10th Pan-European Conference on International Relations to Stay in Izmir

4 March 2016

Dear EISA Members and Conference Participants

Most of you will have closely followed the recent developments in Turkey and the decision of IPSA to relocate their conference, originally planned for Istanbul. Following the persecution of colleagues in response to them signing a petition against the Turkish government's policies in the South-eastern part of the country, we had asked you to give us some time to monitor the situation and discuss whether we are going to stick to Izmir as the venue for PEC-16 or move the conference to an alternative location.

During the past weeks, we have taken a number of steps to engage in such a discussion. We have opened an EISA Debate and Discussion Forum on Facebook; we have talked to many Turkish colleagues, including a number of those who had signed the initial petition; we have prepared plans to move the conference elsewhere; and together with the Programme Chairs, I have been on a site visit to Izmir and met with the Rector, the Dean and our local conference organisers among others.

The overwhelming majority of those that we have talked to, including our Turkish colleagues, and including those who had signed the petition, was against relocating the conference. Our decision to follow this view is based on two main arguments. The first one is that boycotting Izmir would only play into the hands of those who pursue a violent path to solve Turkey's domestic problems, and hurt our local colleagues and Izmir as one of the most liberal cities in Turkey. Secondly, even if critical Turkish colleagues feel inhibited in putting forward their arguments, moving the conference will do little to mitigate this concern and instead prevent a considerable number of those colleagues to come to the conference in the first instance because of visa and financial difficulties. Thus, moving the conference seems to be counter-productive if we are concerned about academic freedom. Furthermore, we have been given assurances by the Rector and the Dean that the University will not interfere in the conference programme. It is also worth pointing out that Yaşar University is hosting the main conference of Turkish IR scholars this year, and that staff in the IR department has published widely in national and international journals, taking a variety of viewpoints.

Some of you may also be worried about the security situation in Turkey. We are fully aware of the terrorist attacks that have taken place in the past months, and that there may well be further attacks until September. Yet as International Relations scholars, we also know that we should not exaggerate this threat and give in to the logic of terrorist violence. Turkey still is a relatively safe place, and most countries have not issued official travel warnings not to go to Turkey. While we cannot completely rule out any violence in Izmir during the conference, we cannot do so anywhere in the world at the present moment. In addition, access to the campus where the conference will be held is strictly controlled. As one colleague has put it, if we as IR scholars shy away from going to places where there is conflict, who else should go there then?

Finally, let me stress that Izmir and Yaşar University offer a congenial setting for holding PEC-16. Izmir in September is a beautiful place that has many attractions to offer. The University is an easy 15-minute metro ride from the hotels in the city centre and offers state-of-the-art facilities. I am convinced that all conference participants will enjoy this setting.

Let us therefore meet in Izmir and engage in fruitful and open debates about the many challenges that the world faces today, including those in Turkey. Let us make this conference an example of dialogue and peaceful engagement. And let us show solidarity with our Turkish colleagues not by moving elsewhere but by being with them.

In this spirit, I am looking forward to seeing you in Izmir!

With best wishes

For the EISA Board

Thomas Diez, EISA President 2015-7