

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

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May 27, 2008

Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
Office of the Prime Minister
Başbakanlık
06573 Ankara
Turkey

Via facsimile +90 312 417 0476

Dear Prime Minister Erdoğan:

I write to you on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) in order to express our alarm and grave concern over the forced resignation of Professor Donald Quataert from Chairmanship of the board of governors of the Institute of Turkish Studies (ITS), a not-for-profit educational foundation which oversees the distribution of the proceeds from a \$3 million endowment by the Turkish government to support Turkish studies in the United States. Dr. Quataert, an eminent scholar in the field of Ottoman and Turkish studies, is professor of history at Binghamton University, State University of New York and served as Chairman of the ITS board of governors from 2001 until December 13, 2006.

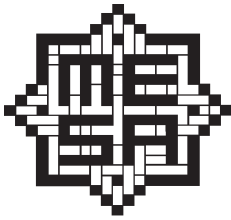
MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has more than 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

The matter of the Turkish government's interference in the academic freedom of one of our most respected academic colleagues was publicly raised at the annual business meeting of the Turkish Studies Association (TSA) held in Montréal in November 2007 in conjunction with MESA's annual conference.

TSA was founded in 1971 to promote high standards of scholarship and instruction in Turkish and Ottoman studies. The Association publishes the scholarly *Turkish Studies Association Journal*, and has more than 500 members internationally. In addition to the *Turkish Studies Association Journal*, the Association's activities include sponsorship of Turkish language prizes, awards for scholarly books and articles, graduate papers, and research scholarships. TSA members at the November business meeting were scandalized by the news of Professor Quataert's mistreatment at the hands of the Institute of Turkish Studies and asked the TSA board to initiate action. The TSA Board referred the case to CAF and expressed backing for its response.

Dr. Quataert's relinquishment of his position came after he refused to accede to the request of ITS's honorary chairman, Ambassador Nebi Şensoy, that he issue a retraction of a scholarly book review he wrote about the killings of Armenians (1915-1918) in the Ottoman Empire. In that article, Professor Quataert urged academicians in Ottoman and Turkish studies to eschew polemical biases and undertake research based on the use of Ottoman-language source materials and produce scholarship according to the highest professional standards. It is indisputable that most of the scholarship to date fails to adhere to these standards and as such serves neither the field of Ottoman-Turkish studies nor the interests of the Republic of Turkey and its citizens.

We are enormously concerned that unnamed high officials in Ankara felt it was inappropriate for Professor Quataert to continue as chairman of the board of governors and threatened to revoke the



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funding for the ITS if he did not publicly retract statements made in his review or separate himself from the Chairmanship of the ITS. The ITS mission statement declares that it is “an independent, tax exempt organization and does not seek to influence legislation nor advocate particular policies or agendas.” The reputation and integrity of the ITS as a non-political institution funding scholarly projects that meet stringent academic criteria is blackened when there is government interference in and blatant disregard for the principle of academic freedom. A clear message is sent to those who would apply for ITS funds or participate in ITS activities that the board does not stand behind the principle of academic freedom, and that politics can vitiate professional standards. It would be a travesty for an association that seeks to provide a more positive image of Turkey and promote the development of Turkish studies in the United States to be viewed in such a counterproductive and negative light. Furthermore the attitude towards Dr. Quataert, sharply contrasts with your government’s recent call to leave the debate regarding the events of 1915 to the independent study and judgment of scholars.

We ask that your government take all necessary steps to press for Professor Quataert’s reinstatement as chairman of the board of governors of ITS, and that the funds for the ITS endowment be placed in an irrevocable trust immune from political interference and infringement of academic freedom.

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

Sincerely,

Mervat Hatem
MESA President

cc:

Amb. Nabi Şensoy, ITS Honorary Chairman and Ex-Officio Member of the Board of Governors, Ambassador of the Republic of Turkey to the US
Amb. W. Robert Pearson, ret., Chairman
David C. Cuthell, ITS Executive Director
Walter Denny, ITS Secretary-Treasurer, Professor of Art History, University of Massachusetts
Halil Inalcik, Professor of History, Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey and Professor Emeritus of History, The University of Chicago
Heath W. Lowry, Atatürk Professor of Ottoman and Modern Turkish Studies, Princeton University
Justin McCarthy, Professor of History, University of Louisville
Mike M. Mustafaoğlu, Trans Global Financial Corporation
Dr. Kenan Şahin, TIAX LL Corporation
Jenny B. White, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Boston University
Birol Yeşilada, Professor of Political Science, Portland State University
Sarah G. Moment Atis, Professor of Turkish Language and Literature, Chair, Middle East Studies Program, University of Wisconsin at Madison
Carter V. Findley, Professor of History, Ohio State University
Fatma Müge Göçek, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Michigan
Avigdor Levy, Professor of History, Brandeis University
Gülru Necipoğlu-Kafadar, Aga Khan Professor of Islamic Art, Harvard University
Sylvia Önder, Visiting Assistant Professor of Turkish, Georgetown University
Esra Özyurek, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of California, San Diego
Leslie Peirce, Professor of History, New York University
Kemal Silay, Professor of Central Eurasian Studies; Ottoman and Modern Turkish Studies Chair Professor; Director, Turkish Studies Program, Indiana University
President John J. DeGioia, Georgetown University
Andras J. Riedlmayer, TSA President; Bibliographer in Islamic Art and Architecture, Aga Khan Program in Islamic Architecture at Harvard University
Donald Quataert, Professor, Binghamton University, SUNY