# Free speech under fire as UK prosecutes Koran-burning protester



A controversial incident outside the Turkish consulate in London has stirred significant debate regarding the erosion of free speech in the UK. Hamit Coskun, a 50-year-old protester who fled Turkey to escape persecution, set fire to a copy of the Koran to condemn what he views as the expanding Islamist influence of President Erdoğan's regime. While Coskun insists his actions were targeted at Erdoğan's government rather than Muslims in general, his demonstration has been met with fierce backlash and has raised alarms about potential restrictions on free expression in a nation that has long prided itself on liberal values.

During the protest, held on February 13, Coskun shouted, “F\*\*\* Islam, Islam is a religion of terrorism,” as he ignited the religious text. This provocative act triggered a wave of outrage on social media, leading to threats against his safety. Subsequent to the demonstration, Coskun was brutally attacked by a knifeman and suffered further assaults from extremists, prompting authorities to relocate him under police protection.

Now, Coskun faces legal challenges, being charged with religiously aggravated public order offences. Initially, he was accused of harassing a "religious institution," but the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) later revised the charges, highlighting concerns that such actions could signal a revival of blasphemy laws in the UK. Legal experts argue that these charges are problematic; under the Public Order Act, “Islam” does not constitute a person, and prosecuting such cases risks criminalising legitimate public demonstrations involving religious texts.

In an exclusive interview, Coskun expressed his dismay at the UK's approach to free speech, stating, “I would never have come here if I knew this country does not have free speech.” His frustrations resonate with an increasing number of advocates for freedom of expression who view the legal actions taken against him as a harbinger of a less tolerant landscape for dissent. Remarks from Stephen Evans of the National Secular Society underline that a successful prosecution could not only suppress criticisms of Islam but also pave the way for prioritising feelings over fundamental freedoms, undermining the core tenets of open discourse.

The case has sparked considerable interest, drawing remarks from MPs and legal scholars about the ramifications of prosecuting individuals expressing their views on religious texts. Support from organizations like the Free Speech Union reflects a growing resistance against what many perceive as encroachments on civil liberties.

As this legal drama unfolds, its implications transcend Coskun's individual plight, engaging in a larger conversation about the fragile balance between respecting religious beliefs and upholding the freedoms that shape democratic societies. The ongoing discussion marks a critical juncture in the UK, where expressions of dissent could soon face intensified scrutiny under the pretext of protecting cultural sensitivities.

This situation is emblematic of a broader trend across Europe, where issues of free speech clashing with political correctness are becoming increasingly fraught. Reactions to Coskun's protest resonate with similar tensions observed in various countries, illustrating how dissenting views often collide with national identity and collective values.

In this charged atmosphere, the outcomes of Coskun’s trial could either affirm the importance of free speech in a democratic context or mark a disturbing retreat from these liberties in the face of religious pressures. As he awaits the verdict from Westminster Magistrates’ Court, many will be keenly observing the ramifications of this case on the wider discourse surrounding free expression in Britain.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-14770461/Man-50-set-fire-Koran-outside-Turkish-consulate-London-says-never-come-Britain-knew-country-does-not-free-speech.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.gbnews.com/news/koran-burning-protester-hamit-coskun-charges-cps-rewritten-london-turkish-consulate> - The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) has amended charges against Hamit Coskun, who burned a Koran outside the Turkish consulate in London. Initially charged with harassing the 'religious institution of Islam', the CPS acknowledged an incorrect application of the term and revised the charge to reflect alleged harassment motivated by hostility towards a religious group. This decision follows criticism that the original charge resembled a reintroduction of blasphemy laws in the UK. MPs and legal experts have expressed concern over the potential implications for free speech and the criminalisation of public desecration of religious texts.
3. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/london/man-admits-assault-koran-burning-turkish-consulate-london-knightsbridge-b1222348.html> - Moussa Kadri, 59, has pleaded guilty to assaulting Hamit Coskun, 50, who burned a Koran outside the Turkish Consulate in London. The incident occurred on February 13 in Rutland Gardens, Knightsbridge. Kadri denied possessing a bladed article during the assault. The case has been sent to Southwark Crown Court for sentencing on the assault charge and trial on the weapon charge. Coskun has denied religiously motivated harassment and is scheduled to stand trial at Westminster Magistrates’ Court on May 28.
4. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/home-news/southwark-crown-court-koran-turkish-london-knightsbridge-b2732862.html> - Moussa Kadri, 59, has admitted to assaulting Hamit Coskun, 50, who burned a Koran outside the Turkish Consulate in London. The assault took place on February 13 in Rutland Gardens, Knightsbridge. Kadri denied possessing a bladed article during the incident. The case has been referred to Southwark Crown Court for sentencing on the assault charge and trial on the weapon charge. Coskun has denied religiously motivated harassment and is set to stand trial at Westminster Magistrates’ Court on May 28.
5. <https://www.newenglishreview.org/man-who-burned-koran-faces-charges-for-harassing-islam/> - Hamit Coskun, 50, faces charges of 'harassing the religious institution of Islam' after burning a Koran during a political protest outside the Turkish Consulate in London. Legal experts argue that the charge is legally flawed, as 'Islam' is not a person under the Public Order Act. Conviction could criminalise the public desecration of religious texts, an act protected as political expression. The National Secular Society has urged the Crown Prosecution Service to drop the prosecution, warning it could lead to the reintroduction of blasphemy laws in the UK.
6. <https://publiclawlibrary.org/controversial-quran-burning-sparks-debate-on-free-speech-vs-religious-sensitivity-in-europe/> - The burning of a Koran by Hamit Coskun, 50, outside the Turkish Consulate in London has ignited debates over freedom of expression and religious sensitivity in Europe. Coskun's act was a protest against Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and in solidarity with Salwan Momika, an Iraqi refugee assassinated in Sweden after burning Qurans. Legal analysts suggest the charges against Coskun may be flawed, viewing them as a concealed effort to reintroduce blasphemy laws. This incident reflects a broader trend of political and religious sensitivities influencing free speech boundaries in Europe.
7. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/hamit-coskun-koran-burning-court-b2698865.html> - Hamit Coskun, 50, has denied charges of religiously motivated harassment after burning a Koran outside the Turkish Consulate in London. The incident occurred on February 13 in Rutland Gardens, Knightsbridge. Footage posted on social media shows Coskun burning a book outside the consulate's barrier, followed by an assault. Coskun appeared at Westminster Magistrates’ Court, where he entered not guilty pleas and was released on conditional bail. He is scheduled to stand trial on May 28. Moussa Kadri, 59, has also been charged with causing actual bodily harm and possession of an offensive weapon.