



The Science Academy Report on ACADEMIC FREEDOMS – 2015-2016

INTRODUCTION

The Science Academy completed its second report¹ on Academic Freedoms in Turkey in July 2016, however, before the report could be published, the heinous coup attempt on July 15th, and the ensuing State of Emergency upended the public agenda. Considering that the objective of its reports is to monitor practices threatening academic freedoms and to help create a collective memory on this issue, The Science Academy has decided not to change the report's content and period of focus. The Academy has made separate announcements² on the establishment of the State of Emergency and the following events, which will also be discussed at length in the Report on Academic Freedoms for 2016-2017.

This second report issued by The Science Academy mainly focuses on the disciplinary investigations and penalties against faculty members, who signed the 'Academics for Peace Petition'. The Science Academy focused on the measures against these academics in its Announcements³ dated January and April 2016, as well as the comprehensive Report shared with the public in April 2016⁴. As we had tried to argue in the said documents, these measures are in breach of academic freedoms, democracy, and freedom of expression. Furthermore, they also violate the basic principles of constitutional, criminal and administrative law, which are still in force in Turkey. Rulings by the Constitutional Court and European Court of Human Rights clearly testify to the illicit character of these measures. However, unjust measures against human rights and the independent functioning of universities are unfortunately not limited to these. Below we can present only 'some examples' to these measures, since the number of interventions against academic freedoms is growing in leaps and bounds. In this respect, we would like to emphasize that, in this sense, the academic year 2015-2016 was one of the most worrying periods for a long time.

¹ For the first report, please see <http://en.bilimakademisi.org/the-science-academy-report-on-academic-freedoms-2015/>

² See <http://en.bilimakademisi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/science-academy-27-july-2016.pdf> and <http://en.bilimakademisi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Science-Academy-statement-2016-Oct-3.pdf>

³ <http://en.bilimakademisi.org/the-science-academy-second-declaration-on-freedom-of-expression/> and <http://en.bilimakademisi.org/the-science-academy-declaration-on-freedom-of-expression/>

⁴ <http://en.bilimakademisi.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Freedom-of-Expression-Science-and-Social-Development.pdf>

However, before dwelling on singular problems, we feel the need to once again underscore the general connection between freedom of expression and science. It is evident that scientists should also express their opinions on the relation between the freedom of expression and universities, on which public figures, the media and political parties make frequent comments. That is because, as will be discussed in detail further below, science cannot thrive in an atmosphere devoid of freedom of expression. In a country where science cannot thrive, there will be no progress, enlightenment or socio - economic welfare increase.

Science depends on experience, observation and logic. In fact, these main pillars also constitute the foundation of democracy and law. Social matters must be handled on the basis of experience and evidence, by means of transparent debates. Closed societies, which act along the arguments of their leaders, in the framework of religious and nationalistic principles, and without regard for evidence have always been condemned to regression and catastrophe. As such, it is urgent to abandon our university system's centralized, hierarchical and authoritarian structure, which has worsened since 1980. It is very unfair to suggest that such a university system is 'sufficient' and 'convenient' for our country.

Freedom of Expression and Science

Academic freedom is a must for the generation, dissemination and advancement of science. It should not be forgotten that science is a system and method of thought based on human imagination as well as logic and empirical evidence. Science tests and confirms whether a relationship of causality imagined to exist in nature or society really exists or not, through systematic and controlled observation, and the exact verification of this relationship by others competent to employ the same methodology (*the academic community*). Here, the first stage consists of imagination. It is not always possible for this imagined phenomenon or relationship to be observed at the moment of imagination, by the individual who suggests it. For instance, Albert Einstein, while on a tram passing by a clock tower in Switzerland, asked himself how the clock would appear if the tram were moving at the speed of light. As such, he triggered the process of reasoning which would yield the theory of general relativity. Although it is not yet possible to travel by a tram or other vehicle at the speed of light, numerous experiments were and are being conducted with particles moving at speeds close to the speed of light. The mathematical (logical) accuracy of Einstein's theory, and observations based on the experimental findings predicted by that theory have been accepted by the science of physics, since it has not been possible to falsify the theory. Applications that we use on a daily basis such as GPS systems make use of Einstein's theory of relativity. Let's take another example: An experiment in 2012 confirmed the prediction made in 1964 by Peter Higgs and his colleagues about the existence of the so-called Higgs boson according to the standard physical model. Scientific findings come about when such conceptions hard or impossible to grasp through intuition are put forth, on the basis of math and experiment, to explain natural phenomena, and then proven by means of systematic and controlled observation. Later these theories receive acceptance and are employed in research.

The critical point here is to ensure that imagination or conception is not suppressed. Even those ideas which are counterintuitive or in conflict with conventional beliefs should be free from all sanctions such as suppression, muzzling, threat and dismissal. In fact, even if diametrically opposed to widely held beliefs, such imagination and conception will make science possible and ensure its advancement. To this end, an atmosphere of unfettered liberty is necessary. Scientific thought and practice do not develop and even cease to exist in locations where it is not possible to think differently and go beyond conventional beliefs.

Not every process of imagination leads to an important scientific finding. However, it is only through methods based on logic and observation that one can see which of these conceptions will lead to a new scientific theory. Conceptions which pass these two tests and whose existence cannot be refuted lay the basis of new theories in the form of scientific findings and explanations, whereas the rest are abandoned by the scientific community. In science, it is essential to approach every suggestion with a healthy dose of suspicion, to subject it to processes of logical investigation and systematic and controlled observation, and thus to identify the reasons behind the formation and development of phenomena, events and processes. Products of imagination and conception can turn into scientific theory, or abandoned for good, only through the twin criteria of logical validity and falsification through systematic observation. When these two criteria are employed, an interesting result appears: Theories, which are widely accepted despite being false can be refuted by fresh experiments or logical processes.

The American philosopher Charles Peirce pointed to four basic methods for the fixation of belief. First comes the method of tenacity, which arises from performing an action always in the same manner. The second is the method of authority, whereby one accepts an idea as correct because it is preached by a certain source or personality. Thirdly, the *a priori* method consists of believing in the existence of something as a postulate. The last is the method of science, where one believes in a conclusion reached through reasoning followed by controlled observation. Peirce suggests that among these four, only the scientific method has the capability of correcting itself.⁵ As such, scientific information is the most reliable one, as it is based on a method which can correct its own errors and which yields the same result at every repetition. This feature has opened new horizons before science and its practices, which in turn generated numerous technological advancements making life easier for humans. This is the process which made possible today's innovative practices such as mobile computing technologies, self-driving cars with artificial intelligence, or genetic methods to cure diseases.

Undoubtedly, academic freedoms and the freedom of thinking and expression are the fundamental conditions for collecting the fruits of science and employing these in service of humanity. When the freedom of thinking and expression are limited, scientific progress is stalled and humanity is deprived of numerous opportunities. However, nowadays we can all

⁵ <http://www.peirce.org/writings/p107.html>.

observe that the freedom of expression and academic freedoms are being increasingly limited across the world. Here, it is not possible to speak of a process managed by a single center or channel. Nevertheless, these limitations largely seem to come from political authorities, mainly governments' executive institutions and agencies. Regulations by political authorities become more and more restrictive. There is nothing new about the said regulations, the likes of which have limited the freedom of expression for centuries on end; however, new technologies have carried their scope and impact to an unimaginable level. On the other hand, a new threat has risen against the freedom of expression in the last three to four decades, with a completely new nature. This change is also based on developments in communications technology.

In many corners of the world, the existence of a vast freedom of expression facilitates the expression of all kinds of ideas, and their dissemination to a huge area via networks of communication. A few thousand or millions of people who see a specific expression may be offended by it. Those offended may then ask the said expression to be erased or censored, and its speaker to be punished. In a way, we are witnessing the rise of a new "right to not being offended".⁶ In this case, two kinds of censorship mechanisms seem to kick in. Either, those feeling offended stage protests and start an assault against the speaker through thousands of millions of messages to muzzle her or him; or more worryingly, one of them attempts to assassinate the perpetrator. Free expression becomes impossible when censorship interrupts or represses the speaker (as in messages sent through thousands of trolls - *heckler's veto*) or when the assassin's censorship or veto appears.⁷ People are deterred from expressing their thoughts due to fear, threat and suppression, and in many cases, auto-censorship kicks in. Universities are among the main institutions impacted by these tendencies.

Universities are venues where students hear all kinds of ideas, no matter how offending, painful, deplorable or unacceptable these may be, and where they acquire skills for criticizing and if possible negating these ideas by developing reasonable and logical arguments. The president of the University of California Clark Kerr puts it thus: "*The University is not engaged in making ideas safe for students. It is engaged in making students safe for ideas. Thus it permits the freest expression of views before students, trusting to their good sense in passing judgment on these views.*"⁸ Naturally, universities offer students the opportunities to think logically, learn about the philosophical background of different ideas, and collect empirical information about the world. As such, universities allow students to develop the knowledge, skills and know-how to scrutinize every idea on the basis of logic, and judge these ideas by the evidence collected through observation. If individuals are educated without encountering certain ideas, they may be shocked the first time they do so. Yet if they encounter these ideas at the university and explore their correct, false or incomplete aspects, then they will know how to act when they come across these ideas in later life, and participate

⁶ Timothy Garton Ash, *Free Speech: Ten Principles for a Connected World*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2016), p. 87

⁷ Garton Ash, pp. 130-132.

⁸ <http://www.economist.com/news/letters/21701088-letters-editor>.

in discussions without reserve or hesitation. Universities demand vast freedom for ideas and opinions, not because they want to become an ivory tower of privileges, or to distance themselves from the society or people. They need a free environment in order to teach their students how to act as good citizens of a democracy. If students are raised to have a discerning mind which can process all kinds of information, and thereby make correct decisions, then they will be able to act the same way in a democratic society and the market. Limiting freedoms in universities is tantamount to failing to deliver academic education and to failing to raise the democratic citizens who can reason and think in abstract manner.

This places an important responsibility on the shoulders of political authorities, the state and government agencies: Not giving any support to, and taking measures to prevent attempts to limit or eliminate the freedom of expression. Failing to fulfill these responsibilities will mean the disappearance of the freedom of expression, while academic freedoms and the ensuing scientific work will also disappear. As such, public universities and non-profit privately endowed universities must be protected from all kinds of influences, which could damage, erode or destroy academic freedoms. The main instrument of such a protection is Academic Autonomy, which we had analyzed in detail in The Science Academy's Report on ACADEMIC FREEDOMS 2014-2015. Academic autonomy is not an end in itself, but an instrument to establish academic freedoms in the fields of research and education. As such, academic freedoms and academic autonomy -a means to guarantee the former-, should be taken into consideration jointly to assess the status of science and the performance of the scientific community in Turkey. If carried out in parallel with other universities across the world, such an assessment would offer even greater clarity, help identify shortcomings and errors, and make it possible to amend these before they turn into bigger problems –on condition that the necessary political will exists.

Important Developments for University Autonomy and Academic Freedoms in the Period of 2015-2016

1. Examples of Interventions against University Autonomy
 - a. Attacks Against and Attempts to Discredit METU
 - b. Amendment to the Regulation on Non-Profit Privately Endowed Universities
 - c. Motion for the Amendment of Rules Governing University President Elections by the Council of Higher Education
 - d. Draft Law on the Amendment of the Articles on Disciplinary Infractions in the Law on Higher Education
2. Examples of Pressures Against Faculty Members

1. Examples of Interventions against University Autonomy

a. Attacks Against and Attempts to Discredit METU

These efforts seem to have started with the attempt to build a road across the campus of Middle Eastern Technical University (METU), and to cut down trees for this purpose, in 2013. The protest rallies against this project inside the university campus drew the ire of political authorities, which branded the protesters as “terrorists”. As regards this event, academics from Turkey as well as overseas universities such as MIT, Yale, Harvard, Columbia, Cornell and LSE felt the need to launch a petition campaign in support of METU.⁹

In December 2015, during a student campaign for the opening of a small mosque in METU, it was speculated that another group of students attacked those worshipping and that the university management did not intervene. These claims sparked another debate on university autonomy. Political authorities did not allow the university to resolve this problem by itself, and instead brought it on the political agenda¹⁰, demanding Council of Higher Education to initiate an investigation. As such Council of Higher Education set up a commission of three individuals in order to monitor the measures to be taken by the university management against the alleged perpetrators of the attack against the worshippers.¹¹ There were countless accusations against the management, especially President Prof. Ahmet Acar, and the issue became a subject of debate among MPs.¹² As a result, an official indictment against President Ahmet Acar was sent to Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office, which took a decision of non-jurisdiction. Then the indictment file was sent to Council of Higher Education.¹³ As in

⁹ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/odtuyle-dayanisma-kampanyasina-akademisyenlerden-imza-vagiyor-25024759>

¹⁰ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-odtude-namaz-kilanlara-saldirinin-takipcisi-olacagiz-40032448>

¹¹ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/yok-baskani-prof-dr-yekta-saractan-odtu-talimati-40032645>

¹² <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2015/12/24/aydin-unal-bu-ahlaksizligin-hesabi-sorulur>

¹³ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/odtu-rektorunun-sorusturma-dosyasi-yokte-40039921>

similar cases, the media initiated a veritable witch-hunt, and instead of upholding university autonomy, became a part of efforts to discredit METU, one of the most prestigious universities in the country, in a way that influenced public opinion on the issue.

As part of this campaign of discredit, it was proposed that the control over web sites with “.tr” extensions should be shifted from METU to Information and Communication Technologies Authority, under the pretext to the cyber attack in December 2015. METU President Ahmet Acar issued a statement on the matter¹⁴ and provided explanations for the events; however, without allowing the establishment of a scientific inquiry commission to establish the presence of any fault, METU was accused and targeted in public debates.

b. Amendment to the Regulation on Non-Profit Privately Endowed Universities

Another development that aggravated the worries, which had appeared in the context of the accusations against the METU management, was a Regulation amendment in December. The Amendment to the Regulation on Foundation-Owned Universities¹⁵ expanded certain articles concerning the termination of their operation licenses, closure, and transfer to guarantor universities, while a number of articles left ambiguous increased the scope for arbitrary intervention. For instance, it is stipulated that these institutions can be closed or their operation license may be terminated in case “*The managers of foundation-owned higher education institutions directly perform or support actions against the country’s indivisible unity*” (e 5); however, since this expression is rather vague, it may possibly prompt the board of trustees and university managers to limit the faculty members’ freedom of expression in order to avoid sanctions from the government. Likewise, Article 10 of the Law on Foundations gives the General Directorate of Foundations the authority to audit foundations, and courts the right to appoint an external trustee to manage the university, which pose additional threats against foundation-owned universities.

Utmost attention must be paid to preserving the autonomy of universities. Instead, these open-ended powers, which may be used in an arbitrary fashion at anytime, hangs over the universities like a sword of Damocles. As such, urgent amendments should be passed to revise these powers. The control mechanism should be based on objective and measurable criteria.

¹⁴ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/odtu-rektoru-acardan-siber-saldiri-aciklamasi-40031278>

¹⁵ <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2015/11/20151119-32.htm>

c. Motion for the Amendment of Rules Governing University President Elections by the Council of Higher Education

Another very grave attempt to interfere with universities' autonomy was prevented on August 18, 2016 with the votes of the opposition parties at the Turkish Grand National Assembly. During debates on an 'omnibus law', a motion was submitted to change the wording of Law no 2547 on Higher Education, Article 13-a, governing the appointment and duties of presidents, in the following manner:

"At state universities, the president is appointed by the President of the Republic from among three candidates, who have served at least three years as professor, and nominated by Council of Higher Education. In case none of the candidates is appointed in a period of one month and the Council of Higher Education does not nominate new candidates in two weeks, the President of the Republic can make a direct appointment. The university president has a four-year term of office. Upon the termination of this term, a president may be appointed again. However, an individual cannot serve as president at the same state university for more than two terms."

The law's preamble, which goes against the autonomy of universities guaranteed by Article 130 of the Constitution, is also very unsettling:

*"Rationale: Elections of university presidents lead to unfair practices, chagrin and personal strife in the universities, and create a chaotic atmosphere in institutions of tertiary education. The replacement of the election system with an appointment system would eliminate these problems at universities."*¹⁶

There are no media reports, which suggest that university president elections lead to 'chaos' as claimed in the rationale of the bill, and a certain amount of 'rivalry' during the elections is a natural result of democratic administration, which has numerous advantages. It is difficult to understand whether the draft law lists these problems in order to argue that the best educated social groups are incapable of organizing an election, or that elections cause similar problems in the designation of village headmen (mukhtars), small town and city mayors, MPs or even President of the Republic as well. It is very ironical to see MPs, themselves elected by popular vote, to claim that elections are a problem-prone method. As argued in our report for the year 2014-2015¹⁷, the legislation must be urgently amended to make sure that universities can freely elect their presidents, who should take office without approval of Council of Higher

¹⁶ <http://www.diken.com.tr/ректорluk-secimlerini-ortadan-kaldiran-akp-onergesi-tepkiler-uzerine-geri-cekildi/>

¹⁷ <http://en.bilimakademisi.org/the-science-academy-report-on-academic-freedoms-2015/>

Education or President of the Republic. For instance, it is very worrying to see that although a candidate has received a record amount of votes at Boğaziçi University presidential elections (86% of the votes, with a participation rate of 90%), she has not been appointed to the post as of today.

d. Draft Law on the Amendment of the Articles on Disciplinary Infractions in the Law on Higher Education

In case the draft law amending the articles on disciplinary infractions in the Law no. 2547 on Higher Education is passed by Turkish Grand National Assembly, the academic and organization autonomy of universities will be dealt a severe blow. These new disciplinary regulations are in continuation of the repressive tradition established in our country in 1980. On the one hand, universities' power to perform disciplinary investigations as independent legal entities is partially transferred to Council of Higher Education, on the other hand, academics' freedom of expression is limited in an unconstitutional manner.

Article 27 of the draft law revises Article 53 of the Law on Higher Education concerning disciplinary penalties and lists the infractions which require warning, reprimand, forfeiture of payment, suspension of promotion, dismissal from academic profession or dismissal from public service. It must be noted that these penalties are described as "an addition to the procedures listed in the Law no. 657". That is, faculty members will be subject to all the disciplinary procedures concerning civil servants, plus the aforementioned procedures specially concerning them. Since Article 1 of the Law no 657 on Public Services clearly stipulates that university employees are subject to their special law, it is difficult to understand why a reference has been made to the Law no 657 as regards their disciplinary infractions. The job descriptions of faculty members and civil servants are not the same, and the expectations from them are different. Faculty members are expected to produce scientific studies in their areas without any pressure or limitation. Faculty members do not perform state services in a hierarchical, top-down manner. It would be meaningful to take a look at some of the disciplinary infractions described in the Law no 657 to see the oddities which will be caused by the merger of these two categories of employees (Article 125):

- Displaying conduct and attitudes unbecoming a civil servant (A, e)
- Disrespecting a superior with conduct and attitudes in the exercise of duties (B, b)
- Acting in a way that damages the prestige and trustworthiness of civil servants outside of service (B, c)
- Objecting to the orders given (B, j)
- Providing information or making announcements to the media, news agencies, radios or TVs without authorization (B, m)
- Verbally disrespecting a superior in the exercise of duties (C, e)
- Acting in a way that damages the prestige and trustworthiness of civil servants during service (C, i)

- Displaying conduct and attitudes which could jeopardize the state's prestige or civil service's reputation while abroad (E, j)

These and similar disciplinary infractions are ambiguous and open-ended in nature, can only serve to apply pressure on faculty members, and should have no place in a university system at world standards. On the other hand, the definitions of disciplinary infractions added to the Law no 2547 especially for faculty members (Article 53) include the underlined ambiguous phrases, which can be very easily misused:

- Conducting activities for a political party or engaging in propaganda for a political party within institutions of higher education (b, (3), k))
- Discriminating individuals on the basis of language, race, gender, political thought, philosophical belief, religion or denomination, or displaying behavior aiming for individuals' advantage or disadvantage, in the exercise of duties (b, (4), h))
- Engaging in or supporting separatist or terrorist actions (b, (6), a))
- Displaying dishonorable or shameful actions unbecoming a public servant or faculty member (b, (6), d))

Another striking element of the draft law is the new Article 53/Ç, which makes changes to the power of disciplinary penalty. Accordingly, a university's authority to initiate an investigation against and give a penalty to its faculty members is partially transferred to the President of Council of Higher Education, who is defined as the disciplinary supervisor. Granting the President of Council of Higher Education the authority to initiate investigations demanding suspension of promotion, multiple forfeitures of pay, dismissal from academic profession or dismissal from public service is a huge blow to the autonomy of universities. It totally goes against the principles of academic freedom and professional ethics outlined in UNESCO's 1997 Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel.¹⁸ Such efforts to submit universities to a central authority and to establish the public servant mentality at universities will only result in the disappearance of original scientific studies and Turkey's loss of prestige across the world.

2. Examples of Pressures Against Faculty Members

In a very worrying development, according to press reports dated June 16, 2016, Prof. Zeynep Sayın Balıkcıoğlu, who worked on contract at Istanbul Bilgi University was dismissed when a student who recorded her lecture without permission published it on the Internet. A series of news stories designed to discredit this university were published on the media, which probably affected the board of trustees and the president, who were fearful of a possible government intervention to the university. This worrying event shows that foundation-owned

¹⁸ http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13144&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

universities' capacity to protect the freedom of expression of their faculty members is severely limited. On the other hand, there was no investigation into the allegation against Prof. Sayın Balıkçiođlu, and she was not allowed to make a defense, despite the fact that numerous manipulated recordings are frequently leaked to the Internet. As such, it is very weird for her to be dismissed without the slightest inquiry about the authenticity of the recording in question. The university management ought to have at least received the testimonies of the professor and student. In another legal misjudgment, no disciplinary inquiry was started against the student. By law, an individual's voice is an inalienable part of her individual rights, and so the unauthorized recording or manipulation of an individual's voice, or its use for the wrong purposes constitutes a violation of individual rights as per Civil Code, Article 24.

Not initiating a disciplinary investigation against the student, and giving the student the right to remain anonymous pave the way to a witch-hunt where any student could denounce any faculty member, who may be dismissed. As explained above under the heading 'Freedom of Expression and Science', in a university all ideas should be freely discussed and students must be given total freedom to argue against these ideas. If students, instead of developing their personalities and expressing their ideas openly before their professors, are making secret recordings, sharing it with millions of people and then prevailing in an atmosphere of lynching, this signals the end of the university as we know it.

This problem affects not only non-profit private foundation universities but also state universities: An inquiry was started against Prof. Őermin Klahođlu, a faculty member at Uludađ University, Faculty of Education, Department of Guidance and Psychological Counseling, for "making propaganda against the state", and her classes were suspended. This inquiry, too, was based on a student's denunciation.¹⁹

The petition entitled "We will not be a party to this crime," and the following rights violations

A petition entitled "We will not be a party to this crime", released to the public with press announcements held simultaneously in Istanbul and Ankara on January 11, 2016, were signed by 1128 academics and researchers working at universities in Turkey or abroad. After the signature deadline was extended by a week, the figure rose to 2212.

Following the press announcement the President of the Republic, government officials, Council of Higher Education's General Assembly, Council of Universities and various university presidents issued a series of statements accusing the signatory academics and researchers of being "supporters of terrorism" and "traitors". A number of national and local

¹⁹ For the defense by Klahođlu, see <http://www.bagimsizgazete.com/2016/06/13/prof-dr-sermin-kulahoglundan-uludag-universitesi-rektorne-acik-mektup/>

media outlets targeted them directly. As a result, numerous academics and researchers saw their offices raided, received threat messages, and were subjected to mobbing.

In the first wave, in provinces such as Bolu, Düzce, Kocaeli, Bursa and Van, the police raided homes and offices, and took some signatories under custody. 35 academics and researchers from state universities and 3 from foundation-owned universities were thus taken under custody; however they were let go without arrest. Again largely in this first wave, a total of 43 individuals -14 from state universities and 29 from foundation-owned universities- were dismissed in a legally controversial manner; and 9 individuals -4 from public universities and from 5 from non-profit private foundation universities- were forced to resign. As a result of numerous disciplinary investigations (447 in state / 63 in foundation-owned universities), a total of 77 academics (66 in state / 11 in non-profit private foundation universities) were suspended temporarily from office. One individual was forced to retire at a foundation-owned university; however, it is thought that the actual figure could be higher.

Up until now, the files of at least 49 faculty members under disciplinary inquiry (5 at non-profit private foundation universities, 44 at public universities) were sent to Council of Higher Education, for the approval of the penalty of “dismissal from public service”. A very large majority of these faculty members were invited to Ankara to give their statement until July 20, 2016; however, this invitation was cancelled on July 14 and the trial was postponed. Council of Higher Education has not yet announced a new date for the trial.

Meanwhile, a separate criminal investigation was initiated against the signatories, accusing them of “engaging in propaganda for a terrorist organization”. According to the latest available data, criminal investigation was started for a total of 598 academics (152 from non-profit private foundation and 446 from public universities), who gave statements to the police. However, the process takes a long times since all the files are collected at Istanbul Police Headquarters, and in the other provinces, the statements are taken on site. Most of the statements are complete, and it is the turn of research assistants and retired academics. As such a large majority of the 1128 signatories are thought to have completed their police statement.

On the other hand, the four academics, who made a press announcement on March 10, 2016 about the developments were arrested and placed in prison. Three of them, Asst. Prof. Esra Mungan, Asst. Prof. Muzaffer Kaya and Assoc. Prof. Kıvanç Ersoy were arrested on March 15, whereas Assoc. Prof. Meral Camcı, who was abroad at the time, was arrested after she returned of her own will on April 1. On April 22, 2016, they were released pending trial.

In addition to these measures, signatory research assistants who are part of the Student Placement Program (which allows them to conduct doctoral studies at a department in another university that in a program does not exist at their own university) were dismissed by the host universities or summoned back by their own universities on the grounds of “necessity”, resulting in the disruption of their doctoral studies.

The Science Academy expressed its detailed opinion on these developments in two statements²⁰ and a report²¹. The Turkish constitution, laws or the international conventions signed by Turkey do not give any justification for the investigation of 2212 academics who only exercised their freedom of expression. The legal system in Turkey guarantees the right of every citizen, including academics, to express their opinions freely – even if these opinions may be disturbing or in minority.

On this occasion, The Science Academy would like to state its readiness to fulfill any responsibility for outlining the framework for scientists' freedom of expression, penning disciplinary procedures at international standards, and identifying the urgent measures to be taken for establishing the autonomy of universities.

²⁰ See footnote 3.

²¹ See footnote 4.