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7 July 2013

To the AIB Community,

We want to share with you our best assessment of the current situation regarding the protests occurring in Turkey.

Brief background: What started as a simple, largely environmental sustainability-motivated, “occupy wall street”-like protest to save a small park (Gezi) near Istanbul’s most important public square (Taksim) turned into demonstrations across the country to protest police brutality against the demonstrators. Initially at a deeper level, but now openly discussed locally and internationally, the protests have turned into a strong reaction against Prime Minister Erdogan’s growing authoritarianism. (See latest issue of [the Economist](#).)

Where we are today: In a word, the current situation is very fluid. On the plus side, police have been pulled out of Taksim Square. As a result peace has returned to the Gezi Park now a humanistic camp with free food, yoga classes, a mobile library, and musical concerts. However, demonstrations have not stopped entirely and police interventions continue particularly in locations close to government buildings. Some members of the government have taken a more conciliatory tone including the President of the Republic; but not the Prime Minister.

Prognosis: The Istanbul protestors are determined that their idealistic and legitimate protest not be hijacked by fringe forces. This is not terrorism of any kind but the legal expression of dissent with a government that believes having 50% of the seats in the Parliament means there is no need for further public discourse or to engage the “other 50%”. There are strong incentives for Erdogan to end the protests in a peaceful manner; the Istanbul Stock Exchange has plummeted since the protests began; the value of the Turkish lira has fallen and it is the beginning of the tourist season. But we do not know how he is going to respond. Most estimates are that things will be peacefully resolved by the time of our conference.

Gezi Park and Istanbul: Istanbul is a large, vibrant city of 15 million with municipal boundaries second only to Los Angeles. In most of the city, you have little sense of anything amiss (except at 21:00 at night when people have been banging on pots and pans in support of the Gezi Protest). While the Hilton is close to Gezi Park, that area is now peaceful since the police forces have been pulled back (as of Sunday the 3rd of June). Sultan Ahmet, where most of the important historical sites are located (Blue Mosque, Hagia Sophia, Topkapi) is five kilometers and a world away from Taksim.

Other Conferences: Since Istanbul is “in” (6th most popular tourist destination in the world) there are numerous conferences scheduled here for the summer. To our knowledge none have been cancelled. In fact, the European Marketing Association is meeting this week, very close to Taksim Square. Even more massive, the EFORT (European Federation of National Associations of Orthopedics and Traumatology) meeting is ongoing (5-8 June) with 7000 participants. EURAM will be meeting right before AIB (26-29 June) with 1100 registered participants, the vast majority whom will be staying in hotels near Taksim Square.

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Government advisories: While many governments currently have a “caution” on their website that tells citizens to be aware of demonstrations and to stay away from locations where such demonstrations are gathering, no country that we are aware of (except for the Syrian government!) has issued a travel advisory against traveling to Istanbul. Please do note that many countries (including the US) have regional travel advisories, advising against non-essential travel to the area of Turkey bordering Syria.

So, as the AIB Executive Board we have decided at this point to continue on with the conference as planned. But we will be keeping an eye on the situation and putting updates on the website and listserve as necessary.

With nearly 1200 of our members coming from more than 60 different countries, the wonderful program put together by Tricia and her Track Chairs, and the backdrop of one of the most beautiful cities in the world, we all are anticipating a memorable conference.

We are looking forward to seeing you in Istanbul!

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Nakiye A. Boyacigiller'.

Nakiye A. Boyacigiller
Local Arrangements Chair

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading 'Rob Grosse'.

Rob Grosse
AIB President