin Dogan claims that Emre’s uncles “were known in Malatya province. They were like a criminal gang.”¹⁴⁷ (When asked to do so, however, Dogan could not recall their names¹⁴⁸) Dogan also claimed that Ulku Ocaklari and the police “are very close. Many policemen come and go. [Burhan] Coskun told me to commit the murders with a knife, because, he said, it would be too difficult to arrange things with the police if it was done with a gun.”¹⁴⁹

Ex-MP Namik Hakan Durhan was later questioned by the Malatya prosecutors. The content of his testimony is not part of the court files.¹⁵⁰ In May 2008 Durhan reacted to Metin Dogan’s accusations in an open letter:

“I was not in Malatya when this conversation was supposed to have happened ... This information is completely baseless and falsified. It is defamation against me and against the party of which I am a member.”¹⁵¹

So far, nobody from Malatya Ulku Ocaklari has been called to testify in court.

f. “I am the number one in Ergenekon”

Emre Gunaydin first told prosecutors about Varol Bulent Aral, a mysterious man about whom little is known, in 2007. Emre, who met Aral while both worked at the Malatya *Birlik* Newspaper in summer 2006, claimed that Aral had called on him to put a stop to the activities of Christian missionaries out to destroy the country. “Come on and say stop,” Aral allegedly

¹⁴⁴ Santral Hill is about 4 km north east of Malatya centre.

¹⁴⁵ Protocol of the 9th Court Hearing, 4 July 2008, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴⁶ Protocol of the 9th Court Hearing, 4 July 2008, p. 7.

¹⁴⁷ Protocol of the 9th Court Hearing, 4 July 2008, p. 9.

¹⁴⁸ Protocol of the 9th Court Hearing, 4 July 2008, p. 9.

¹⁴⁹ Protocol of the 9th Court Hearing, 4 July 2008, p. 8.

¹⁵⁰ ESI Interview with Umut Sahin, Association of Protestant Churches, Ankara, 5 October 2010.

¹⁵¹ *Ankara Haber Ajansi*, “Eski Milletvekili Durhan Hakkındaki Iddialari Reddetti” [Former MP Durhan renounced the allegations against him], 14 May 2008, <http://www.haberler.com/eski-milletvekili-durhan-hakkındaki-iddialari-haberi/>.

told Emre. “We will guarantee you state support.”¹⁵² Subsequently asked about this in court, Emre retracted his earlier statements, but it was enough to invite Aral to court as a witness.¹⁵³

At the time of the Malatya murders Varol Bulent Aral was in jail, having been arrested in February 2007 for illegal possession of a Kalashnikov. After his release he was again imprisoned in Adiyaman, a town located some 130 kilometers from Malatya, for insulting and threatening the Chief of Police in Adiyaman.

Aral testified as a witness in the Malatya trial on 16 October 2008:

“I know Emre Gunaydin from the Malatya *Birlik* newspaper where we worked for three days in the fall of 2006. ... We talked for about half an hour about the PKK. There was no conversation about missionaries or the victims.”¹⁵⁴

Of his earlier arrest, Aral said that he found the Kalashnikov “in the bag of a 10 year old boy, which had looked suspicious, in a parking space in Adiyaman. I wanted to bring it to a nearby police station, but since I had a problem with one of the policemen [in Adiyaman] I didn’t want to bring it there. I wanted to bring it to a more distant police station.”¹⁵⁵

Even now little is known about Aral’s life. Aral described himself as a person suffering from bad health and depressions and who, “not having a permanent address,” was staying with “a lot of people” and living on only 10 TL (EUR 5) per day as a day labourer.¹⁵⁶ An indictment described Aral as an advertiser (“reklamci”) who had worked briefly at the Malatya *Birlik* newspaper.¹⁵⁷

In court Aral was also asked about his personal organizer, which was found at the Malatya Bus Terminal on 30 January 2008 and contained the names of various ultranationalists including Kemal Kerincsiz, one of the suspects in the Ergenekon case. Kerencsiz is an ultranationalist lawyer specialised in filing complaints against Christians and Turkish liberal intellectuals for denigrating Turkishness. “These notes concerned research for a book I am writing entitled ‘Teferruat’ [Details],” Aral explained.¹⁵⁸ “I am not an informant”¹⁵⁹, he also claimed. “I still cannot understand how Emre could do this. Emre and the others are too inexperienced.”¹⁶⁰ During the same hearing Emre was asked whether Aral persuaded him to commit the murders. He used his right to silence and did not respond.

On 2 February 2009, however, Emre changed his mind and gave a statement to prosecutors incriminating both Aral and a second person, the Christian convert Huseyin Yelki who had worked with the missionaries in their office, as having instigated the raid on the Zirve office. Emre claimed that Aral had introduced him to Huseyin Yelki and that he had met with Yelki on numerous occasions after Aral left Malatya province in October 2006.

¹⁵² Malatya indictment, p. 6.

¹⁵³ Protocol of the 7th Court Hearing, 12 May 2008, p. 8.

¹⁵⁴ Protocol of the 12th Court Hearing, 16 October 2008, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Protocol of the 12th Court Hearing, 16 October 2008, p. 2.

¹⁵⁶ Protocol of the 12th Court Hearing, 16 October 2008, p. 4.

¹⁵⁷ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Protocol of the 12th Court Hearing, 16 October 2008, pp. 1-2.

¹⁵⁹ Protocol of the 12th Court Hearing, 16 October 2008, p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ Protocol of the 12th Court Hearing, 16 October 2008, p. 3.

Huseyin Yelki supposedly told Emre that the missionaries wanted to destroy the country and that “brother Bulent [Aral] has a fight with them.”¹⁶¹ After Aral’s departure from Malatya, Yelki allegedly told Emre that he should enter the Zirve office and collect all the material he could find.¹⁶² According to the indictment against Aral and Yelki, a month and a half prior to the murder Yelki instructed Emre to make contact with the Christians in Zirve. Although Yelki himself worked at Zirve at the time, he did not want to serve as an intermediary. “Find another way to contact Necati and those working at Zirve,” he told Emre. “I should not facilitate this contact. I must not be linked to this event.”¹⁶³ This, prosecutors now alleged, explained why Emre got in touch with Necati Aydin through a Christian chat room.

“Whoever is in the office on that day, you won’t leave any evidence,” Yelki supposedly instructed Emre a few days prior to the murders.¹⁶⁴ Emre also claimed that Yelki’s brother told him at the beginning of April 2007 that “the job was moved from the 16th to the 18th [April].”¹⁶⁵ Emre finally told prosecutors that the other four suspects had also met Huseyin Yelki.¹⁶⁶ Emre claimed that in case “the police began to search for them, Yelki would help them escape with some money. If they got caught they should wait for state support from Bulent Varol Aral.”¹⁶⁷

The indictment against Aral and Yelki was published on 9 April 2009 and both were detained. Ozkan Yucel, a lawyer from the Izmir Bar Association representing the victims’ families, was elated:

“We have always argued that these were not murders that five young men decided to commit one morning after they got up, but that they were incited to commit them by others, and that they were protected by the state, or at least told that this was the case. This is a step forward. There are other people connected to Aral.”¹⁶⁸

The indictment accused Aral and Yelki of having instigated, “in the framework of a terror organization, a multiple murder and kidnapping.”¹⁶⁹

Confronted with these accusations in February 2009 Varol Bulent Aral denied all of Emre’s claims. He stated that he did not know Huseyin Yelki.¹⁷⁰ Yelki also denied knowing Aral and told prosecutors that he had been in contact with Christians, both Turkish and foreign, since 2001.¹⁷¹ He was baptized in June 2002 and was offered work with the Christian publishing house Kayra in Malatya in 2002. When Kayra closed down in 2005 Yelki continued using the Zirve office to distribute Christian literature.¹⁷²

¹⁶¹ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 6.

¹⁶² Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 6.

¹⁶³ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, pp. 5, 6.

¹⁶⁴ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 6.

¹⁶⁵ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 6.

¹⁶⁶ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 6.

¹⁶⁷ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 6.

¹⁶⁸ *Bianet*, “Aral Tutuklandi, Zirve Davasi ‘Ergenekon’a Dogru” [Aral arrested, Zirve trial heads towards Ergenekon], 5 February 2009, <http://bianet.org/bianet/azinliklar/112361-aral-tutuklandi-zirve-davasi-ergenekona-dogru>.

¹⁶⁹ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 7.

¹⁷¹ Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, p. 8.

¹⁷² Indictment against Varol Bulent Aral and Huseyin Yelki, pp. 7-8.

Yelki testified in court on 21 May 2009, now as a suspect. “The accusations are completely baseless,” he stated. “I do not know Emre Gunaydin and the others.”¹⁷³ Later during the hearing Emre stood up and said, to the surprise of the prosecutors, that “Huseyin Yelki is not guilty, he is being held in prison for no reason.” When the judges demanded to know why he had previously implicated Yelki, Emre said he did so because “Yelki was a Christian missionary.”¹⁷⁴ Yelki was released the same day. The charges against him were dropped.¹⁷⁵

Aral testified as a suspect on 21 August 2009. Once again Emre withdrew his earlier statements:

“I mentioned Varol Bulent Aral’s name in order to reduce my sentence. He has nothing to do with these incidents.”¹⁷⁶

In a bizarre moment, Aral theatrically interrupted Emre, shouting, “I am the number one man in Ergenekon and I instigated these murders! Let Jesus protect you.”¹⁷⁷

The court decided to drop the charges against Aral, who returned to Adiyaman prison to serve his prison term. It looked as if this was the end of his role in the Malatya court case. Nobody expected that over a year later Aral would once again become a key suspect.

g. “I regret some of the things I have done”

In his first statement to prosecutors after his arrest, Emre claimed to have met a mysterious “researcher” a few months before the murder.

“In late 2006 or early 2007, I think, there was a person whose name I do not know, but who presented himself as a researcher. He talked about Christianity and missionary work at my father’s sports centre. He said that there were churches in Malatya and that they were financially powerful. I do not know this person, but maybe my father does.”¹⁷⁸

Who was this researcher? An anonymous letter sent by email in the summer of 2007 claimed that Malatya’s Protestants had been closely monitored for a long time both by the provincial gendarmerie and by academics from the Strategic Research Centre (Stratejik Arastirma Merkezi) of Inonu University in Malatya.¹⁷⁹ The e-mail was addressed to the Association of Protestant Churches, who forwarded it to the prosecutors.¹⁸⁰ It was signed with a pseudonym. The unknown author claimed to work for the gendarmerie in Malatya. The letter stated that

¹⁷³ Protocol of the 17th Court Hearing, 21 August 2009, p. 1.

¹⁷⁴ *Compass Direct*, “Efforts to Tie Malatya Murders to ‘Deep State’ Fizzle in Turkey – Alleged ring-leader retracts testimony implicating suspected link to ‘masterminds’”; 28 May 2009, <http://www.compassdirect.org/english/country/turkey/4067/>.

¹⁷⁵ Protocol of the 17th Court Hearing, 21 May 2009, p. 9.

¹⁷⁶ Protocol of the 20th Court Hearing, 21 August 2009, p. 5.

¹⁷⁷ Protocol of the 20th Court Hearing, 21 August 2009, p. 5.

¹⁷⁸ Malatya Indictment, p. 6.

¹⁷⁹ Inonu Universitesi Stratejik Arastirmalar Merkezi, INUSAM. It is described in its Founding regulations (Yonetmeligi Kurulus): <http://www.inonu.edu.tr/baglanti.php?sayfa=arsmerklink>.

¹⁸⁰ Until 2009 the Association of Protestant Churches used the name “Alliance” of Protestant Churches.

“the person instigating and guiding Emre Gunaydin is the theology faculty member Ruhi Abat, who was guided by our [gendarmerie] commander Mehmet Ulger. Ruhi Abat had been working for 4-5 months with our field officer Mehmet Ulger.”¹⁸¹

The anonymous author did not give any further information – he claimed that he feared being identified. The e-mail was not included in the October 2007 indictment.

On 12 May 2008 Emre denied knowing anyone named Ruhi Abat.¹⁸² His father later testified, however, that “Ruhi Abat came to the sports centre [the martial arts center of Emre’s father] over a period of about one and a half months in 2003. Later two of his kids came there.” Emre’s father explained, however, that in his view “Ruhi Abat has never seen my son in the sports hall. Emre was 14-15 years old [in 2003].”¹⁸³

As it turned out, Abat was indeed a researcher with an intense interest in missionary activities. This became clear when Abat testified as a witness on 13 April 2009, describing his work on missionaries in Malatya as “research that I consider important for religious and national values, and the unity of nation and state.”¹⁸⁴ According to Abat, his research was part of a nation-wide project allegedly undertaken by the Historical Research Foundation (Tarihi Arastirmalar Vakfi).¹⁸⁵ In Malatya it was conducted by a team of no less than seven researchers,¹⁸⁶ all of them academics from Malatya University. “I did not receive any payment related to this work. The participants did this voluntarily,” Abat told the court.¹⁸⁷ In his witness testimony Abat remained vague about the content of his research:

“I did not do any independent study on missionary activities. There were two or three group studies. Every theology department would survey the missionary activities in its region ... We tried to find out more on missionary activities in Malatya and Adiyaman.”¹⁸⁸

He refused to state his opinion on whether or not missionary activities were a crime. “An easy yes or no answer is not possible,” he told the court.¹⁸⁹

Abat admitted that he had also been in contact with the Malatya gendarmerie, including its head Mehmet Ulger. He insisted, however, that “most of these conversations [with Ulger] were about getting his support to prevent the closure of [Malatya University’s] Theology Department.”¹⁹⁰ Abat claimed that he feared losing his university job and turned to Ulger in hope of putting pressure on the university rector to keep the department open.¹⁹¹ Abat also claimed that he gave a lecture to the gendarmerie field commanders on “missionary activities in the 19th and 20th century.” After the lecture, he said, “both the police and the gendarmerie consulted me for information about my studies by phone or by coming to my office.”¹⁹²

¹⁸¹ Anonymous e-mail to the Association of protestant Churches in summer 2007.

¹⁸² Protocol of the 7th Court Hearing, 12 May 2008, p. 10.

¹⁸³ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 11.

¹⁸⁵ The Foundation appears as the publisher of books in the late 1990s. It has no website of its own.

¹⁸⁶ Sukru Uslu, Suayip Ozdemir, Yusuf Benli, Hamdi Onay, Hulusi Arslan and Ahmet Sinanoglu.

¹⁸⁷ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, pp. 11-12.

¹⁸⁸ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 10.

¹⁸⁹ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, pp. 10-13.

¹⁹⁰ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 11; Fatih Hilmioğlu, the President of Malatya University, had contacts to General Eryugur [see Cast of Characters]. Both are suspects in the Ergenekon trial.

¹⁹¹ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 10.

¹⁹² Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 10.

Mehmet Ulger was the Malatya Gendarmerie Commander between January 2006 and July 2008. Testifying on the same day as Ruhi Abat, he told the court that he had met Abat in 2006 at a workshop on missionary activities. Ulger explained that his contacts with Abat were related to a seminar and the preparation of a conference. Ulger claimed to have called Abat to inquire about a document he had found, which was written in Arabic.¹⁹³ He explained: “My business meetings continue 24 hours a day. I don’t remember whether I talked to Ruhi Abat from the office or from home. It might be that he called me at 11:30 at night.”¹⁹⁴ The lawyers of the victims’ families were not convinced. Police had established that 1,415 phone calls had been made between Abat and the gendarmerie within a few months.¹⁹⁵ Why so many phone calls? Ulger explained that many calls were made by the gendarmerie “in order to obtain information from a faculty member.”¹⁹⁶

Mehmet Ulger also described the gendarmerie’s general interest in missionary activities:

“Within the gendarmerie, according to general characterizations, missionary activities are considered as ‘extreme right’. They are not considered a crime. The gendarmerie’s interest in missionary activities is the same as in other extreme right-wing and Islamist activities.”¹⁹⁷

Ulger said that he had heard about missionary activity in Turkey, but that he did not even know whether any took place in Malatya.¹⁹⁸ He claimed that “during this period there was no research on missionary activities.”¹⁹⁹ Of Ruhi Abat, Ulger told the court in Malatya, “No, he is no informant. There has been no payment at all to him.”²⁰⁰

Ulger was then also asked about the testimony of another witness, Veysel Sahin. Sahin had been arrested in May 2008 when hand grenades and explosives were found in his home.²⁰¹ Sahin, having spoken with Malatya prosecutors in December 2008, told them that he had moved to Malatya in November 2005 to open an office of the Iraqi Turkmen Front.²⁰² He claimed to have met Mehmet Ulger at the Iraqi Turkmen Front’s office in March 2006. Ulger, he recalled, arrived wearing civilian clothes. Sahin recalls that Ulger also introduced himself as a business partner of the Malatya Arena Book Cafe.

¹⁹³ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 15.

¹⁹⁴ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 15.

¹⁹⁵ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 15. The court had ordered the police to investigate the phone conversations between Ruhi Abata and the Malatya gendarmerie (Mehmet Ulger).

¹⁹⁶ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 15.

¹⁹⁷ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 14. Discussing the role of the gendarmerie columnist Ali Bayromoglu wrote: “Following February 28 [1997], the military took over posts traditionally controlled by the police and the governors. The gendarmerie moved from the rural area to the urban area. Security and Public Order Assistance Squads (*Emniyet Asayis Yardimlasma Birlikleri, EMASYA*) obtained authority above that of the governor. A domestic security structure has been established that posits society itself as being the greatest threat ... Moreover, the power to gather intelligence in a country should not be in the military’s hands. Today, it is the military bureaucracy that defines what threats exist, it is the military that gathers intelligence, assesses social incidents and bases all of its findings on internal security documents and not legal criteria.” Quote in “Almanac Turkey 2005 – Security Sector and Democratic Oversight”, *DCAF-TESEV Series in Security Sector Studies*, September 2006.

¹⁹⁸ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 16.

¹⁹⁹ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 14.

²⁰⁰ Protocol of the 16th Court Hearing, 13 April 2009, p. 16.

²⁰¹ As of December 2009 he is serving a 29 year prison sentence for armed assault and illegal possession of firearms and dangerous materials. *Malatya Guncel*, “Veysel Sahin’e ceza yagdi”, 15 December 2009, http://www.malatyaguncel.com/news_detail.php?id=33677&uniq_id=1289319512.

²⁰² The Iraqi Turkmen Front is the biggest party of the Turkmen (Turkish) minority in Iraq.

“He wanted the distribution of bibles in the East and Southeast to be done by only one company and explained that this should be handled by the Arena Company – a company where he was a partner – so that he could obtain the names of people who receive these books.”²⁰³

According to Veysel Sahin, Ulger himself had ordered members of the gendarmerie to threaten the other publishing houses, Zirve and Kayra.²⁰⁴ Ulger also allegedly gave Veysel Sahin the contacts of Dogu Perincek, the well-known leader of the ultranationalist Workers’ Party in Turkey.²⁰⁵ Following up on Ulger’s recommendation, Sahin met Perincek. The investigation of his phone records confirmed that he had been in contact with Perincek’s driver.²⁰⁶ Perincek was arrested in 2008 on charges of belonging to the Ergenekon terrorist network. In court Ulger explained that he knew Veysel Sahin, who had been an informer, but one who had never provided any information. On the contrary, as he was planning a criminal act he was arrested. Following his arrest, Ulger told the court, Veysel Sahin threatened him.²⁰⁷

Three months after Ulger and Abat testified in court, another anonymous letter was sent, this time to Istanbul Prosecutor Zekeriya Oz, one of the prosecutors in the Ergenekon trial, and to Malatya Prosecutor Seref Gurkan. Its author pointed a finger at the Malatya Province Gendarmerie Intelligence unit:

“I will try to explain to you what I know about the missionary crime in the Malatya province and about Colonel Mehmet Ulger, who personally instigated this crime. I have this information because I am a member of the Malatya Province Gendarmerie Intelligence unit (JIT) ... In March 2007 Colonel Mehmet Ulger gave a briefing to the Kayseri [*a town in Central Anatolia half-way between Ankara and Malatya*] Gendarmerie Information Office and the president of the Gendarmerie Headquarters Supervisory Board.²⁰⁸ About one and a half months after this briefing, the missionaries were murdered in Malatya. At the briefing Mehmet Ulger gave detailed reports about the people who were later killed, as well as about their activities.”

The anonymous letter claimed that the gendarmerie dedicated many resources to investigating missionary activities and that it worked closely with academics, in particular with Ruhi Abat.²⁰⁹

“Inonu University faculty member Ruhi Abat visited the gendarmerie office before and after the event almost two or three times a week and talked for hours with Mehmet Ulger in his office. However, Ruhi Abat’s visits to the Gendarmerie have never been

²⁰³ Letter of the lawyers of the victims’ families, sent on 15 April 2010 to the Malatya Court, p. 4.

²⁰⁴ Sahin testified to the prosecutor on 3 December 2008; quoted in the victim’s families’ lawyers’ letter to the Presidency of the Third Heavy Penal Court in Malatya, p. 4.

²⁰⁵ Letter of the lawyers of the victims’ families, sent on 15 April 2010 to the Malatya Court, p. 4.

²⁰⁶ Letter of the lawyers of the victims’ families, sent on 15 April 2010 to the Malatya Court, p. 4.

²⁰⁷ Ulger told the court: “Veysel Sahin has a criminal record, producing false documents and committing other crimes. He is not a trustworthy person ... When he was arrested he sent me a message: “If I do not get out within 40 days I will call you to account.” Protocol of the 16th Court hearing, p. 14.

²⁰⁸ In a letter from 22 November 2010 to the Malatya court, the Kayseri gendarmerie confirmed to have held a seminar on 25-26 May 2006 on “excessive right-wing and missionary activities”, which the head of the Malatya gendarmerie Mehmet Ulger also attended (30th Malatya court hearing, 3 December 2010; the letter was included in the court files).

²⁰⁹ Further links between the gendarmerie and university in Malatya were revealed when Mehmet Colak, who was working for the Malatya gendarmerie intelligence unit, testified in court: he had talked 40 times to Ruhi Abat from the university (17th court hearing on 21 May 2009).

registered ... Mehmet Ulger had personally given orders to send this person straight to his office, without making him wait and without doing the registration. This can be confirmed by the personnel on duty.

In 2007, the Malatya Gendarmerie used more than 40.000 YTL [around 20,000 Euro] of the Gendarmerie headquarters' intelligence budget ... Almost all of this money was used to [investigate] missionary activities. And out of this money, Mehmet Ulger made plenty of payments to Ruhi Abat personally, especially before the murders. But it is impossible to prove this. On the pay slips there are no names written, only code names are used.”

The anonymous author asserted that Ulger had also replaced the SIM card from a mobile phone belonging to one of the suspects in the Zirve murder case:

“After the event, the SIM card of one of the mobile phones of one of the suspects in prison was taken by Mehmet Ulger. He visited the prison. The prison authorities were told that information from the card was needed to shed light on [the Zirve murders]. The following day a new SIM card with the same number was given to the prison authorities. This is also known to Prison Gendarmerie Abdulkadir Seri and Ismail Sert and the prison staff Aytekin Kut, Kamil Coskun and Huseyin Karakus. Although this crime falls into the remit of the police, why have Mehmet Ulger ... and some non-commissioned officers and expert gendarmerie been so interested?”

The letter concluded:

“I know more than this, but if I say exactly what I know, I will be identified. I am sending this letter to the two prosecutors, because I also regret some of the things I have done. I hope I will have helped in solving a dark crime.”

In February 2010 the victims' lawyer Erdal Dogan submitted five pages of documents identifying anonymous payments made by the Malatya Gendarmerie.²¹⁰ The payment slips had initially been sent to the daily *Hurriyet*. Dogan obtained them and handed them over to the Malatya prosecutors. As he explained,

“On the slips there are no real names, only code names are used. That's why we do not know which code refers to whom. The Malatya 2nd Army commandship opened an investigation into who leaked this information, which suggests these documents are real.”²¹¹

Mehmet Ulger has not been summoned again to respond to the accusations made against him in the anonymous letter.

h. The deep state in Malatya?

The 29th court hearing took place on 15 October 2010. With the testimonies of Orhan Kartal and Erhan Ozen, the court case took a new dramatic turn.

Orhan Kartal, a former PKK member, had shared a prison cell with Varol Bulent Aral in Adiyaman between October and December 2008. Taking the stand in October 2010 he

²¹⁰ Erdal Dogan presented examples of payments and its records at the court hearing on 19 February 2010.

²¹¹ Lawyer Erdal Dogan in an e-mail to ESI on 3 November 2010.

testified that Aral had told him that he was “a leading power behind the Zirve publishing house incident, that he was in contact with certain state circles, that one of them was JITEM leader Veli Kucuk, and that he was not alone.”

“[Aral] said that he had organized some youngsters; that he had psychologically prepared the Zirve publishing incident; [and] that he had later come to Adiyaman.”²¹²

Kartal told the court: “Besides Veli Kucuk, as far as I remember [Aral] also mentioned a person called Muzaffer.”²¹³ Kartal stated that Aral had himself arrested on purpose in Adiyaman by openly carrying the Kalashnikov in order to be in jail at the time of the Malatya murders.²¹⁴

Varol Bulent Aral, who was present in court at the request of the judge, started yelling at the end of Kartal’s testimony. He was removed from the courtroom by force.²¹⁵ The judge ordered Aral’s arrest. Aral was again a suspect.²¹⁶

Erhan Ozen, who had told Malatya prosecutors that he had worked as an informal intelligence officer with the secret Gendarmerie Intelligence and Counter Terrorism Department (JITEM) between 1997 and 2005, was the next to testify. Ozen, already a witness in the Hrant Dink murder trial, is currently an inmate at the Iskilip Prison (in the province of Corum). His activities at JITEM, he had said, had been coordinated by former gendarmerie general Veli Kucuk and former gendarmerie general Levent Ersoz, both later indicted as part of the Ergenekon case.²¹⁷ Levent Ersoz had been gendarmerie commander in Turkey’s Kurdish region between 2002 and 2004 and a former head of the gendarmerie intelligence department.²¹⁸

According to Ozen, “the Malatya operation was undertaken to create conditions for a coup.”²¹⁹ Varol Bulent Aral, he testified, had played a key role.

“I know that Varol Bulent Aral was in contact with Veli Kucuk, receiving orders [from him]. I do not want to explain how I got to know this ... From Veli Kucuk, Muzaffer [Tekin], Siran and Yusuf [both are code names] I heard the name Varol Bulent Aral in Malatya. In these conversations it was said that he was helping those in Malatya.”²²⁰

During his statement to the prosecutors on 13 October 2010, two days before the court hearing, Ozen also testified that plans were made to damage the government’s reputation.

“While I was working unofficially for JITEM, I knew that Muzaffer Tekin and persons with the codenames Yusuf and Siran were planning plots to put the government in a

²¹² Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 2.

²¹³ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 2.

²¹⁴ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 3.

²¹⁵ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 6.

²¹⁶ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 7.

²¹⁷ Levent Ersoz is a former gendarmerie commander based in Sirnak and Diyarbakir as head of JITEM between 2002 and 2004.

²¹⁸ Ahmet Insel and Ali Baramoglu (editors), *Almanac Turkey 2006 – 2008, Security Sector and Democratic Oversight*, Tesev Publications, August 2010, p. 182.

²¹⁹ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 5.

²²⁰ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 5.

difficult situation and to weaken it. The plans indicated that missionary activities were increasing in Malatya and that there would be some operations.”²²¹

Muzaffer Tekin, a retired captain and member of the ultranationalist Worker’s Party, played a leading role in organizing protests against Christians and liberal writers in Istanbul in 2006 and 2007 together with former gendarmerie general Veli Kucuk and other ultranationalists. He was linked to handgrenades found in Istanbul in 2007 in a place owned by a close associate of his, another retired military called Oktay Yilidirm. Tekin was charged with having ordered the 2006 attack killing a judge in Ankara (see page 4). Tekin was indicted in the first Ergenekon indictment in 2008.

Ozen claimed to know high-ranking figures in the military hierarchy. “When I was in 1997 in Balikesir-Edremit as an infantry soldier, my commander was Hakan Korkmaz. We would go out together. On one of these occasions we met Muzaffer Tekin. Until the end of 2005 I met Muzaffer Tekin many times.”²²² It was during one of these meetings that he learned about concrete assassination plans, Ozen testified.

“I know that from 2004 onwards, the Hrant Dink and Malatya operations were brought to an active status. There was talk that there were missionary activities in Malatya and surrounding areas. I also heard that efforts were made to discredit the government in power. I met with Veli Kucuk, Levent Ersoz and Muzaffer Tekin at the end of 2004 in the Istanbul Sariyer officers’ club together with persons with the code names Siran and Yusuf. I was outside the room. According to what Siran and Yusuf told me, there would be an operation against missionaries in Malatya to discredit the government. The efforts were brought to active status and although no date had yet been set for the operations, preparations began.”²²³

This was a few months before the Malatya *Ulku Ocaklari* organised demonstrations against local Christians.

Answering a question about JITEM activities, Ozen explained:

“The system worked in cell structures of 3, 4 or 6 persons. The higher ranks (ustler) gave the order for an operation. The planning was done by Levent Ersoz, Muzaffer Tekin and Veli Kucuk. During the implementation, people from different segments were used. The commanders decided that.”²²⁴

Ozen also claimed that the rector of Malatya’s Inonu University, Fatih Hilmioglu, supported these activities and the monitoring of missionaries in Malatya by his staff.

Hilmioglu had already been arrested in April 2009 and indicted in connection with the Ergenekon court case. He was a close associate of the former head of the gendarmerie in Turkey, Sener Eruygur, who stands trial for plotting to overthrow the government in 2003-

²²¹ *Today’s Zaman*, “Witness in Malatya murders case says he worked for JITEM”, 13 October 2010, <http://www.todayszaman.com/tz-web/news-224254-witness-in-malatya-murders-case-says-he-worked-for-JITEM.html>.

²²² Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 3.

²²³ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 4.

²²⁴ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 4.

2004. According to Ozen, Muzaffer Tekin often visited the rector, who was known for his strong ultranationalist convictions.²²⁵

“I know that Muzaffer Tekin and the Inonu University rector spoke in person in Istanbul. The Malatya region was fully under the control of JITEM. The person responsible for JITEM activities in Malatya was a captain. I cannot remember his code name. I came to Malatya with Muzaffer Tekin and Siran and Yusuf (code names). It was summer 2005 ... In Malatya we met with the *Nationalist Action Party Ulku Ocaklari*.”²²⁶

After Ozen’s interrogation, lawyer Erdal Dogan addressed the court calling for the Malatya court case to be merged with one of the ongoing Ergenekon court cases in Istanbul.²²⁷ He was thereby repeating a demand the lawyers had made in a letter to the court in April 2010.

A tense atmosphere was dominating the 30th court hearing on 3 December 2010, where the issue of merging the trials came up again. Abuzer Yildirim’s lawyer, Mert Eryilmaz, argued strongly against this. He read from a written text he submitted to the judge for the inclusion into the court files,

”Since there has been until today no definite evidence concerning the existence and activities of the Ergenekon organization, the acceptance of the demands by the complainants’ lawyers towards the merging of the trials would be an extremely unlawful decision.”

He then turned towards the families of the victims: the mother of murdered Ugur Yuksel, who sat in the first row, right behind the five murder suspects, sobbing silently and to the widow of Tilmann Geske next to her. Though repeatedly advised by the judge to lower his voice, Eryilmaz delivered a hate speech: Christians were a “threat for the independence of our country”, “the suspects were provoked by provocative separatist-destructive and treasonous activities of the evangelists and other missionaries all over Turkey.” He shouted that “the Zirve Publishing house and the Protestant Churches Federation to which it is linked are openly supporting the terrorist PKK.” The missionaries’ aim was not to spread the Christian faith in Turkey but

“to betray the youth, to distance them for their Islamic religion and to indoctrinate them with feelings of hatred against the state and the nation ... The fundamental aim of the Zirve Publishing house and of other missionary groups in our country is to make our homeland a colony of the Christian Western countries.”

By now he was screaming with a trembling voice, ignoring the reprimands of the judge:

“The victims working for Zirve Publishing in Malatya planned to eliminate our religion, to divide up our country, and to bribe our people. In addition, they financially supported terror organizations in our country.”

At the end of this delivery the judge requested the removal of Eryilmaz from the court room. While he was dragged out by several police officers, he shouted, “This is a Protestant court!”

²²⁵ Bugun, “Gundemi sarsacak sok aciklama” [Shocking statements that will shake the agenda], 15 October 2010, <http://www.bugun.com.tr/haber-detay/123103-gundemi-sarsacak-sok-aciklama-haberi.aspx>.

²²⁶ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 4.

²²⁷ Protocol of the 29th Court Hearing, 15 October 2010, p. 6.

5. CONCLUSION – THE MEANING OF MALATYA

Given the nature of the crime, the connections of the suspects and the allegations swirling around them, it is not surprising that there is a lot of contradictory information, disinformation, and confusion. There is a key suspect who allegedly told his associates that he had close links to one of Turkey's most famous organised crime figures. Can one believe them, or him? There is another suspect who was already in prison at the time of the Malatya murders for carrying around a Kalashnikov. One witness is in prison for previous membership of the PKK; a second for armed assault; a third for murder; a fourth for hiding weapons and explosives. There are three letters, which make detailed claims concerning the crime: one sent by a convicted murderer and two by anonymous sources which claim to work in the gendarmerie. The question whom to believe is not only a dilemma for judges; it is also a dilemma for anybody following this trial (and other, similar, and even more complicated ongoing court cases which involve allegations that the so-called “deep state” or senior generals might have been involved in carrying out or preparing illegal operations).

This is not a new dilemma. When a Mercedes and a truck crashed in the town of Susurluk in November 1996 the Turkish public learned that Abdullah Catli, a convicted mafia killer then wanted by the police, was travelling together with a member of parliament and a former Deputy Police Commissioner. It later turned out that Abdullah Catli also had contacts with gendarmerie commanders, as well as with Grey Wolf ultra-nationalists. Police established that the last person to whom Catli spoke on the phone before the Susurluk accident was a person who was also referred to a number of times in the Malatya court toom: Veli Kucuk, the alleged founder of JITEM. Two reports (one by the Turkish Parliament and one by an Inspector, Kutlu Savas, appointed by the Turkish Prime Minister), looking into the connections between the state and organised crime groups following the Susurluk incident in 1997 and 1998, also discussed this shadowy organisation. The Savas Susurluk Report noted that “although denied by the General Command of the Gendarmerie, the existence of JITEM cannot be ignored.”²²⁸ And yet at the time the General Commander of the gendarmerie and the Chief of General Staff, argued that JITEM was a piece of fiction.²²⁹

Turkish human rights activist and academic Murat Belge, who told media that he was tortured by Veli Kucuk following the military coup in 1971, considered JITEM the embodiment of the Turkish “deep state”.²³⁰ And yet no previous investigation had ever succeeded in shedding light on its operations. Recently a former JITEM operative, Abdulkadir Aygan, told Turkish newspapers that Veli “Kucuk was one of the founders of JITEM.” Aygan published a book in 2004 which included documents to prove the existence of JITEM and information that led investigators to the discovery of the bodies of missing people killed by the organization. Aygan also explained how dangerous it was for anyone to be identified as a supporter or sympathizer of the PKK and what could happen:

“Persons in contact with the PKK or supplying the PKK were denounced to JITEM. JITEM then did its job. To do the job means to extra-judicially seize a person, bring him to JITEM and to interrogate him, and then to kill him.”²³¹

²²⁸ Dogan Gures was the Chief of General Staff and Teoman Koman the General Commander of the Gendarmerie. Tesev, Almanac 2005 – Security Sector and Democratic Oversight, p. 175.

²²⁹ Tesev, Almanac 2005 – Security Sector and Democratic Oversight, p. 178.

²³⁰ Safile Usul, 'Veli Küçük bana işkence yaptı' [Veli Kucuk tortured me], *gazeteport*, 8 September 2008, http://arsiv.gazeteport.com.tr/NEWS/GP_280409?WebsiteSearch=true. More on Murat Belge here: http://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=311&film_ID=10&slide_ID=2.

²³¹ Nese Dusel, 27 January 2009, *Taraf*.

To be identified as a PKK sympathizer could be a death sentence. Note that it was the claim (however tendentious) that missionaries were supporting separatists in Turkey, more than their religious activities, which was at the heart of the ultranationalist campaign against them in recent years.

One of the most important and encouraging changes in Turkey since the Malatya court case began in late 2007 has been a decrease in openly anti-Christian media reports. There has also been a noticeable decline in the violence targeting Christians in Turkey. This can be quantified: in recent years the Association of Protestant Churches in Turkey has published annual reports about human rights violations against Protestants. According to the most recent report, “many church leaders and the Protestant Community’s legal counsel continue to find themselves under police protection because their lives are under threat.”²³² However, there is an encouraging trend. The 2007 Report listed 19 physical attacks, including the Malatya murders.²³³ In 2008 the number of incidents was down to 14, and nobody was killed.²³⁴ In 2009, the report lists only two attacks.²³⁵ For Orhan Kemal Cengiz there were two explanations for the drop in attacks:

“On the one hand there has been self-control by national media after the 2007 killings not to target Christians anymore. On the other hand there is the effect of the Ergenekon arrests. The kitchen in which the attacks against Christians were prepared was seriously hit.”²³⁶

It remains to be seen whether this trend will hold. In 2010 another crime shocked Turkey when a Catholic bishop Luigi Padovese was stabbed and killed; the court case concerning his murder is set to begin later this year.²³⁷

Will the further course of the Malatya court case contribute to elucidating the background of ultranationalist violence in Turkey? On 15 April 2010 the victims’ families’ lawyers wrote a letter to the Presidency of the Court in Malatya,²³⁸ in which they demanded that the numerous links between the suspects in the Malatya case and those in the Ergenekon trials be investigated more thoroughly.²³⁹ A decision as to whether to merge the Malatya court case with other current trials looking at alleged crimes of the deep state is yet to be taken, despite repeated requests by the lawyers.

²³² Association of Protestant Churches, Report on Human Rights Violations 2009, 30 January 2010, http://www.protestankiliseler.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1153&Itemid=471.

²³³ Association of Protestant Churches (Turkey), Report On Human Rights Violations 2007, January 2008, http://www.protestankiliseler.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1137&Itemid=459.

²³⁴ Association of Protestant Churches (Turkey), Report On Human Rights Violations 2008, January 2009, http://www.protestankiliseler.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1138&Itemid=460.

²³⁵ Association of Protestant Churches (Turkey), Report On Human Rights Violations 2009, 30 January 2010. Luigi Padovese, a Roman Catholic bishop, was stabbed to death in in the Mediterranean port of Iskenderun in June 2010.

²³⁶ Association of Protestant Churches, Press Conference in Ankara, 5 October 2010.

²³⁷ On the parallels between the 2010 Padovese murder case and previous attacks see also the interview with lawyer Erdal Dogan in the Turkish weekly *Agos: Funda Tosun*, “Asil plan Papa’nin oldurulmesi miydi?”, *AGOS* Nr 24, 18 June 2010. English translation here: <http://www.esiweb.org/pdf/Turkey%20-%20AGOS%2018%20June%202010%20Dogan%20on%20Padovese.pdf>.

²³⁸ Hafize Cobanoglu, Nalan Erkem, Murat Dincer, Ali Riza Kilic, Orhan Kemal Cengiz, Ozkan Yucel, Erdal Dogan, Ali Koc, Ismail Cem Halavut.

²³⁹ Letter of the lawyers of the victims’ families, sent on 15 April 2010 to the Malatya Court, p. 22.

Everybody mentioned in this report and currently on trial in Malatya or in Istanbul has to be considered innocent until sentenced in a court. What is clear, however, is that crimes of this kind are by no means exceptional in Turkey's turbulent modern history. As Orhan Kemal Cengiz noted in a recent op-ed:

“We have a very long history of murders, mass provocations and military coups in Turkey. Hundreds of intellectuals have been assassinated ... in just the last 50 years there have been a dozen attempts to carry out military coups, some of which “successfully” resulted in intervening in the democratic system. From this perspective, the history of Turkey can be written as a history of unsolved murders and as a history of absolute impunity for illegal structures within the state apparatus. When it comes to the political murders, assassinations and mass provocations in which “deep state” elements are involved, either no one was captured or the “suspects” were simply set free after staying in prison for a very short period.”²⁴⁰

Only when this tradition of political violence and impunity comes to an end could Turkey be said to be safely and irreversibly on a democratic path. It remains to be seen whether Turkish courts will be able to get to the bottom of the crimes targeting religious minorities; and whether the ultranationalist subculture of hatred will finally be brought under control.

²⁴⁰ Orhan Kemal Cengiz, “Why will unsolved murders remain unsolved?”, *Today's Zaman*, 31 December 2010, <http://www.todayszaman.com/columnist-231121-why-will-unsolved-murders-remain-unsolved.html>.

ANNEX – COURT HEARINGS MALATYA TRIAL

At the time of writing, a total of 27 witnesses have been heard over the course of 30 court hearings. The first witnesses were heard during the 9th Court Hearing on 4 July 2008.

| | | |
|----|-------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | 22 Nov 2007 | |
| 2 | 14 Jan 2008 | The suspects Kursat Kocadag, Hamit Ceker and Mehmet Gokce are heard. |
| 3 | 25 Feb 2008 | |
| 4 | 17 Mar 2008 | |
| 5 | 14 Apr 2008 | The suspects Cuma Ozdemir, Abuzer Yildirim and Salih Gurler are heard. |
| 6 | - | |
| 7 | 12 May 2008 | The suspects Salih Gurler and Emre Gunaydin are heard. |
| 8 | 9 Jun 2008 | The suspects are questioned again. |
| | | The questioning of witnesses begins |
| 9 | 4 Jul 2008 | <p>OZAN DAGHAN COBANOGLU At the time of the event he lived in Kocaeli province near Istanbul. He was contacted by Emre Gunaydin through a Christian website and referred him to Necati.</p> <p>EMIN MIGI Migi was the accountant of the company (Silk road) set up by Tilmann Geske in Adana. On the day of the incident he came to Malatya to have Tilmann sign some documents. He saw Abuzer Yildirim in the Zirve office on the morning of the murder.</p> <p>METIN DOGAN Inmate in Elbistan prison. He claims to know Emre from his father's sports club and from the Ulku Ocaklari where they were both active as teenagers. Dogan states that he was initially chosen to commit the murder. Emre denies knowing Dogan.</p> <p>OZGE TALAS Her husband shared the office with Zirve. At around noon on the day of the murder she came with her husband to the office.</p> <p>GOKHAN TALAS Talas, a graphic designer, shared the office with Zirve. On the day of the murder, he came to the office. When he could not open the door he called the police.</p> <p>RUHI POLAT A railway worker. He knows Emre from his father's sport centre. Polat is a member of the provincial assembly of the nationalist MHP.</p> |
| 10 | 21 Aug 2008 | <p>HUSEYIN YELKI A Turkish Christian convert, he used to work for Kayra Publishing house.</p> |
| 11 | 12 Sep 2008 | <p>ABDULLAH MAHMUT KUDAS Kudas knows Cuma Ozdemir, Salih Gurler, Hamit Ceker and Emre Gunaydin from the dormitory where they lived.</p> <p>TURNA ISIKLI She knows Emre Gunaydin from school.</p> <p>MEHMET ULUDAG He knows Emre, Cuma, Hamit and Salih from the afternoon school (dershane).</p> |
| 12 | 16 Oct 2008 | <p>VAROL BULENT ARAL Aral knows met Emre from working for the local Birlik newspaper.</p> <p>YILDIZ OZDEMIR knows Emre, Abuzer and Salih from the afternoon school.</p> <p>EBUBEKIR OKTEM knows Salih, Emre, Abuzer, Hamit and Kursat from the afternoon school.</p> |
| 13 | 21 Nov 2008 | |
| 14 | 16 Jan 2009 | |
| 15 | 20 Feb 2009 | |
| 16 | 13 Apr 2009 | <p>ONUR DULKADIR knows Emre Gunaydin, Abuzer Yildirim from the afternoon school.</p> <p>MUSTAFA GUNAYDIN Father of Emre Gunaydin.</p> |

| | | |
|----|---------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | | <p>ZEKI DAG knows Emre Gunaydin from the newspaper.</p> <p>HAMIT OZPOLAT runs the Tempo radio and the Frekans newspaper in Adiyaman and knows Bulent Aral Varol.</p> <p>SALIH DEMIR knows Emre from the Birlik newspaper.</p> <p>RUHI ABAT Abat is an academic at Malatya's Inonu University. By education he is a theologian. Around the time of the murder he was working in the strategic studies research centre on missionary activities in Malatya.</p> <p>MEHMET ULGER Ulger was provincial Gendarmerie commander for Malatya from January 2006 to July 2008. An anonymous letters claimed that he instigated the Zirve murders.</p> |
| 17 | 21 May 2009 | <p>ERKAN YILMAZ knows Emre Gunaydin from the afternoon school.</p> <p>MEHMET COLAK From 2003 to 2007 Colak worked in the intelligence unit of the Malatya Gendarmerie. As of 2007 he is based in Diyarbakir.</p> |
| 18 | 19 Jun 2009 | |
| 19 | 17 Jul 2009 | |
| 20 | 21 Aug 2009 | <p>BURCU POLAT Burcu Polat knows Emre Gunaydin from the sports centre where she went with her father Ruhi Polat.</p> |
| 21 | 16 Oct 2009 | <p>MURAT GOKTURK He worked in the Malatya Gendarmerie from 2004 until June 2008. He was later moved to Igridir. He knows Huseyin Yelki, from whom he received a bible in Arabic.</p> |
| 22 | 13 Nov 2009 | |
| 23 | 25 Dec 2009 | |
| 24 | 19 Feb 2010 | |
| 25 | 15 April 2010 | <p>BURAK DOGAN knows Varol Bulent Aral, who he met in August 2006. Aral told him that something had to be done about missionary activities and that those who would do something would become rich.</p> |
| 26 | 14 May 2010 | |
| 27 | 25 Jun 2010 | |
| 28 | 20 Aug 2010 | |
| 29 | 15 Oct 2010 | <p>ORHAN KARTAL shared a prison cell with Aral in 2008. Kartal claimed that Aral told him that Aral was involved with the planning of the Zirve murders.</p> <p>ERHAN OZEN Ozen claimed to have worked for JITEM between 1997 and 2005. He claimed that the murders of Hrant Dink and of the missionaries in Malatya were planned by JITEM.</p> |
| 30 | 3 Dec 2010 | <p>No witnesses were heard.</p> |
| 31 | 20 Jan 2011 | <p><i>The trial will continue in Malatya ...</i></p> |

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