

Network of Concerned Historians				NCH
Campaigns				
Year original	Year follow-up	Circular	Country	Names
2005		39	Armenia	Yektan Turkyilmaz, cultural anthropologist
	2005			<i>follow-up 1</i>

Announcement

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) reports that cultural anthropologist (and historian) Yektan Turkyilmaz was released from prison on 16 August 2005. Please see NCH case summary and AAAS message below. No further action is required at this time.

NCH SUMMARY

On 17 June 2005, Yektan Turkyilmaz (?1972-), a Turkish citizen of Kurdish origin, a Ph.D. student of cultural anthropology and a fellow at the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, United States, was arrested at Yerevan airport and imprisoned for attempting to “smuggle” culturally valuable antique books as he was leaving Armenia. On his fourth research trip to Armenia, Turkyilmaz had conducted research on the history of Turkish Eastern Anatolia during the interwar period. He had acquired around 88 books ranging from the 17th to 20th centuries from Armenian second-hand bookstores, an open-air market, and as gifts, in order to build up a research collection and a library of Armenian books that would otherwise be lost. However, he was apparently unaware that he was required to declare seven of the 88 books, which were over fifty years old, at customs. Turkyilmaz was questioned on his archival work and political beliefs, and digital copies of his archival research were confiscated. His official request to be released on bail until his trial date (9 August 2005) was rejected. He faced up to eight years’ imprisonment. On 16 August 2005, Turkyilmaz, was released and given a suspended sentence of two years’ imprisonment. Reportedly, he had to remain in Armenia until 31 August 2005, when the verdict officially comes into force. The judge upheld the confiscation of all 88 books, though ordered the return of his electronic research materials. The court had convicted Turkyilmaz of two counts of smuggling, but commuted the sentence, as he was cooperative with investigators and partially admitted his guilt. Turkyilmaz was the first Turkish scholar to ask for and to receive access to the Armenian National Archives, where he did research in May and June 2005. He was one of the few Turkish scholars who has critically examined the events of 1915 and Armenian claims of genocide, and other instances of political violence in Anatolia and the South Caucasus. He received several foreign scholarships. His dissertation “Imagining ‘Turkey’, Creating a Nation: the Politics of Geography and State Formation in Eastern Anatolia, 1908–1938” won him

several awards. Turkeyilmaz also studied in the Masters Program at the Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Bogaziçi University, Istanbul.

[Sources: American Association for the Advancement of Science, Human Rights Action Network Case, ar0510_tur (5 & 18 August 2005); International PEN Writers in Prison Committee, Rapid Action Network 31/05 (London), 4 & 5 August 2005; Social Science Research Council, “Yektan Turkeyilmaz” (WWW-text; [2005]).]

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE HUMAN RIGHTS ACTION NETWORK (AAAShran)

TURKISH SCHOLAR DETAINED IN ARMENIA RELEASED

18 August 2005

Case number: ar0510_tur

Issues: Academic and scientific freedom; freedom from arbitrary arrest and detention

[Previous AAAS Alerts: 5 August 2005]

FACTS OF THE CASE

On August 16, 2005, Yektan Turkeyilmaz, a Turkish citizen and Ph.D. candidate in anthropology at Duke University, was released from prison and given a suspended sentence of two years in prison. According to reports, he must remain in Armenia until August 31st, when the verdict officially comes into force. After that time, he will be free to return to the U.S. to continue his graduate studies. The judge also upheld the confiscation of all 88 books, though ordered the return of Turkeyilmaz’s electronic research materials.

Turkyilmaz was arrested on July 17th, 2005 and was indicted on July 21st for attempting to remove culturally valuable books from Armenia. He had bought most of these books from second-hand bookstores and received some as gifts. He was apparently unaware that permission is required to take books that are over 50 years old out of the country. The Yerevan court convicted Turkeyilmaz of two counts of smuggling, but commuted the sentence, as he was cooperative with investigators and partially admitted his guilt.

Turkyilmaz was the first Turkish scholar to request and receive access to the Armenian National

Archives. His studies reflect on the historical formulation of identity and nationality in Eastern Anatolia. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reports that over 200 U.S., Turkish, and Armenian scholars sent open letters to Armenian president Robert Kocharian calling for the release of Turkeyilmaz, who is a Turkish citizen of Kurdish origin.

(Sources of information for this case include: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty - Armenian service, and Personal correspondence with coworkers and supporters.)

RECOMMENDED ACTION

No action required at this time. Many thanks to all those who sent letters of appeal on this case.

AAAS Human Rights Action Network

<http://shr.aaas.org/aaashran>