

*Nothing in nature is random . . . A thing appears random only
through the incompleteness of our knowledge.*
Spinoza, Ethics I

Dear
Eberhard Van Der Laan,

We are writing this letter to inform you about a case which has been going on in Turkey for about a year now and we think it would be interesting for you.

It gave way to a serious debate in Turkey that a person who insulted a scientist for his scientific studies could have a seat in the Honorary Board of the Days of Philosophy. We think this selection was not appropriate and find it important to inform you about the issue.

The person concerned is İbrahim Karaosmanoğlu, Mayor of Kocaeli Greater Municipality, with whom you shared the Honorary Board on the occasion of the activity “**Kocaeli University 10th Days of Philosophy: Spinoza.**” Information is about a court case opened for Karaosmanoğlu’s labelling of a scientist “CHARLATAN” for his scientific studies.

It is a case now popular in Turkey, referred to as “CHARLATAN CASE.”

The person who is labelled as “charlatan” by the Mayor is **Prof. Onur Hamzaoğlu**, Head of the Public Health Department of Medical School, Kocaeli University.

Now how could a Mayor, “honoured” as the member of the Honorary Board of a scientific activity accuse a scientist as “charlatan” and what entitles him to do so? To respond to this question, we need to take a look at the field of study of Prof. Hamzaoğlu and who is disturbed by the findings of his study.

Kocaeli is the second industry-intensive zone in Turkey, naturally with serious environmental and health problems associated with this fact. The locality Dilovası is the area in Kocaeli province with rather high concentration of industrial enterprises. As a physician aware of his social responsibility, Prof. Hamzaoğlu investigated the causes of mortality in this area. According to the findings of this study, 33 out of 100 deaths in the area are related to cancer. Prof. Hamzaoğlu also found that the risk of dying from cancer for those living in Dilovası area for longer than 10 years is 4.4 times greater than others residing there for shorter periods and this case is independent from such factors as age and smoking.
(<http://journals.tubitak.gov.tr/medical/issues/sag-11-41-3/sag-41-3-1-1007-943.pdf>; short url: <http://goo.gl/Cm8ah>).

In his report based on these findings Prof. Hamzaoğlu also included suggestions for solution. One of the most important of these suggestions is to prohibit capacity increase by presently active enterprises as well as not to allow new industrial investments in the area.

This study of Hamzaoğlu aroused public interest. The TBMM (Turkish Grand National Assembly) set up an investigation committee in 2006 and listened to Prof. Hamzaoğlu. In the TBMM report issued in 2006, problems of environmental pollution in Kocaeli region and possible solutions were addressed in detail. Meanwhile, the Cancer Control Department of the Ministry of Health proposed the Public Health Department of the School of Medicine, Kocaeli University, to conduct a new study on causes of mortality in Dilovası area. The

findings of this study which was conducted with Prof. Hamzaoğlu and his colleagues also show that 30.4 of 100 deaths occurring in Dilovası in the period 2000-2006 were caused by cancer. These findings were officially shared with the University, Provincial bodies and the Ministry of Health.

In spite of all these findings, no measures were taken for improvement and enterprises in the region continued to increase their capacity. Upon this, Prof. Hamzaoğlu made a plan for a new study in 2009. In this new initiative launched in 2009, Prof. Hamzaoğlu was the project manager and project staff included faculty members from the departments of Child Health and Diseases and Medical Genetics of the School of Medicine, KOÜ (Kocaeli University). The Presidency of the KOÜ decided to support the project by fully covering its budget. This new project sought to compare Dilovası area where there is serious environmental pollution to Kandıra district of the same province where there is almost no industrial establishment in terms of air pollution and existence of heavy metal in aerial particles. The study also envisaged monitoring healthy and volunteering pregnant women living in both areas throughout their pregnancy and investigating the existence and level of heavy metals in samples of colostrums and meconium to be taken after birth. In the final part of the project, newborns would be monitored until they are 18 months old and the project would be completed 36 months after, in 2012.

The study conducted in Dilovası and Kandıra districts found heavy metals in colostrums of lactating women over limit values set by the World Health Organization. The pollution had its impact on foetus as well. As a matter of fact, lab analyses showed the existence of such heavy metals as lead, mercury, cadmium, arsenic and aluminium in meconium of newborns. All laboratory analyses were made in the labs of TÜBİTAK.

In October 2010 new spread around that the fourth iron-steel plant of the province would be established in an area very close to the provincial capital. Possible effects of this new plant on the nature and inhabitants of the area gave rise to serious concerns. In January 2011 a journalist interested in the issue interviewed Prof. Hamzaoğlu on the present situation in the province and possible health effects of a new plant, knowing Hamzaoğlu's earlier studies on the impact of industrial activities on human health. In this interview, Prof. Hamzaoğlu stated that according to measures and tests conducted that far, heavy metals were found in air and also in colostrums of lactating women and meconium of their infants. Immediately after the media coverage of this interview, both provincial authorities and officials from the Ministry quickly launched a campaign of denial. In this campaign, it was first declared that "there was no such pollution", followed by accusations of "misinforming the public with the 'findings' of yet uncompleted survey." Mr Karaosmanoğlu, Mayor of Kocaeli Greater Municipality accused Prof. Hamzaoğlu for playing a "CHARLATAN" in printed and visual media. Upon this, Prof. Hamzaoğlu applied to Public Prosecutor in Kocaeli on the ground of defamation in February 2011. He also brought a law suit for redress. The Public Prosecutor found the application grounded and referred the case to the basic criminal court, which started public prosecution against the Mayor. The case is presently ongoing. The fourth session of the trial will be held in Kocaeli on 26 January 2012. **With this letter, we invite you to be present at this session, see the process for yourself and breathe the air of Kocaeli before the Symposium.**

Upon these developments, the Mayor pledged a complaint to the Public Prosecutor against Prof. Hamzaoğlu, asking for his imprisonment for "instigating fear and panic in public." Examining the complaint, the public prosecutor declared non-jurisdiction and sent the file to

Kocaeli University. The Presidency of the University initiated disciplinary investigation concerning the case of Prof. Hamzaoğlu, which is yet to be concluded. The Presidency asked the opinion of the Board of Ethics of the University on the ground of “making open statements about un-completed surveys and on non-scientific grounds”. The Board of Ethics, whose membership includes Prof. Sinan ÖZBEK, one of the organizers and science board members of the activity “**Kocaeli University 10th Days of Philosophy: Spinoza.**” The board resolved that Prof. Hamzaoğlu, as a man of science, failed to act in “due diligence.” Prof. Hamzaoğlu then applied to the Turkish Medical Association to have the outcomes of his study examined by an independent board of ethics. This board of ethics set up independently found no ethical negligence on the part of Prof. Hamzaoğlu and concluded that he, on the contrary, served for a significant and correct purpose.

(http://www.onurumuzusavunuyoruz.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=157&Itemid=196&lang=en; short: <http://goo.gl/S1fv2>).

In the face of all these events, we, academics from different universities in Turkey who are convinced that Prof. Hamzaoğlu did exactly what needed to be done as required by social responsibility, have sided with Prof. Hamzaoğlu. Through a site in the Internet that we set up in such a short period as one week we collected more than 10,000 pledges supporting Prof. Hamzaoğlu and showing that he is not alone. On the one side, there are those upholding their economic and political interests over and above public health concerns and on the other we have honest professionals and academics siding with Prof. Hamzaoğlu in efforts to protect and promote public health. In each session of the court trial going on with parties as Kocaeli Mayor Karaosmanoğlu and Prof. Hamzaoğlu, hundreds of people crowded in front of the courtyard to support Prof. Hamzaoğlu and they are determined to continue this support.

In case the University opens the way, Prof. Hamzaoğlu will be tried for imprisonment from 2 to 4 years for informing the public. Since it is indeed difficult to believe, we want to state it once more: The intention is to send a professor in public health to prison for informing his fellow people about air pollution and its serious health consequences. Yet, in the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm in 1972, the right to environment was recognized as a human right by stating that “Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being,” The 1988 Lima Declaration on Academic Freedom defines academic freedom as the “right of academics to perform their functions without any concern about intervention or pressure from the State or any other source.” Prof. Hamzaoğlu, on the other hand, is made subject to serious harassment and his engagement in further academic research as well as informing the public about the findings of these studies is tried to be prevented.

The public opinion in Turkey accorded the reaction that this harassment deserved: This year Prof. Hamzaoğlu received various awards including Nusret Fişek Public Health Award of Turkish Medical Association, Hasan Balıkcı Honorary Award of the Chamber of Electrical Engineers, Grass Man Award of KÜLTÜRÇEV and Eco Hero Award of Green Prophet.

Now we are doing what falls upon us and fulfilling our duty to inform you. We think you would seriously consider not only the scientific quality but also the legitimacy of an activity overseen by a board one of the members of which dares to coin a distinguished scientist as “CHARLATAN” only for being keen about public health issues and acting contrary to the expectations of some circles pursuing their selfish interests. An activity which is in the field of *philosophy* cannot be allowed to be overshadowed by such an *ethical* scandal. We regard it

as a part of our endeavour to inform you, other members of the board and all participants to the activity about this case which will degrade the reputation of “Kocaeli University 10th Days of Philosophy: Spinoza” and invite you to demonstrate your sensitivity about the issue.

With our best regards,

Note: For detailed information about the issue:

<http://www.onurumuzusavunuyoruz.org/index.php?lang=en> (short url: <http://goo.gl/wfQtx>)

On behalf of more than 10,000 pledges supporting Prof. Hamzaoğlu;

Prof. Dr. Cem Terzi (Dokuz Eylul University)

Prof. Dr. İzge Günal (Dokuz Eylul University)

Prof. Dr. Feride Aksu (Ankara University)

Dr. Ali Özyurt (Istanbul Medical Chamber)

Asst. Prof. Dr. Harun Balcıoğlu (Ankara University)

Dr. Nazmi Algan (Istanbul Medical Chamber)

Asst. Prof. Dr. Cavit Işık Yavuz (Kocaeli University)

Assoc. Prof. Murat Civaner (Uludağ University)

Asst. Prof. Dr. Özgür Müftüoğlu (Marmara University)

Dr. Erkin Başer (Dokuz Eylul University)

Res. Assist. Emel Yuvayapan (Dokuz Eylul University)

Prof. Dr. Ahmet Haşim Köse (Ankara University)

Prof. Dr. Fuat Ercan (Marmara University)

Prof. Dr. Mehmet Türkay (Marmara University)

Prof. Dr. Zuhale Okuyan (Dokuz Eylul University)

Prof. Dr. Yüksel Akkaya (Gazi University)

Prof. Dr. Atilla Göktürk (Dokuz Eylul University)

Prof. Dr. Beyza Üstün (Yıldız Teknik University)

Prof. Dr. L. Işıl Ünal (Ankara University)
Prof. Dr. Fatma Gök (Boğaziçi University)
Prof. Dr. Nilgün Toker (Ege University)
Prof Dr. Tahsin Yeşildere (İstanbul University)
Prof. Dr. Ertan Yılmaz (Dokuz Eylül University)
Prof. Dr. Gülhan Hoştürk Türkay (İstanbul University)
Assoc. Prof. Sibel Özbudun (Hacettepe University)
Assoc. Prof. Hakan Mıhçı (Hacettepe Üniversitesi)
Asst. Prof. Dr. Yasemin Özgün (Anadolu University)
Asst. Prof. Dr. Esin Candan (Dokuz Eylül University)
Res. Assist. Aydın Arı (Dokuz Eylül University)
Dr. Meryem Kıroğlu Kurtulmuş (Marmara University)
Asst. Prof. Dr. Ferda Dönmez (Ankara University)
Lecturer Ersin Vedat Elgür (Dicle University)
Lecturer Aydın Gelmez (Dicle University)