

## AFTERWORD

*Lord Eric Avebury*

I first met the feisty Merve Kavakci in November 2000 when I chaired a meeting for her in the House of Lords to explain how she had been wrongfully prevented from taking her oath as an elected member of the Turkish Grand National Assembly, purely because she insisted on wearing the Islamic headscarf.

It reminded me of an episode in the history of our own parliament when Charles Bradlaugh, a famous atheist, was prevented from taking his seat in the House of Commons for refusing to take a religious oath of loyalty. That barrier was removed in 1883, and it would be unthinkable that an MP would nowadays be denied entry for reasons connected with religious belief.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) took up Ms. Kavakci's case on my request, and I asked them also to write to the European Union's Enlargement Commissioner, then Mr. Gunter Verheugen, so that it could be taken into account as one factor in the determination of Turkey's application to join the EU.

Five years on, Turkey had ignored the IPU, but in the meanwhile Ms. Kavakci had applied to the European Court of Human Rights. After another two years, the court ruled that there had been a violation of the right to free elections, and that the sanctions imposed on Ms. Kavakci and two of her colleagues were not proportionate to the aims pursued.

In this book, Merve Kavakci deals with the "modernization" of Turkey following the Atatürk revolution, and its insistence on the secularisation of women. There was no room in that ideology for the *başörtülü kadınlar*, the emancipated women who consciously decided to wear the headscarf, and until the advent of religious parties there was hardly any challenge to Atatürk's secularist legacy. Not only was Kavakci herself banned; her party was closed down, a frequent event in Turkey's politics. Yet if Turkey wants to become part of Europe, it will have to allow women the freedom to make these decisions for themselves. Here is a paradox that has yet to be resolved.