

Dossier on the Disappearance of Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad



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Since 18 January, the German journalist Eva Maria Michelmann and the Kurdish journalist Ahmet Polad have been considered abducted. According to the latest information available, Eva Maria Michelmann is being held in Damascus while Ahmet Polad is in Aleppo, according to the most recent eyewitness reports.

This dossier provides an overview of the circumstances surrounding the abduction of the two journalists and the subsequent developments in the case.

Eva Maria Michelmann was born on 2 December 1989 in Siegburg. She lived in Cologne and studied social work. Michelmann worked as a social worker in Germany, particularly in the areas of supporting women, refugees and homeless people. She also participated in humanitarian aid missions in Caracas, Venezuela.

As a freelance journalist, Eva Maria has reported regularly from Rojava since 2022 with an international press pass and has published articles in outlets such as the Turkish-language news agency “Etkin Haber Ajansı”, abbreviated as “ETHA”. She reported directly from protests and on local developments. Previously, she wrote regularly for the German newspaper *Perspektive Online*, especially on political topics related to women. Ahmet Polad is a Kurdish journalist, editor at *Kurdistan Azad* and producer at the television channel Özgür TV.

Background of the Disappearance of Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad

On 28 February, the Turkish-language news platform “Etkin Haber Ajansı” (ETHA) published an article (1) reporting the disappearance of the two journalists. On 18 January, Michelmann was in the city of Raqqa together with Polad to document developments on the ground and report on attacks on the city by the Syrian Transitional Government (STG). Video footage recorded for Özgür TV in which Ahmet Polad can be heard speaking captured fighting and gunfire on the streets of Raqqa. As the clashes intensified, the two journalists sought shelter with around 40 civilians in a building belonging to a youth organisation of the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES). The building was eventually surrounded by forces of the transitional government. According to ETHA, many other buildings in the city were also attacked at the same time, resulting in violent clashes. As night fell, STG forces reportedly tightened their encirclement of the building and eventually broke into the ground floor.

Reports indicate that several people were killed during the incident. Continuous coverage was impossible due to repeated power and internet blackouts. The reports further state that the Syrian

Democratic Forces (SDF) contacted the STG forces to negotiate the evacuation of the civilians inside the building. The two sides reportedly agreed that the house would be evacuated in small groups, with the civilians moving to an area under SDF control at the time. Some of those evacuated reportedly reached SDF forces guarding the al-Aqtan prison near Raqqa. However, when telephone contact was later made with the evacuated group, it became apparent that Michelmann and Polad had not reached the prison. An eyewitness who had been evacuated reported that both were placed in a vehicle by transitional government forces after leaving the building. The head of internal security in Aleppo, Mohammed Abdul Ghani, is also said to have been present. He was identified by the eyewitness Casim Mihemmed from a photograph (2). Like many members of the transitional government's security forces, Abdul Ghani has a background with the Islamist group Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). This incident took place more than 100 days ago.

Michelmann and Polad are two of thousands abducted

On 6 January, the Syrian Transitional Government (STG) launched an offensive against areas controlled by the Democratic Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (DAANES). In the fighting, the STG captured several cities, including Deir Hafir, Tabqa, Raqqa and Deir ez-Zor. This displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians. In addition, thousands of civilians and SDF fighters were arrested during the clashes or simply disappeared. The Syrian Transitional Government stated that it currently holds 970 people in custody. According to Kongra Star, the actual number is significantly higher. Ilham Ehmed spoke of up to 4,000 people (3) who are allegedly being held as prisoners of war and hostages by the transitional government.

Actions since the disappearance

Since the disappearance of Michelmann and Polad was made public, efforts have been made through various channels to seek clarification. German Bundestag members Sanae Abdi and Cansu Özdemir spoke publicly about the case and called for both clarification of the incident and the protection of journalists in war zones in general. Özdemir contacted the Federal Government and the Federal Foreign Office.

A broad public discussion was also generated in newspapers such as *Der Tagesspiegel*, *SPIEGEL*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *T-Online*, *Deutschlandfunk* and *Deutsche Welle* (DW). International media outlets, for example *The Washington Post*, also published articles (4).

Several organisations dedicated to the protection of journalists and press freedom were also mobilised. These included exchanges with the German Journalists' Union (DJU) and Reporters Without Borders. The trade union ver.di, the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) (5), the Union

of Free Journalists in North East Syria (YRA) and the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) (6) all issued publications about the case. Through the lawyer Roland Meister, the International Red Cross was contacted. It began reaching out to contacts in the region, including Mazlum Abdi, Commander-in-Chief of the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), in an effort to locate the journalists.

Press Conference (10 March 2026 – first public update)

On 10 March, the solidarity structure People's Bridge held a press conference together with the lawyer Roland Meister, Michelmann's brother Dr Antonius Michelmann and her mother Rotraut Hake-Michelmann. Lawyer Roland Meister stated that the German Federal Foreign Office had been contacted. A member of staff at the Foreign Office explained in a telephone conversation that all relevant authorities in the Middle East, not only in Syria, had been notified by the German Government. Michelmann's details and a photograph had been shared in order to establish her whereabouts. The German Government has not yet received any information from the Syrian transitional government. Roland Meister added: "We know of a journalist in Damascus who reported that the name Eva Maria Michelmann is not known locally."

He went on to outline four possible scenarios regarding Michelmann's situation: that she is in official custody; that she is being held in informal custody (i.e. abducted and not yet handed over to the official government); that she may have been killed and buried in anonymous mass graves; or, given Turkey's direct involvement in the military operations in January and its cooperation with the Syrian transitional government, that she may have been handed over to Turkey because the Kurdish journalist Ahmet Polad, who was detained with her, holds Turkish citizenship.

Michelmann's mother and brother also expressed deep concern for their daughter and sister at the press conference. Dr Antonius Michelmann emphasised that his sister had always been an open-minded, courageous and honest person who saw Rojava as a focal point for solidarity and the lived unity of peoples.

On 11 March, at the Federal Press Conference, the representative of the Federal Foreign Office was again asked what steps had already been taken to clarify the status of the German citizen Eva Maria Michelmann and secure her release. The Foreign Office confirmed that it was aware of the case but provided no further details when asked about specific measures.

In Michelmann's case, press freedom and the protection of journalists in war zones have clearly been violated. The European Parliament and the Federal Government have a responsibility to clarify this case immediately and secure the release of the journalists Michelmann and Polad.

While there was still no confirmed information about the journalists' whereabouts at the time of the March press conference, new, partly verified information has emerged since April.

Current Developments (as of 27 April 2026)

On 27 April 2026, another press conference was held in Cologne by Eva Maria Michelmann's family members and their lawyer Frank Jasenski. For the first time, concrete new information about the missing journalist's whereabouts was made public. Her location is now considered known. According to the spokesperson for the solidarity structure People's Bridge, it has been confirmed that she is alive. This information is based in part on statements by former detainees released in a prisoner exchange on 11 April. It was also reported that Ahmet Polad is being held in a prison in Aleppo. In addition, the Federal Foreign Office stated on 23 April that Eva Maria Michelmann had been transferred from Aleppo to a detention facility in Damascus. She was visited there by staff from the German Embassy. Despite these developments, there is still no official statement from the Syrian transitional government regarding the detention of the two journalists. The family's lawyer, Frank Jasenski, emphasised that the current situation constitutes a serious violation of fundamental rights. In particular, it was highlighted that for several months Michelmann has had no contact with her family, lawyers or the outside world. This can be classified as solitary confinement and may amount to a form of torture under international law.

There are also serious concerns about their health condition. According to eyewitness reports, Ahmet Polad was injured. There are also indications that Eva Maria Michelmann has been subjected to continuous interrogations. Reports suggest that since her detention she has been held under conditions that are extremely stressful both physically and psychologically.

On the occasion of the 100th day of her disappearance, an open letter was published addressed to leading political figures, including the Federal Chancellor, the Federal President and the President of the European Commission. It was signed by more than 160 people and representatives in politics, the media and civil society. The letter calls in particular for the immediate release of Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad and for transparent clarification of their fate.

The family expressed both relief at the confirmed sign of life and deep concern about the detainees' condition. At the same time, they criticised the Federal Government's information policy and measures so far. They called for the case to be made a political priority and for stronger diplomatic pressure to be applied.

We ask you to advocate for the following:

- **Immediate clarification of the fate of the missing journalists Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad and their release**
- **Transparent information on the health and survival status of all abducted persons in Syria (approximately 4,000 people – see the statement by Kongra Star)**
- **Granting access for the International Committee of the Red Cross and human rights organisations to persons abducted and held by the Syrian Transitional Government**

We are available for enquiries via the contact details provided.

People's Bridge

Sources:

- (1) <https://etha55.com/haberdetay/rakkada-kusatmada-kalan-iki-gazeteciden-haber-alinamiyor-219878>
- (2) <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DW3EnrMiAcK/>
- (3) <https://deutsch.anf-news.com/frauen/kongra-star-startet-unterschriftenkampagne-fur-geiseln-und-vermisste-50697>
- (4) https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/04/28/germany-syria-missing-journalist-eva-maria-michelmann/ffb1b1f4-42ea-11f1-b19d-32431046b5b4_story.html
- (5) <https://cpj.org/data/people/eva-maria-michelmann/>
- (6) <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/syria-german-and-turkish-journalists-missing-in-raqqa-since-late-january>