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for the South East of England

Commissioner Olli Rehn
Commissioner for Enlargement
European Commission
Rue de la Loi, 200
Bruxelles 1049

15th January 2009

Dear Commissioner Rehn,

Turkish ban on website

I am writing to express my concern about restriction of freedom of expression in Turkey in the context of its application to join the EU.

It has been recently reported that a criminal court in Istanbul has blocked the website of Professor Richard Dawkins, the evolutionary biologist, on the grounds that it has been seen as blasphemous and defamatory. Professor Dawkins has been accused of having 'violated' Adnan Oktar, a prominent advocate of Islamic creationism, after he criticised Mr. Oktar's book 'The Atlas of Creation'.

Freedom of expression and thought are crucial foundations to healthy, democratic practice. The banning of such a website due to its thought provoking content is in stark contrast to the democratic and legal reforms you have been calling for as one of the conditions of Turkey's accession to the EU. As you stressed in your speech to the EU-Turkey Joint Parliamentary Committee in May last year, progression rather than regression by Turkey must be encouraged if it is to be successful in its path to possible EU membership.

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Therefore, I would like you to act upon such principles and investigate to what extent banning Professor Dawkins website is part of a wider picture of repression of expression in Turkey, and to take the matter up with the Turkish authorities. The Commission must continually prioritise core, democratic values (such as freedom of expression) in its dialogue with Turkey, and I ask that you persist in highlighting that countries are not permitted to accede to the EU until they conform to the fundamental rights expected.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Caroline Lucas