



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
Association**  
of North America, Inc.

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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 Dr. Elifhan Köse, a faculty member at Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey University, is being prosecuted for attending a memorial service and chanting anti-government slogans. On 19 December 2014, Dr. Köse was sentenced to 11 months and 20 days imprisonment on the grounds that she insulted then-Prime Minister (and now President) Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Dr. Köse has not yet been taken into custody to serve this draconian sentence, leaving time for the government to act to reverse these and other measures taken against her in violation of her rights to freedom of speech and assembly.

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.

Dr. Köse attended a memorial for Berkin Elvan—a teenager who was struck by a tear gas canister in the head when trying to buy bread during the Gezi Park protests. After months hospitalized in a coma, Elvan died in March 2014. Faculty participation in the memorial was facilitated by Eğitim Sen, the Higher Education Union, and Dr. Köse attended the memorial at the urging of her union. Her attendance was a legitimate expression of her constitutional rights to freedom of opinion, freedom of assembly and participation in activities supported by her academic union.

There is reason to believe that Dr. Köse was specifically targeted because her participation in the memorial was apparently recorded by the police without the necessary court order. As a member of a left-leaning union, a participant at a memorial protesting police brutality, and a female academic studying religiously-observant women, she may have been targeted for a number of reasons. Reports in the Turkish media have suggested that left-leaning female academics who are critical of the government have been subjected to heightened scrutiny by state officials. The allegations against Dr. Köse include that she participated in a chant during the memorial in which then-prime minister Erdoğan was described in insulting terms. Dr. Köse's attendance at

the memorial and her expression of critical opinions concerning the government and Erdoğan were well within her legal rights. Dr. Köse testified that she did not deliberately insult Erdoğan. It remains unclear whether she will be subjected to additional disciplinary action by YÖK, the Higher Education Council, for her alleged public statements during the memorial.

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 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 support an appeal of the judgment against Dr. Köse and that you terminate any other disciplinary proceedings that might be underway against her. We 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