



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
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of North America, Inc.

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October 30, 2015

Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu  
Office of the Prime Minister  
Başbakanlık  
06573 Ankara, Turkey  
Via facsimile +90 312 417 0476

Dear Prime Minister Davutoğlu:

I write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom in order to express our concern over reports that Hakan Demir, a fourth year mechanical engineering student at Boğaziçi University, was detained on October 7, 2015 at the airport on his way to Diyarbakır. Following Demir's detention his university housing was subjected to search and a decision was subsequently taken to prosecute him apparently based on books and written materials seized from his house.

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 nearly 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.

The search of Demir's house resulted in the discovery of books by PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) affiliated public figures Abdullah Öcalan and Mustafa Karayılan. In addition, Demir's cell phone was searched particularly for the music it contained. Demir is being subjected to secret proceedings in closed sessions leading to limited information concerning his prosecution. But his lawyer, Hüseyin Boğatekin has indicated that Demir is being held at the notorious Silivri Prison, which is a high-security penal facility that has repeatedly been used to imprison academics, journalists and politicians facing national security-related charges. Because of the secrecy attached to the proceedings, the charges against Demir have not been made public. But based on the information available, there is reason to believe that Demir is being tried for possession of written materials and music by prominent Kurdish figures and suspicion that his travel to Diyarbakır would have been in furtherance of political activities expressing solidarity with Kurdish civilians confined to government-declared state security zones. Demir's lawyer has indicated that his client is very concerned that his detention will prevent him from sitting for his final exams. The faculty and administration of Boğaziçi University have issued a statement in support of Demir, indicating that they will be following closely the proceedings until Demir is released and able to rejoin his classmates.

As a member state of the Council of Europe and a signatory of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Turkey is required to protect freedom of thought, expression and assembly.

Further, Turkey is also a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), all of which protect the rights to freedom of opinion, expression and association, which are at the heart of academic freedom. These rights are also enshrined in articles 25-27 of the Turkish Constitution. We urge your government to take all necessary steps to ensure that these rights are protected.

We respectfully ask that your government take immediate steps to clarify the charges against Demir as well as the grounds for those charges. If Demir is being detained solely as a result of possessing Kurdish literature and music and planning to travel to engage in peaceful political activities in solidarity with the Kurdish communities in and around Diyarbakır, we ask your government to pursue his immediate release. We also continue to urge you to take note of mounting international condemnation of the erosion of democratic rights and freedoms in Turkey.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely,



Nathan Brown  
President, Middle East Studies Association  
Professor, George Washington University

cc:

- Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanı, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkish president)
- Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Başkanı, İsmet Yılmaz (President of the Turkish National Assembly)
- Türkiye Adalet Bakanı, Kenan İpek (Turkish Justice Minister)
- Türkiye Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu (YÖK) Başkanı, Yekta Saraç (President of the Turkish Higher Education Council)
- Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights, Barbara Lochbihler
- Member of the Cabinet of Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Monika Kacinskiene
- Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, Johannes Hahn
- Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks