

Press release from the family of Eva Maria Michelmann and her lawyer

Berlin, 29 May 2026

On 29 May 2026, the third press conference was held in Berlin regarding the abduction/detention of journalists Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad (Mehmet Nizam Aslan) by the Syrian Transitional Government. Participants included Rotraut Michelmann (Eva's mother), Dr Antonius Michelmann (brother), lawyer Roland Meister, and Avîn Hummitzsch from the Rojava solidarity organisation 'People's Bridge', who acted as moderator. This was preceded by a meeting with the Federal Foreign Office. The previous press conferences had been held in Cologne. The press conference was well attended.

Avîn Hummitzsch opened the press conference with a summary. She provided information on the circumstances under which Eva and Ahmet were detained and noted that Eva Michelmann had so far been visited only once by a representative of the German Embassy. She reported that since the abduction was made public on 28 February, work had been carried out at various levels to secure the release of the two journalists. The initiative "Freedom for Eva and Ahmet" had most recently held vigils in Cologne and Paris and was organising protests across Europe every Wednesday, which it would also be stepping up in the near future.

At the start, lawyer Roland Meister reported on the meeting with representatives of the Foreign Office. During this, grave concern regarding the detainees' state of health was emphasised. According to the lawyer, an Alawite journalist from Syria reported that Eva Maria Michelmann had been subjected to systematic interrogation and torture. Ahmet Polad is, according to witness statements, seriously injured.

The Syrian government has so far failed to comply with the demand to allow an independent doctor to visit Eva Maria Michelmann in Damascus, Meister said. Furthermore, since 23 April, the Syrian government has not permitted any further visits by the Foreign Office. Neither the Foreign Office nor lawyers in Damascus have been allowed to organise a visit to the two detainees. Once again, it is unclear whether both are being held in Damascus or in Aleppo. They therefore remain in incommunicado detention, in violation of human rights.

He also criticised the approach of the Federal Government and its Foreign Office. Given the ongoing contacts between the Federal Government and representatives of the Syrian transitional government, it is incomprehensible why the Federal Government is not making a more intensive effort to secure their release. The approach taken so far of 'quiet diplomacy' is also lacking in transparency. The legal basis for the detention of Eva Maria Michelmann remains unknown. The German government must increase the political pressure. Whilst no further visits by the German embassy are permitted and no information regarding her state of health is provided, sanctions against former HTS leaders are being lifted and the Syrian interim president Ahmad al-Shaara is being invited to international meetings, such as the current G7 summit.

Rotraut Hake-Michelmann, mother of Eva Maria Michelmann, emphasised the family's concern for Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad. She pointed out that Eva had been detained for more than 130 days. Kurdish actors had provided significant support to the families in the search for the two, who had been missing for six weeks. It was only after it had been established that both journalists were in prison in Aleppo that the first and, to date, only visit by a representative of the German Embassy took place.

Rotraut Michelmann also drew parallels with the case of the German theologian Elisabeth Käsemann, who was murdered in 1977 by the military dictatorship in Argentina. She referred to the criticism that Germany's inadequate diplomatic efforts had made the execution possible and raised the question of the relationship between profit-driven economic interests and the commitment to the freedom of German nationals. According to Rotraut, Elisabeth Käsemann's father summed it up well at the time when he spoke of 'murder by failure to assist' and said that 'the production and sale of a Mercedes was more important to the German government than the release of his daughter'.

Finally, she read out a statement from the parents of Ahmet Polad, who emphasised that journalism must not be criminalised and called for support for the demand for the release of Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad.

Dr Antonius Michelmann highlighted the importance of public attention. The work of supporters, journalists, former victims and lawyers had helped to determine the whereabouts of the two. He also highlighted the economic interdependence between the two countries and expressed his bewilderment that the German state is not pulling out all the stops to get Eva out of prison – "even though there is a whole range of means of pressure available". If this case were made a "top priority", said Dr Antonius Michelmann, it would be a simple matter to put Eva on a plane as early as next week.

The press conference concluded after questions from the press and answers from the lawyer, the family members and the moderator.