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Current Statement for the Press and the Public

No further contact with Eva Maria Michelmann since 23 April 2026 – Incommunicado detention by the al-Scharaa/al-Jolani regime continues

As legal representatives of Eva Maria Michelmann, Mehmet Nizam Aslan/Ahmet Polad and their respective families, we report with great concern:

1. No further contact since 23 April 2026

Since 18 January 2026, Eva Maria Michelmann and Mehmet Nizam Aslan, known in journalistic circles as Ahmet Polad (also transcribed as Ahmed/Ahmet Polat/Polad in some reports), have been detained in violation of international protection regulations for journalists.¹

After investigations by journalists, friends, family members, our law firm, and sources from north-eastern Syria/Rojava established that both are being held in Aleppo, a representative of the Federal Foreign Office visited Eva Maria Michelmann in a prison in Damascus on 23 April 2026. It was not until 30 April 2026 that the Syrian transitional government confirmed the detention.²

Although the Federal Foreign Office had promised regular consular assistance for Eva Maria Michelmann and had been reminded of this commitment both in writing and verbally, no further visit has been reported to date. It appears that the Syrian government is now also refusing the Federal Foreign Office permission for a further visit.

The Foreign Office stated as recently as last week that it was working flat out on Eva Maria Michelmann's behalf. According to the information available to us, a further visit is also due to take place, accompanied by a doctor. In response to urgent enquiries, it has recently been stated that no current information can be provided to the family or the legal representatives at this time. Nor has there been any response to the request to seek consular and diplomatic guarantees of protection and access from the Syrian government for lawyers Roland Meister and Yener Sözen, so that they can visit Eva Maria Michelmann safely in Damascus.³

2. Allegations of torture and health risks

Reports – including from a Syrian journalist – indicate that Eva Maria Michelmann was severely tortured. A fellow prisoner of Ahmet Polad, an SDF member who was released in a prisoner exchange, reported that he is injured. Eva Maria Michelmann's state of health was already alarmingly poor during the visit on 23 April 2026. The detention of Eva Maria Michelmann and her colleague contravenes fundamental human rights, which the Syrian transitional regime has also committed to upholding.⁴

The German Federal Government and the Federal Foreign Office must not accept such behaviour on the part of the Syrian government.

There is no justification whatsoever for the delay in the promised further visit.

¹ <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/syria-german-and-turkish-journalists-missing-in-raqqa-since-late-january> — International Federation of Journalists (IFJ), 13.03.2026; <https://cpj.org/2026/03/german-turkish-journalists-missing-in-syria/> — Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 11.03.2026.

² <https://cpj.org/2026/04/cpj-demands-transparency-as-german-reporter-confirmed-detained-in-syria/> — Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 27.04.2026; <https://apnews.com/article/syria-german-journalist-detained-72ee58347f6ffba75137c01ce3bdd1c> — Associated Press (AP), 30.04.2026.

³ <https://cpj.org/2026/04/cpj-demands-transparency-as-german-reporter-confirmed-detained-in-syria/> — Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 27.04.2026; Kanzlei Meister & Partner, Pressemitteilung vom 24.04.2026, Anlage: 260424_Pressemitteilung_RAB_Eva Maria in Damaskus inhaftiert.pdf.

⁴ https://koeln.t-online.de/region/koeln/id_101231304/eva-maria-michelmann-koelner-journalistin-95-tage-lang-gefoltert.html — t-online Köln, 27.04.2026; <https://cpj.org/2026/04/cpj-demands-transparency-as-german-reporter-confirmed-detained-in-syria/> — Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 27.04.2026.

3. The German Government and the EU must not accept the continued incommunicado detention

We are already hearing voices accusing the German government and the Foreign Office of refraining from forceful political intervention and of leaving Eva Maria Michelmann in the hands of a dictatorial security regime with an Islamist veneer that emerged from HTS/al-Qaeda structures, because they do not wish to anger this dictatorship and are keen to maintain good relations with it – not least so that refugees can be deported to Syria.⁵

However, this is a regime that resorts to torture without hesitation and which, according to numerous reports, is accused of committing serious acts of violence against Alawite and Druze population groups. This regime is holding Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad in torture detention – without legal basis, without access to a lawyer, without medical supervision and without visits from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or the German Foreign Office.⁶

Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad were conducting research in Raqqa into the activities of Islamic State (IS) and its links to the jihadist structures of the Syrian transitional government.

Their detention for more than four months raises the question of whether the Federal Government, the Federal Foreign Office and the EU regard normalisation, economic cooperation, deportation interests and political influence as more important than human rights, freedom of the press and the freedom of those who bring this situation to light.^{7 8}

The German government and the Foreign Office bear joint responsibility for the fate of German national Eva Maria Michelmann. They cannot be absolved of this legal, political and, in particular, human responsibility.

According to Syrian lawyers, the situation in Damascus is confusing, dangerous, and characterised by conflicting jurisdictions. To date, no dependable contact has been established with Eva Maria Michelmann and Ahmet Polad. There are conflicting reports as to whether they are being held in Aleppo or in Damascus. In view of their continued incommunicado detention, conflicting reports regarding their location and the lack of procedural safeguards, an acute danger to life and limb cannot be ruled out.⁹

4. Demands of the families and legal representatives

We expect the Federal Government, the Federal Foreign Office, and the EU to significantly and transparently step up their efforts to secure their release.

This includes ensuring that another visit to Eva Maria Michelmann is arranged without delay, with the involvement of an independent doctor, and that diplomatic assurances, as well as guarantees of entry, protection and access, are obtained for lawyers Roland Meister and Yener Sözen.¹⁰

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/syria-country-policy-and-information-notes/country-policy-and-information-note-criticism-of-the-government-syria-april-2026-accessible> — UK Home Office, Country Policy, and Information Note: Criticism of the government, Syria, April 2026; <https://snhr.org/blog/2026/04/05/quarterly-report-on-cased-of-arbitrary-arrest-and-detention-in-syria/> — Syrian Network for Human Rights (SNHR), 05.04.2026.

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/may/04/syria-justice-assad-regime-arrests-2013-tadamon-massacres> — The Guardian, Melvyn Ingleby / William Christou, 04.05.2026; <https://www.justsecurity.org/117191/trump-administrations-delisting-hts/> — Just Security, Jason M. Blazakis, 18.07.2025.

⁷ <https://rojavainformationcenter.org/2026/01/isis-escapes-as-a-result-of-syrian-army-assault/> — Rojava Information Center, 21.01.2026; <https://acleddata.com/expert-comment/syria-collapse-ceasefire-risks-putting-thousands-isil-prisoners-play-expert-comment> — ACLED, Muaz Al Abdullah, 23.01.2026; <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/from-insurgency-to-statecraft-al-sharaa-and-syrias-foreign-fighters-test/> — Combating Terrorism Center at West Point / CTC Sentinel, Adrian Shtuni, Februar 2026; <https://www.thenationalnews.com/news/mena/2026/02/25/isis-launching-daily-attacks-in-north-eastern-syria-as-fears-of-security-vacuum-grow/> — The National, Nada Homsy, 25.02.2026.

⁸ <https://sana.sy/en/economic/2313532/> — SANA, German-Syrian Economic Cooperation Forum in Berlin, 29.04.2026; https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/news/commission-proposes-full-resumption-eu-syria-cooperation-agreement-2026-04-20_en — European Commission, 20.04.2026; <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/politics/eu-agrees-to-lift-sanctions-on-syrias-interior-defense-ministers/3934200> — Anadolu Agency, 18.05.2026; <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/syria-join-g7-finance-talks-paris-sign-growing-status-2026-05-18/> — Reuters, 18.05.2026.

⁹ <https://cpj.org/2026/04/cpj-demands-transparency-as-german-reporter-confirmed-detained-in-syria/> — Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), 27.04.2026; <https://apnews.com/article/syria-german-journalist-detained-72ee58347f6ffba75137c0c1ce3bdd1c> — Associated Press (AP), 30.04.2026.

¹⁰ <https://www.icrc.org/en/missing-family-member-syria> — International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Information page; <https://www.icrc.org/en/document/missing-persons-and-their-families-factsheet> — International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 05.12.2023.

Voices of the families

Rotraut Hake-Michelmann, mother of the abducted journalist Eva Maria Michelmann:

“I don’t want my Eva and Ahmet to end up like Elisabeth Käsemann:¹¹ murdered by a brutal regime, sacrificed for economic interests by a German government.

My daughter is alive, and the time to act is now!”

Dr Antonius Michelmann, brother of the abducted journalist Eva Maria Michelmann:

“My sister’s case is having a significant impact. Complete strangers are offering us encouragement and organising support. That is how Eva and Ahmet were found in the first place. At the same time, we encounter bewilderment everywhere that neither German citizenship nor her status as a journalist is sufficient for the German government to secure my sister’s release. If the CDU and SPD in Berlin wanted to, we could be holding Eva and Ahmet in our arms tomorrow.”

Kudret and Adil Aslan, mother and father of the abducted journalist Mehmet Nizam Aslan, known in journalistic circles as Ahmet Polad:

“Our son, Ahmet Polad, was arrested by Syrian government forces on 18 January 2026 whilst carrying out his journalistic work in Syria, along with his colleague Eva Maria Michelmann. Although months have now passed, we have received no news of him whatsoever. As his mother and father, we are deeply concerned for our son’s health. Journalism is not a crime. It is unacceptable that journalists are deprived of their freedom simply for doing their job, and that their families are left in limbo. We call on everyone, particularly human rights organisations, press associations and the international public, to remain silent no longer, to take decisive action and to make the voice for our children’s freedom heard.”

¹¹ Elisabeth Käsemann was a German Protestant theologian and political activist. She had been living in Argentina since 1970, where she was actively involved in social and political causes. She was abducted and tortured during the military dictatorship in Argentina in 1977 and executed exactly 49 years ago – on 24 May 1977. An international campaign for her release was unsuccessful. The SPD/FDP government of the time and the Foreign Office were justifiably accused of not doing enough to secure her release. She is the best-known in Germany of the 30,000 victims of the Argentine military dictatorship. Her father was the renowned Protestant theologian Ernst Käsemann. (See also: <https://www.elisabeth-kaesemann-stiftung.com/>)