



Sent via email

Dear members of the Inter-university Board of Turkey:

The American Sociological Association denounces the recent actions of the Inter-university Board of Turkey (ÜAK) denying Mehmet Deniz' May 2020 application to recognize his PhD awarded by the State University of New York - Binghamton's (SUNY-Binghamton) Department of Sociology. We are alarmed that the Inter-university Board would so brazenly challenge the equivalency of degrees issued by the State University of New York.

In denying Dr. Deniz' PhD as equivalent to a PhD awarded in Turkey on June 16, 2021, the Inter-university Board affirmed its willingness to play an active role in undermining academic freedom in Turkey. The board, composed of all university rectors in Turkey, has the power to decide whether Turkish institutions of higher education will recognize the credentials Turkish citizens obtain outside Turkey. Without your approval, those Turkish citizens who obtained degrees outside of Turkey will not be able to reap the professional and economic rewards of their studies upon their return.

The Inter-university Board's decision signals a new means for clamping down on academic freedom in Turkey. In making its determination, the Inter-university Board relies on a 2020 amendment to its bylaws, which introduced "the subject and content of the thesis" as a basis for rejecting equivalence. In rejecting a thesis for its "content," the board blatantly violates the principle of autonomy and freedom of expression at the heart of academic freedom.

The Inter-university Board decision regarding Dr. Deniz breaks with its own established record of recognizing doctorates not just from SUNY-Binghamton, but SUNY more generally. SUNY-Binghamton has been granted a status of equivalence to Turkish universities, theoretically requiring recognition of all its degrees. In keeping with this status of mutual institutional respect, the Inter-university Board has recognized hundreds of doctorates conferred by SUNY, including several dozen doctorates conferred by SUNY-Binghamton's Sociology department, alone.

In rejecting Dr. Deniz' doctoral thesis, the Inter-University Board casts a pall of uncertainty over all Turkish students studying abroad. This uncertainty will compel Turkish students studying abroad to self-censure for fear that they might provoke the Inter-university Board to reject their degrees. Unless overturned by the Council of State, where Dr. Deniz entered his appeal on August 20, 2021, this decision by the Inter-university Board will radically subvert academic freedom in Turkey. We urge you to overturn this decision.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cecilia Menjivar', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Cecilia Menjivar
President, American Sociological Association