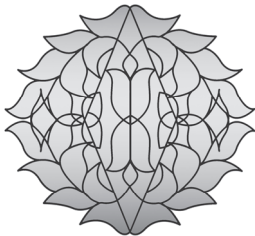




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MESA '09

September 4, 2009

Professor Henk Schmidt
Rector Magnificus
Erasmus Universiteit Rotterdam
c/o Secretariat of the Executive Board
Administration Building, Room E2-12 Woudestein
Rotterdam, Netherlands
cvb@eur.nl

Dear Rector Schmidt,

I write on behalf of the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) to protest the Erasmus University Rotterdam's August 19 decision to terminate Dr Tariq Ramadan's guest professorship in Citizenship and Identity at the EUR due to his hosting a program on the Iranian English-language television channel Press TV.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 3000 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

Apparently, administrators at the Erasmus University Rotterdam (EUR) deem that by continuing to host the television program "Islam and Life" on Press TV, Professor Ramadan signals support for the current Iranian regime and the oppressive means it has used to enforce the outcome of the recent disputed elections in that country. Such a conclusion is explicitly contradicted by Professor Ramadan's own explanation of the TV program and its goals, the long record of his writings and numerous public interviews, and the fact that the TV program was started well before these latest Iranian national elections. The EUR decision also reveals a lack of awareness of the range of opinions expressed on both Press TV and Professor Ramadan's program in particular, the latter consistently steering clear of partisan politics. Professor Ramadan's endeavor to educate fellow Muslims about social and cultural issues pertaining to their faith and the way they live it through an English-language television program, and to do so in a non-sectarian manner at that, in no way supports the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Most important, however, the EUR decision to terminate Tariq Ramadan's professorship goes against the whole principle of free inquiry and expression central to the life of a university – especially one that proudly bears the name of Erasmus. It is this aspect of the decision that especially troubles the members of our committee. Indeed, it is difficult to understand the action by the EUR as anything but an action against Professor Ramadan's political activities and thus as a form of political retaliation against him. For universities to function as institutions of free inquiry and expression, there can be no willingness on the part of administrators, faculty, or students to stifle either inquiry or expression.

Therefore, as a committee of MESA charged with monitoring infringements on academic freedom, CAF members are troubled by the action taken against Professor Ramadan and what it implies about the EUR's lack of respect for academic freedom. In that spirit, I write to urge that you rescind this decision and allow Professor Ramadan to continue in his professorship.

Sincerely yours,

Virginia Aksan
President, MESA
Professor of History, McMaster University