



ARCHITECTS' COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DES ARCHITECTES D'EUROPE

Chamber of Architects of Turkey CAT
Eyup Muhcu
Konur Sokak 4
Yenisehir
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Turkey

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Dear President, dear Eyup Muhcu,

Thank you for your letter of 11 June regarding the unfortunate events occurring in Taksim Square in Istanbul and Turkey at the moment, and for asking us to support you by writing to various Human Rights' organisations.

As a private citizen, I deplore much of what is happening, which reveals a worrying tendency towards curtailment of basic freedoms and like many others have already reacted through the on-line petition by the Amnesty International in Ireland, which to my belief had some impact, judging not the least by the European Parliament Resolution against the excessive use of force.

Obviously, as your letter and the public reactions state, what is proposed as the "socio-cultural" reconstruction project of the public space is not simply an urban rejuvenation project to be carried out between the government as the developer and the construction teams, but in order to be successful it needs to be 'owned' by that same public, who have a vital and shared interest in it. How was that to be achieved? In my opinion, the only way would have been a consensus that would have involved the genuine intention to provide a public facility, the expertise to plan and design for it, the feasibility to financially carry it out, and critically, the public consultation about the merits and benefits for the public. Judging by the strong public resentment as reported by the media, none of that was the case or perhaps, more importantly, the process of reaching the decision to proceed with the development was not transparent and is now being enforced at all cost, raising all other issues of democratic rights and nature of the civil society in Turkey. The escalation of force is deeply regrettable and needs to be stopped.

The current débâcle also underlines the points we from the ACE addressed to Government officials in Turkey last year regarding the important role professional expertise and chambers such as yours play in society, as co-guarantors of the public interest. From the professional point of view, the contested development plans for Taksim Square highlight the necessity of the of adequate process of urban planning appropriate to the local needs, adequate environmental considerations and participatory consultations with the stakeholders and community, who all share the interest in the general quality of life in the built environment. While the practices differ, indeed, in most European countries it is becoming increasingly commonplace to make provision for procedures that allow for public participation in consultations regarding urban regeneration projects (cf. the 2005 Bristol Accord on Sustainable Communities, which encourages just such participatory approaches). The specific point in your letter which makes a reference to the proposed development in Taksim Square and its 'revivalist' outlook wishing to recreate a visual replica of the past, is a regrettable direction that has unfortunately

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also sometimes repeated in number of countries in Europe that have emerged through the rapid and turbulent socio-political changes, and have sought some form of a solid visual reassurance that could easier be recycled from the past, rather than forged in the present. These are complex processes which require persistent and complex mediation on the ground in each specific situation.

What could the ACE do in support of your requests? Mindful of the ACE's mission as a federation of architectural associations and chambers, as you are aware, we would normally confine our commentary to architectural and environment matters, where our expertise can be most effective.

Having consulted the members of the Executive Board, and if you are in agreement, we would see as appropriate to address your concerns to the organisations such as ICOMOS and UNESCO, who have an official role as custodians of the cultural heritage. We would be happy to convey how our profession is deploring the current and on-going action of the Turkish Government in the face of a manifest out-pouring of public concern regarding plans which will sacrifice an important area of urban greenbelt in Istanbul, the cultural impact of the proposed action and the human distress caused to victims of the proposed urban transformation.

Dear Eyup, dear President, I sincerely empathise with you and our colleagues and indeed the citizens of Turkey, who have to live through the difficult period in your society at the moment. I hope that the recent signals by your Government mentioning the possibility of a referendum about the development are at least the steps in the right direction, which will hopefully open up a mature dialogue with the citizens.

Please, keep us informed and let me know if you see productive that a letter from ACE should be sent to the above mentioned instances, or indeed to the appropriate Turkish Government department.

With cordial regards,



Selma Harrington
ACE President