

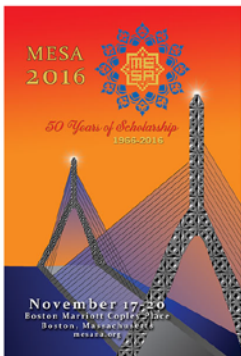
2 August 2016



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MESA Letter of Explanation regarding extraordinary measures against academics in Turkey

To whom it may concern:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) to explain the circumstances that currently affect Turkish academics who may be seeking positions outside of Turkey. MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent scholarly association in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 3000 members worldwide.

There has been a sharp deterioration in respect for academic freedom by the Turkish government that has affected public and private universities since at least January 2016, when the government began a series of reprisal actions against academics who signed a peace petition. The pattern of government-sponsored disciplinary actions, firings, interrogations, detentions and prosecutions that ensued against the signatories represented the beginning of a rapid deterioration in the conditions for research and teaching on Turkish university campuses. More recently, in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt of July 15-16, 2016, the Turkish government has undertaken actions that herald a massive and unprecedented assault on Turkish universities. One of the Middle East region's leading systems of higher education is under severe threat as a result, as are the careers and livelihoods of many of its faculty members and academic administrators.

Since the events of July 15-16, 2016, the Turkish government has moved to purge government officials in the Ministry of Education and has called for the resignation of all university deans across the country's public and private universities. As of this writing, more than 15,000 employees at the education ministry have been fired and nearly 1600 deans—1176 from public universities and 401 from private universities—have been asked to resign. In addition, 21,000 private school teachers have had their teaching licenses cancelled. Fifteen universities and over 1500 other educational institutions including private schools and dormitories have been closed by Turkish authorities and have had their assets seized. Further, local news reports indicate that dozens of academics have been detained in connection to the failed coup attempt. Amnesty International has stated that the over 13,000 people detained in connection with the coup investigation have endured coercive interrogations including beatings, forced stress positions, deprivation of food and medicine and even rape.

Beyond these measures targeting individuals in the education sector, a blanket travel ban has been imposed on academics across the country (in what



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may be a temporary measure), and Turkish academics abroad have been required to return to Turkey. Faculty across all disciplines may be affected by these measures. The scale of the travel restrictions, suspensions, imposed resignations, closures and asset seizures, detentions and interrogations impacting the education sector go much farther than the targeting of individuals who might have had any connection to the attempted coup.

In short, the crackdown on the education sector creates the appearance of a purge of all those deemed critical of the current government regardless of any purported association with the coup. Moreover, the removal of all of the deans across the country represents a direct assault on the institutional autonomy of Turkey's universities. The replacement of every university's administration simultaneously by the Higher Education Council, a body controlled by the Turkish executive branch, would give the government direct administrative control of all Turkish universities. Such concentration and centralization of power over all universities is clearly inimical to academic freedom.

In light of the unprecedented government attack against academic freedom—including freedom of expression, opinion, association and travel—and against the autonomy of universities in Turkey, Turkish scholars, researchers and academics may be left with no choice but to try to leave the country to continue their scholarly activities. The targeting of our Turkish colleagues in the academy amounts to collective punishment apparently designed to prevent the higher education sector from fostering independent or critical thinking and from remaining autonomous of government control. As a result, we encourage all universities outside of Turkey to welcome applications by Turkish scholars for a variety of temporary and permanent positions with an appreciation for the difficult circumstances that have forced them to seek employment opportunities abroad.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Baron" with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Beth Baron
MESA President
Professor, City University of New York

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy W. Newhall" in a cursive, flowing script.

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