



**Middle  
East  
Studies  
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of North America, Inc.

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February 17, 2016

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

Dear Prime Minister Davutoğlu:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our concern over reports that Haydar Darıcı, a PhD candidate at the University of Michigan, may be criminally charged with membership in a terrorist organization, disseminating propaganda of a terrorist organization, and violating the law on marches and demonstrations. We wrote to you previously, on January 5, 2016, with regard to Darıcı, after he was taken into custody on Thursday December 31, 2015 in Diyarbakır. At that time, he was attempting to assist demonstrators taking part in a peace march who were severely affected by the pepper gas grenades used by riot police. Together with others who were also detained, Darıcı was released after four days in custody, but the prosecutor initiated a criminal investigation and barred him from leaving Turkey for an indefinite period. Given that Darıcı is enrolled in a Ph.D. program in the U.S., this travel ban jeopardizes his ability to pursue his doctoral studies, which was the subject of our earlier letter. We are now writing to follow up on that letter because Darıcı remains subject to a travel ban, his passport has been confiscated and an indictment has been prepared against him, criminalizing his legitimate research activities in violation of academic freedom, freedom of expression and the right to education. His trial begins on April 5, 2016.

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.

Darıcı is a doctoral student conducting anthropological research concerning Kurdish youth participation in political mobilization. This research will ultimately contribute to the doctoral dissertation he is preparing on Kurdish youth activism in Turkey. As part of his ongoing doctoral research, Darıcı makes regular visits to Diyarbakır. On December 31, 2015, he was in the city as an academic researcher, not as a participant in the activities of the “*Barış için yürüyorum* / I’m walking for peace” initiative. Yet he was taken into custody, together with twenty-three others

on the grounds of violating the law on demonstrations and marches (*gösteri ve yürüyüş kanunu*) as well as provisions of the anti-terrorism law.

The criminal investigation that has since been undertaken against Darıcı and the indictment that he now faces suggest that he has been singled out for punitive action based on grounds beyond those that brought him into contact with authorities at the demonstration he was observing. Darıcı was originally taken into custody for being in the vicinity of the demonstration and, as established by eyewitnesses, trying to help the peaceful protesters affected by pepper gas inhalation. Yet after being taken into custody authorities began to investigate Darıcı's academic work, including scholarly articles he has written, op-ed columns informed by his research and citations of his work by other academics as well as his twitter activity. In other words, a broader investigation of Darıcı was launched, related not to his presence at the demonstration but to his academic work and publications. This broader investigation suggests that the authorities are seeking to find grounds to criminally charge Darıcı since his presence in the vicinity of the demonstration was not, in itself, a legitimate basis to indict him. Further, the use of his scholarly writing, opinion pieces, tweets (and retweets in which others cite his tweets) as a basis for criminal charges is not only a grave violation of his academic freedom and freedom of speech but also a shocking conflation of scholarship with criminal activity and terrorist propaganda. Unfortunately, the treatment to which Darıcı has been subjected is consistent with a broader pattern whereby your government has sought to criminalize the study of the Kurdish community except where the work in question is aligned with your government's agenda on the Kurdish question. Indeed, the violations of academic freedom and freedom of speech in Darıcı's case are reminiscent of the matter we addressed in our January 14, 2016 letter to your office concerning the Peace Petition signatories.

Criminal investigations of academics for the conduct of their legitimate research activities constitute a clear violation of academic freedom. Applying anti-terrorism laws or laws limiting demonstrations against scholars who are simply observing civil society activities during the conduct of their research is an unacceptable infringement on academic fieldwork, particularly in anthropology. We urge you to take all necessary measures to revoke any judicial decisions restricting Haydar Darıcı's academic freedom and to ensure that charges related to his lawful research activities are dropped.

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. Turkey is also a signatory of 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 of 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 request that your government take immediate steps to drop charges against Darıcı and lift the travel ban inimical to his academic freedom and right to education. We urge you to intervene personally in this and other recent cases that represent egregious violations of academic freedom in Turkey. As an academic yourself, you are well equipped to judge the gravity of these violations and of efforts to characterize academic research and writing on the Kurdish community as itself a form of criminal conduct or terrorist propaganda. We continue to urge you to take note of mounting international condemnation of the erosion of democratic rights and freedoms in Turkey, particularly as a consequence of the sweeping powers the government is employing under the rubric of antiterrorism in the southeastern provinces.

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

Sincerely,



Beth Baron  
MESA President  
Professor, City University of New York



Amy W. Newhall  
MESA Executive Director  
Associate Professor, University of Arizona

cc:

- Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Cumhurbaşkanı (President of the Turkish Republic)
- İsmail Kahraman, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Başkanı (President of the Turkish National Assembly)
- Bekir Bozdağ, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Adalet Bakanı (Justice Minister of the Republic of Turkey)

- Yekta Saraç, Türkiye Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu (YÖK) Başkanı (President of the Turkish Higher Education Council)
- Elena Valenciano, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights
- Barbara Lochbihler, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights
- Monika Kacinskiene, Member of the Cabinet of Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy
- Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
- Nils Muižnieks, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
- Kati Piri, Member, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament.
- Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
- David Kaye, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression
- Kishore Singh, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education
- Serdar Kılıç, Turkish Ambassador to the United States
- John R. Bass, United States Ambassador to Turkey
- Mark Schissel, President, University of Michigan
- Andrew Shryock, Chair, Department of Anthropology, University of Michigan