

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2005		39	Armenia	Yektan Turkyilmaz, cultural anthropologist

Announcement

The Writers in Prison Committee of International PEN reports that Yektan Turkyilmaz, a Turkish cultural anthropologist and fellow at the John Hope Franklin Institute, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, United States, was arrested at Yerevan airport and imprisoned for attempting to “smuggle antique books” as he was leaving Armenia on 17 June 2005. Turkyilmaz had purchased around 100 books ranging from the 17th to 20th centuries but he was apparently unaware that he was required to declare any books over 50 years old at customs. When convicted at a trial which is to take place on 9 August 2005, he faces up to 8 years’ imprisonment. Turkyilmaz is the first Turkish citizen to be granted access to the Armenian National Archives. His dissertation was entitled “Imagining ‘Turkey,’ Creating a Nation: the Politics of Geography and State Formation in Eastern Anatolia, 1908-1938.” See the full text below. We hope that you can send the recommended urgent appeals immediately. Please remember to write in your professional capacity. Thank you.

PS: For another recent item on Armenia, see NCH #38 (Annual Report 2005).

INTERNATIONAL PEN WRITERS IN PRISON COMMITTEE RAPID ACTION NETWORK

5 August 2005

ARMENIA: YEKTAN TURKYILMAZ TRIAL DATE SET FOR 9 AUGUST

[Update #1 to RAN 31/05 (4 August 2005): “Armenia: Turkish academic imprisoned for attempting to ‘smuggle’ books.”]

Members of the world association of writers, International PEN, have been alerted to the plight of Yektan Turkyilmaz, a Turkish Ph.D. student of cultural anthropology has been in prison in Armenia since mid-June. He was arrested for not declaring that he was in possession of antique books as he was leaving the country. PEN learned today that the trial is to take place on 9 August 2005.

International PEN is concerned that Turkyilmaz has been imprisoned pending trial for over six weeks and that he is threatened with a sentence of up to eight years in prison. It is concerned that he is being treated particularly harshly because of the nature of his studies. PEN is urging that he be freed pending trial, that his claims that he was unaware of the export regulations on the books be taken into consideration and to provide assurances that the action has not been taken as a means to prevent him from continuing out his research.

Yektan Turkyilmaz, aged 33, was arrested at Yerevan Airport on 17 June as he attempted to leave Armenia. Turkyilmaz was on his fourth research trip to the country, and planned to travel on to Paris and Istanbul before returning to Duke University in the USA where he has a John Hope Franklin Institute fellowship.

During his visit, Turkyilmaz had purchased around 100 books ranging from the 17th to 20th Centuries which he mostly bought from Armenian second-hand book shops. Turkyilmaz has been collecting such books for his own research as well as to build up a library of Armenian books that would otherwise be lost. However, Turkyilmaz was apparently unaware that he was required to declare any books over 50 years old at customs. A large number of CDs containing research material was also seized and had not been returned. On 21 July, the prosecuting authorities announced that Turkyilmaz is to be tried under Article 215 of the Armenian Criminal Code relating to the export of “contraband” goods which includes drugs, arms, materials for the manufacture of weapons of mass destruction and “cultural values for the transportation of which special rules are established”. Turkyilmaz faces a prison term of up to 8 years in prison.

There is deep concern that Turkyilmaz has limited access to his lawyer and friends, and that he is denied access to the telephone, or to write and receive letters.

BACKGROUND:

Turkyilmaz is the first Turkish citizen to be granted access to the Armenian National Archives. He has gained degrees from Bogazici University in Istanbul, and Duke University in the USA. He has also received a scholarship from the Social Science Research Council in the USA, as well as from the Council of Library and Information Resources, and the American Research Institute in Turkey. His dissertation “Imagining ‘Turkey’, Creating a Nation: the Politics of Geography and State Formation in Eastern Anatolia, 1908-1938” has won him several awards. Academics world-wide have joined together to protest his arrest, pointing out that he is unique in being a fluent speaker of Turkish, Armenian, English and Kurdish, and a reading knowledge of Ottoman Turkish and French. The Social

Science Research Council states that “Not only has Turkyilmaz dedicated his academic research towards understanding and preserving the multi-cultural heritage of Eastern Anatolia, but he has also dedicated his personal efforts towards this cause. ... He maintains one of best collections of Armenian books in Turkey... Several researchers have already benefited from this collection for their own research and Turkyilmaz has literally ‘saved’ many books from being discarded and forgotten”. The SSRC website reproduces many testimonies from professors testifying to Turkyilmaz’s integrity and academic achievements.

For full details go to:

<http://www.ssrc.org/Threats-to-Intellectual-Freedom/Turkyilmaz.page>

To see a letter of protest to Armenian President Robert Kocharian signed by over 240 writers and academics world wide, click:

http://www.ssrc.org/programs/publications_editors/publications/Turkyilmaz.pdf

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

Please send appeals:

Expressing deep concern about the arrest of Yektan Turkyilmaz for inadvertently attempting to take books out of Armenia without permission;

Pointing out that his continued detention and that he could be tried under charges that carry a maximum of eight years in prison is unreasonably harsh;

Referring to suggestions that these measures have been taken as a means of deterring Turkyilmaz from further research into the issue of Armenian-Turkish relations;

Requesting that the court takes these concerns into consideration;

Calling for Yektan Turkyilmaz to be freed pending trial and that all restrictions on visits and communications be lifted.

APPEALS TO:

His Excellency Robert Kocharian

President

Office of the President

Marshal Bagharmaina St 26

375077 Yerevan

Armenia

Fax: + 37410 521 581

Appeals should also be copied to the Armenian embassies in your own countries For addresses click:

<http://www.armeniaforeignministry.com/htms/embassiesList.html>

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