



# SCIENCE ACADEMY, TÜRKİYE

## ACADEMIC FREEDOMS REPORT 2024-2025

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## A. Foreword

In Türkiye, 2025 was marked less by progress in academic freedoms than by intervention, struggle, and regression. Of the principle enshrined in the original text of the 1961 Constitution—that universities are public legal entities endowed with scientific and administrative autonomy—only the notion of “scientific autonomy” remained in the 1982 Constitution. Today, even this limited form of autonomy is under threat from the indirect interventions of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK).

Beyond the failure of judicial rulings concerning lawsuits and administrative investigations against academics to establish a consistent body of rights-protective jurisprudence, the non-implementation of administrative court decisions rendered in favor of faculty members constitutes a serious violation of the rule of law. Both academics and students are subjected to systematic administrative pressure and are effectively prevented from devoting themselves fully to their primary responsibility of scholarly activity.

As of 31 December 2025, there were 129 state universities in Türkiye (one inactive) and 75 foundation universities (one inactive).<sup>1</sup> Compared to countries with similar population sizes, Türkiye has a remarkably extensive higher education system. Yet substantial disparities persist among these institutions in terms of academic infrastructure, faculty capacity, and academic qualifications, and the country is still far from establishing minimum standards across the higher education sector.

This assessment is also reflected in the European Commission’s 2025 Report, which emphasizes that Türkiye, despite being part of the Bologna Process, has still failed to eliminate qualitative disparities among its higher education institutions. (p. 84)<sup>2</sup>

As in its report for the previous year<sup>3</sup>, the Science Academy again calls public attention to Türkiye’s standing in the Academic Freedom Index (AFI) in 2025.<sup>4</sup> The Academic Freedom Index, developed through a wide-ranging international collaboration between Friedrich-Alexander University Erlangen–Nürnberg and the V-Dem Institute, draws on an open-access and multidimensional database to assign scores ranging from 0 and 1 to 179 countries. According to the interactive map presenting the latest available data for 2025, Türkiye’s AFI score has steadily declined over the past decade, reaching 0.12 (Status E).

With this score, Türkiye is ranked among the ten countries experiencing the sharpest deterioration in academic freedoms and falls within the lowest ten percent globally, between Qatar and South Sudan. Although academic freedom has generally been in decline worldwide, Türkiye stands out within the European Higher Education Area as one of the countries furthest behind, alongside Belarus (0.04), Saudi Arabia (0.07), and Egypt (0.08). As of 2025, no neighboring country records a lower score than Türkiye. Among the member states of the Council of Europe, Türkiye occupies the lowest position in the ranking. More broadly, the 2025 data once again confirm that scientific freedom in Türkiye remains subject to intense pressure.

The data concerning academic freedoms are also consistent with the democracy indicators published by the V-Dem Institute. According to the Institute’s Democracy Index, Türkiye is

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<sup>1</sup>Higher Education Information Management System. (The last access date for all links cited in the footnotes is March 2026.)

<sup>2</sup> *Türkiye 2025 Report* (November 2025), European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document.

<sup>3</sup> *Science Academy Academic Freedom Report 2023–2024* (February 2025), Bilim Akademisi.

<sup>4</sup> Academic Freedom Index website, V-Dem Institute.

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categorized as an “electoral autocracy” and ranks 138th out of 180 countries, placing it within the lowest 20–30 percent globally.<sup>5</sup>

The European Commission’s 2025 Türkiye Report also points to the continuing deterioration in the field of human rights.<sup>6</sup> The report notes that investigations targeting journalists, writers, lawyers, human rights defenders, and academics on charges of supporting terrorism persisted throughout the reporting period (p. 5). Moreover, following the annulment ruling of the Constitutional Court,<sup>7</sup> the power to appoint rectors was redefined under Article 13 of Higher Education Law No. 2547 as an authority vested exclusively in the President.<sup>8</sup> The European Commission likewise characterizes this arrangement as a matter of concern with respect to university autonomy (p. 84).

One reason for the adoption of this legal arrangement in its current form is that, although the Constitutional Court could have derived certain substantive limitations from Article 130 of the Constitution, it chose not to do so and instead based its ruling solely on lack of competence *ratione materiae*.

Since 2018, the practice of appointing university rectors directly by the President has reinforced the risks of institutional homogenization and political influence. Considering the extensive authority rectors exercise over universities—and faculties in particular—it is clear that they possess broad capacity to intervene directly in matters ranging from academic freedoms to faculty appointments, financial affairs, and the wider sphere of academic life.

In its February 2025 report, *How Universities Can Protect and Promote Academic Freedom: EUA Principles and Guidelines*, the European University Association sets out in explicit terms the principles that university administrations should uphold in order to protect academic freedom.<sup>9</sup> Türkiye remains far from fulfilling these principles.

According to the 2025 *Free to Think* report issued by Scholars at Risk, academic freedom in Türkiye was subject to severe restrictions during the 2024–2025 reporting period. The report emphasizes that university autonomy and the freedom of expression of both students and academics, within and beyond university campuses, encountered substantial limitations. The report also criticizes the authorities’ attempts to suppress the student protests that began following the detention of Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu on 19 March 2025 through the use of force, including pepper spray and pressurized water, as well as the detention of numerous students during these events (p. 71).<sup>10</sup>

Finally, it must be underlined that the restrictive visa regimes imposed by scientifically advanced Western countries—together with the systematic limitation of available visa appointments—continue to hinder university students and researchers in Türkiye from participating in educational programs and academic events and from engaging with their colleagues abroad.<sup>11</sup>

Consideration should also be given to the situation of researchers who, despite having their conference papers accepted, are unable to participate in academic meetings because of prolonged visa procedures. Although no comprehensive statistical analysis on the issue is

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<sup>5</sup> *Democracy Report 2025: 25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?* (March 2025), V-Dem Institute. See also *Democracy Index*, Our World in Data.

<sup>6</sup> *Türkiye 2025 Report* (November 2025), European Commission, Commission Staff Working Document.

<sup>7</sup> Constitutional Court, E. 2018/117, K. 2023/212 (Official Gazette: 4 June 2024).

<sup>8</sup> Article 13/1(a) of Law No. 2547: “Rectors of state and foundation universities shall be appointed by the President. In foundation universities, the appointment of the rector shall be made upon the proposal of the board of trustees. The rector represents the legal personality of the university or institute of high technology.”

<sup>9</sup> *How Universities Can Protect and Promote Academic Freedom: EUA Principles and Guidelines* (February 2025), European University Association.

<sup>10</sup> *Free to Think 2025: Report of the Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project* (2025), Scholars at Risk.

<sup>11</sup> “What Solutions Are Türkiye and the EU Considering for the Visa Problem?” (24 May 2024), BBC News Türkçe.

currently available, anecdotal evidence indicates a growing number of such cases. Systematic discriminatory practices, at times reaching the level of racism on a global scale, have previously been reported.<sup>12</sup> The continuation of these conditions directly undermines academic mobility—recognized as a fundamental academic right—particularly for early-career researchers, and therefore requires careful monitoring.<sup>13</sup>

## Conceptual Framework

Drawing upon UNESCO’s 2017 Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers<sup>14</sup> and the International Science Council’s framework on Freedom and Responsibility in Science,<sup>15</sup> academic freedom should be conceived as the body of individual and institutional safeguards that enable academics and researchers to define research questions, conduct research, access scientific knowledge and research resources, express ideas, publish and criticize findings, engage in collaboration, teach, and participate in public debate within their areas of expertise, free from political, administrative, economic, ideological, or religious pressure.

While UNESCO associates this framework with the freedom of scientific research, appropriate working conditions for scientists, and society’s right to participate in and benefit from scientific progress, the ISC emphasizes that these freedoms also encompass freedom of movement, freedom of association, freedom of expression and communication, and freedom of access to data and information.

Nevertheless, both UNESCO and the International Science Council emphasize that these freedoms should not be regarded as unlimited privileges, but rather understood in relation to the principles of scientific honesty, research integrity, transparency, openness to criticism, respect for human rights, and public accountability. Academic freedom, therefore, signifies not only the right to remain free from external interference, but also the ethical and institutional foundation necessary for the conduct of reliable, critical, shareable, and socially beneficial scientific activity.

In this report, the concept of “academic freedom” encompasses the rights of faculty members and students to produce scientific knowledge, to learn and teach, to select research questions, to communicate and criticize findings, and to participate in public debate within the scope of their expertise. “Scientific freedom” refers more specifically to the dimensions of research, publication, data-related work, and scientific communication within these broader freedoms. “Institutional autonomy,” meanwhile, refers to the ability of universities to make academic, administrative, and financial decisions independently from political or arbitrary outside intervention.

Although analytically distinct, these three domains are deeply interconnected. Where institutional autonomy is weakened, academic freedoms tend to narrow; and where academic freedom becomes insecure, scientific production inevitably loses both quality and credibility.

Particularly in university environments where job security is weak or disciplinary and administrative sanctions are broadly interpreted, a sphere of self-censorship emerges that can be as effective as explicit censorship itself. Accordingly, this report considers not only direct prohibitions and penalties, but also the structural conditions that effectively limit individuals’

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<sup>12</sup> Waters, J. L., Adriansen, H. K., Madsen, L. M., & Saarinen, T. (2024). “(Un)wanted Bodies and the Internationalisation of Higher Education.” *Progress in Human Geography*, 48(6), 879–897.

<sup>13</sup> Mills, D. (2022). *Academic Mobility in Higher Education*. Paper commissioned for the World Higher Education Conference, 18–20 May 2022.

<sup>14</sup> *Recommendation on Science and Scientific Researchers* (2018), UNESCO.

<sup>15</sup> *A Contemporary Perspective on the Free and Responsible Practice of Science in the 21st Century* (December 2021), International Science Council.

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ability to produce and articulate ideas, as constitutive elements of the academic freedom landscape.

## Methodology and Scope

The events included in this report were selected from developments occurring in Türkiye during the 2025 calendar year that affected academic freedom, scientific freedom, institutional autonomy, students' freedom to study and express themselves, or the professional security of academic personnel within higher education institutions. The assessment is based on publicly available news reports, university statements, judicial decisions, declarations by trade unions and professional organizations, reports issued by relevant civil society organizations, and the monitoring framework developed by the Science Academy in previous years.

The report evaluates these incidents according to five principal criteria:

- (i) the nature of the right affected;
- (ii) the type of intervention involved;
- (iii) whether the intervention points to a structural rather than an isolated problem;
- (iv) whether the incident produces a deterrent or intimidating effect within the higher education sector; and
- (v) whether legal oversight mechanisms function effectively.

Accordingly, the report seeks not only to document individual cases of violation, but also to make visible recurring patterns and broader structural tendencies.

## B. Erosion of Institutional Autonomy in Universities

### Boğaziçi University

Since 2021, the multidimensional interventions targeting the academic autonomy of Boğaziçi University have continued without slowing down, while faculty members and students have maintained their resistance against practices that erode the university's academic standards. At the current stage, the university's administrative structure has largely been replaced by managers transferred from municipalities and administrative personnel recruited through non-merit-based procedures;<sup>16</sup> non-meritocratic academic staffing has continued through appointments made without the knowledge of academic units and despite their objections;<sup>17</sup> campus resources have been encroached upon, and campus spaces transformed; the library and dormitories have been demolished; student clubs have been obstructed from functioning; and the campus has effectively been stripped of student life.<sup>18</sup> In this process, both the spatial and institutional memory of the university have been systematically targeted for destruction.<sup>19</sup> As one newspaper report observed, "Boğaziçi University has become an institution enclosed not only by physical fences, but also by intellectual ones."

Once regarded as Türkiye's brightest gateway to the world, the campus now stands under a form of administrative discipline symbolized by the widely circulated image of police handcuffs

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<sup>16</sup> Coşkun, C. (29 December 2025). "The Collapse of a University (1): Those Leaving the CHP, the 16/9 Actors, and Special Appointments." *Kısa Dalga*.

<sup>17</sup> Coşkun, C. (2 January 2026). "The Collapse of a University (5): The Operation to Erase Memory and 'Alternative' Resistance." *Kısa Dalga*.

<sup>18</sup> Coşkun, C. (30 December 2025). "The Collapse of a University (2): Parallel Foundations, Companies, and Commercial Encirclement." *Kısa Dalga*.

<sup>19</sup> Coşkun, C. (2 January 2026). "The Collapse of a University (5): The Operation to Erase Memory and 'Alternative' Resistance." *Kısa Dalga*.

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attached to its gates. Constructed through the rule of trustee rectors, this new order has eroded not only a single institution, but also half a century of Türkiye's academic memory and prestige. As one report observed, Boğaziçi University is now associated less with scientific achievement than with the tragic story of how an institution can be rendered dysfunctional step by step.<sup>20</sup>

Since the beginning of 2025, Boğaziçi University has experienced a contentious process in terms of academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and the participation of university stakeholders. During their 1,000th protest held on 17 January 2025, faculty members reiterated their demand for a pluralistic and inclusive university in response to increasing restrictions on campus life. The rectorate, meanwhile, withdrew the university from membership in the European University Association without providing any justification and without informing the academic community. This decision was subsequently challenged before the courts. During the same period, legal and administrative controversies deepened due to practices such as preventing academics from entering the campus, barring Senate members from attending meetings, and failing to implement court decisions.

The use of university premises for commercial events, including activities planned during examination periods, was criticized by students and academics on the grounds that such practices damaged the institution's reputation. At the same time, there was an increase in measures such as the non-renewal of academic contracts without stated justification, many of which were likewise brought before the judiciary. Collectively, these developments revealed a growing tension between the university administration's governing approach and core academic values.

## Merit

The principle of merit requires that, in competitive selection processes, no subjective considerations other than qualifications relevant to the position—such as competence, skill, experience, and performance—be taken into account. In states founded upon the rule of law, this principle also implies respect for the recognition and legal consequences of duly acquired qualifications and achievements, as well as protection against their arbitrary revocation within the framework of legal certainty.

In 2025, perhaps the most significant development related to merit and its broader implications was the annulment of Istanbul Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu's university diploma. In terms of the political dimension of the case, the key point is that the CHP had already selected and announced İmamoğlu as its presidential candidate for the 2028 elections. The annulment carried an unmistakable political dimension insofar as it prevented him from fulfilling the constitutional requirement of holding a university degree in order to run for the presidency.

While the investigation at Istanbul University was still ongoing in February, Professor Tahsin Yeşildere, a former president of the University Faculty Members Association, stated that İmamoğlu's transfer in 1990 from Girne American University in Cyprus to Istanbul University's Faculty of Business Administration had been lawful under the legislation applicable at the time, and that his diploma was accordingly valid. Yeşildere also underlined that the Council of Higher Education (YÖK) only began regulating horizontal transfer procedures in 2007, whereas prior to that date the matter had been left entirely to the discretion of universities.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the absence of any serious legal dispute regarding the matter, İmamoğlu's diploma—issued by the Faculty of Business Administration at Istanbul University in

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<sup>20</sup> Coşkun, C. (28 December 2025). "The Collapse of a University: The Fifth Year of Trustee Rule at Boğaziçi University." *Kısa Dalga*.

<sup>21</sup> Kepenek, E. (25 February 2025). "Professor Tahsin Yeşildere: Ekrem İmamoğlu's Horizontal Transfer Was Lawful." *Bianet*.

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accordance with the applicable legislation—was annulled on 18 March 2025.<sup>22</sup> In its official statement, the university declared that “the decisions regarding the horizontal transfers of 28 graduates, as well as the graduation statuses and diplomas obtained on the basis of those decisions, were annulled and withdrawn on the grounds of ‘nullity’ and ‘manifest error.’”<sup>23</sup>

In addition, an investigation was initiated against Ekrem İmamoğlu on the charge of “forgery of official documents,” based on allegations that his university diploma was invalid. According to the statement issued by the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office, “it was determined that İmamoğlu had transferred to Istanbul University from an institution that was not recognized at the relevant time, and therefore the revocation of the diploma was requested in order to prevent unlawful acts and transactions that could be carried out on the basis of that diploma.” In the official correspondence sent by the Prosecutor’s Office to the rectorate of Istanbul University, the university was asked to take the necessary action, including the withdrawal of the diploma.<sup>24</sup>

Istanbul University subsequently removed İmamoğlu’s diploma records from the university database on the grounds that his horizontal transfer had allegedly been irregular. As a result, graduation inquiries conducted through the e-Government system would now indicate that he was only a high school graduate.<sup>25</sup> Under these circumstances, İmamoğlu would no longer be eligible to run for the presidency. This development may be seen as opening the way for political intervention in universities’ academic assessments and credentialing authority.

In July 2025, Istanbul University also annulled İmamoğlu’s master’s degree diploma. The decision was justified on the grounds that the undergraduate graduation requirement had not been fulfilled and that there were deficiencies in the enrollment conditions. His graduation records were removed from the system, and it was further decided that his thesis would be deleted from the YÖK archive.<sup>26</sup>

Beginning on 19 March 2025, following Istanbul University’s decision to annul the diploma, students across the country began organizing protest demonstrations.<sup>27</sup>

-In many statistical assessments and university ranking indices, the number of academic publications produced by universities is regarded as an indicator of quality. However, the shortcomings of evaluations based exclusively on numerical output become much more visible when the actual quality of publications is examined in greater detail. One striking example concerns the 2024 cardiology special issue of the *Turkish Journal of Medical Sciences*, published by TÜBİTAK, in which five of the six articles appear to have been written by the same fourteen authors, with only the order of authorship changing from one article to another.<sup>28</sup>

This situation once again brings the issue of merit to the forefront, raising the question of how publications expected to be grounded in original research could have been produced within such a short timeframe—unless some of them simply reproduce the findings of others.

-The problem of merit within universities has also acquired another dimension through the emergence of a market for “theses for sale.” According to prices advertised on one website, a student seeking to have a doctoral dissertation written in the field of theology would be expected

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<sup>22</sup> However, in its decision no. 2018/16871 (*Abidin Pişgin*) (Official Gazette: 20 February 2024), the Constitutional Court held that, pursuant to the principle of administrative consistency—one of the components of the principle of good governance—the imposition of the full burden of an administrative error upon the applicant through the annulment of a doctoral diploma more than one year after its issuance constituted a violation of the right to education guaranteed under Article 42 of the Constitution (paras. 44–50).

<sup>23</sup> “Istanbul University Annulled Ekrem İmamoğlu’s Diploma” (18 March 2025), Bianet.

<sup>24</sup> Doğan, B. (27 February 2025). “From the Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office to the Rector: Revoke the Diploma.” *Yeni Şafak*.

<sup>25</sup> “İmamoğlu, Whose Master’s Degree Record Was Not Deleted, Will Now Appear as a ‘High School Graduate’” (7 May 2025), Bianet.

<sup>26</sup> “Ekrem İmamoğlu’s Master’s Degree Diploma Was Also Annulled” (28 July 2025), Bianet.

<sup>27</sup> “University Students’ Boycott Protests Continue Today: ‘Do Not Obey, Defend Your Rights!’” (25 March 2025), Evrensel. “Day 4 of the University Boycott: ‘Tayyip Resign!’” (27 March 2025), Evrensel.

<sup>28</sup> Kartoğlu, Ü. (16 February 2025). “One Article Every Nine Days.” T24

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to pay between 90,000 and 108,000 Turkish lira. According to a report by Mahir Bağış in *Nefes Gazetesi*, these amounts rise to as much as 85,000 Turkish lira in the social sciences, while comparable fees are also demanded in fields such as engineering and law.<sup>29</sup>

-As a striking example of systemic non-meritocratic practices, it was discovered that unauthorized access had been gained to the digital systems of public institutions through the use of forged electronic signatures, prompting a large-scale investigation. The systems of the Ministry of National Education (MEB), the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK), the Directorate of Migration Management, and several universities were reportedly infiltrated; fabricated graduation records, grade alterations, manipulation of examination results, and violations of personal data were identified. Fraudulent graduation records were created within the systems of Atatürk University, Gazi University, İnönü University, Ege University, and Yıldız Technical University. It was further determined that some documents—including diploma numbers, grade point averages, and graduation dates—had been reproduced from a single template. One document reportedly contained the names of three different individuals. Fraudulent high school diplomas were also issued. Using a forged electronic signature issued in the name of A.S., unauthorized entry was gained into the Ministry of National Education’s system, where records were created for four separate individuals. These records were later deleted on 5 November 2024. Investigators further established that forged documents were sold for amounts ranging from 250,000 Turkish lira to 2.5 million Turkish lira, with some payments made through cryptocurrency transactions. Messages uncovered during the investigation reportedly included statements such as “Professor, the system is active” and “It appears in the official inquiry.”<sup>30</sup>

According to the information made public, hundreds of individuals—including lawyers, food engineers, teachers, and pharmacists—had allegedly entered professional life using fraudulent academic qualifications.<sup>31</sup> Allegations also emerged that professors, associate professors, and other academics had obtained fake diplomas. Yet neither the exact number of such cases nor the sectors in which individuals built careers on the basis of fraudulent credentials has been conclusively determined.<sup>32</sup> The affair also acquired a tragicomic dimension when numerous users posted complaints on the website “Şikayetimvar,” claiming that they themselves had been deceived by promises of fake diplomas, had not received the services they paid for, and would pursue legal action to recover their losses.<sup>33</sup>

-“Newport International University” once again became a subject of public attention in connection with the fake diploma investigations. The institution is not officially recognized either in Türkiye or in the United States, where it was originally established. Nevertheless, thousands of individuals have graduated from this institution despite its lack of accreditation for higher education. Between 2004 and 2007, several lawsuits were filed against the then Minister of National Education, Hüseyin Çelik, and officials affiliated with Newport on the grounds that they had engaged in “activities contrary to the law.” Among the plaintiffs were the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects and even the Council of Higher Education itself.

Thus far, two individuals have received criminal penalties for “conducting unauthorized educational activities” in Türkiye on behalf of the U.S.-based institution. Through a series of

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<sup>29</sup> “Scandal of Theses for Sale in Academia: Prices Exceed 100,000 Turkish Lira” (14 June 2025), *Gerçek Gündem*.

<sup>30</sup> “Fake Diploma Investigation Expands: Allegations of Digital Breaches in Public Institutions” (3 August 2025), *Evrensel*.

<sup>31</sup> “Hundreds Began Their Professions with Fake Diplomas: Lawyers, Food Engineers, and Pharmacists Included” (2 August 2025), *Evrensel*.

<sup>32</sup> Soykan, T. (5 August 2025). “This Regime Deserves Mihyeddin: The Academic Sphere Has Been Captured by Fixers.” *BirGün*.

<sup>33</sup> “There Turns Out to Be a Market for Fake Diplomas: Hundreds of ‘Victimization’ Complaints Posted on Şikayetvar” (3 August 2025), *Diken*.

lawsuits filed between 2004 and 2007, TMMOB sought both the prosecution of public officials and the punishment of those responsible for the institution's operations. According to TMMOB, Newport was offering engineering education and issuing irregular diplomas in professions falling within the Union's jurisdiction—including computer, mechanical, electrical, electronics and communications, and civil engineering—and these practices were argued to have harmed the professional standing and credibility of these fields.<sup>34</sup>

-Ömer Fatih Sayan, who came under public scrutiny for claims that he possessed six undergraduate degrees, two master's degrees, and two doctoral degrees, removed from his personal website information relating to the four undergraduate programs he had reportedly completed at Anadolu University. The same information, however, was still accessible on the website of the Ministry of Transport and Infrastructure. Sayan likewise deleted references to these four undergraduate degrees from his official biography.<sup>35</sup>

-According to Ministry of National Education (MEB) data based on YÖK records, between 2020 and 2025, 6,378 out of 169,000 individuals who had completed secondary education abroad, obtained equivalency recognition, and subsequently enrolled in universities in Türkiye were found to have “deficiencies or inconsistencies” in their documentation; in total, 6,738 individuals were dismissed from universities. On the basis of these figures, CHP parliamentarian Seda Kaya Ösen stated that “at least one out of every twenty-five documents is fraudulent.”<sup>36</sup> Debates surrounding fraud and irregularity in Türkiye have also extended into the field of education. It was determined that the YÖKSİS records of foreign students did not contain examination or score information and that their admission category had been recorded as “students applying under quotas allocated to international students and seeking to pursue education through their own financial means (associate and undergraduate level).” The issue, which was also reflected in reports of the Court of Accounts, was brought before the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye through a parliamentary question submitted by CHP İzmir MP Seda Kaya Ösen.<sup>37</sup>

-As a potentially positive development that may help prevent scientific misconduct, the President of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), Erol Özvar, stated that “a comprehensive regulatory framework concerning how and to what extent artificial intelligence may be used in theses, articles, and other scientific studies is about to be implemented.” Özvar explained that the “Ethical Guidelines on the Use of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Scientific Research and Publication Activities of Higher Education Institutions,” prepared the previous year, had functioned as a framework for assessing both the opportunities created by generative artificial intelligence and the potential risks associated with it. He continued as follows: “We are now taking this step one stage further. A comprehensive legislative framework concerning how and to what extent artificial intelligence may be used in theses, articles, and other scientific studies is about to be implemented. I would like to announce here that the necessary regulations and legal arrangements will be enacted as soon as possible. In this way, an ethical, accountable, and transparent governance framework concerning the use of artificial intelligence in our higher education system will have been established. Within this framework, concrete standards will be introduced not only regarding how generative artificial intelligence may be used in theses,

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<sup>34</sup> Çaklı, O. (6 August 2025). “Multiple Lawsuits Were Filed Against Newport University, from Which AKP Politician Ahmet Hamdi Çamlı Received a Diploma; Two Individuals Were Penalized for ‘Unauthorized Activity.’” T24.

<sup>35</sup> “Deputy Minister Sayan Removed Certain Undergraduate Degree Information from the CV on His Personal Website” (6 August 2025), T24.

<sup>36</sup> “Inconsistencies in University Equivalency Documents Reflected in Court of Accounts Reports: One out of Every 25 Documents Is Fake!” (15 October 2025), T24.

<sup>37</sup> “Inconsistencies in University Equivalency Documents Reflected in Court of Accounts Reports: One out of Every 25 Documents Is Fake!” (15 October 2025), T24.

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articles, and scientific studies, but also in relation to data security, source verification, plagiarism prevention, transparent reporting, and ethical responsibility.”<sup>38</sup>

On 22 August 2025, the Executive Board of the Bilim Akademisi issued the following statement regarding the production of forged documents and signatures:

*“The data revealed in recent days and the investigations initiated concerning the widespread and systematic production of forged documents and signatures have exposed not only the responsibility of university administrations, the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), and the Ministry of National Education, but also a grave situation with respect to the quality and reliability of universities and the education system as a whole, including the validity of entrance examinations, grading and evaluation systems, and the diplomas awarded by these institutions. Alongside the production of fraudulent diplomas, university administrations have also openly revoked legitimately issued diplomas, despite the absence of any allegation of forgery, in ways clearly connected to the political climate.*

*Beyond mere violations of law, the long-standing disregard by YÖK, university administrations, and the national education system for fundamental ethical principles—particularly merit and integrity—is unacceptable. Equally unacceptable is the failure of administrators to fulfill their responsibilities, their reliance on top-down directives incompatible with academic values, rules, and procedures, and their preoccupation with formalistic details such as attendance monitoring in classrooms rather than addressing serious ethical violations.*

*The methods by which administrators are appointed, the adoption of tailor-made arrangements in their career paths, the resulting spread of unqualified personnel, the ignorance—or deliberate disregard—of the most basic moral, scientific, and pedagogical principles, and the accumulation of systemic deterioration over many years have all contributed to the situation we are witnessing today.”<sup>39</sup>*

In the final days of December 2025, the President of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), Erol Özvar, announced that a proposal was being developed to reduce four-year undergraduate degree programs to three years. According to Özvar, students would still complete eight semesters, but would do so within a more intensive three-year schedule, while academic standards would not be compromised.<sup>40</sup> The proposal, introduced without prior discussion either within university senates—the bodies authorized to decide on academic matters—or on any shared platform where university administrators and the needs of different faculties could be collectively considered, drew considerable criticism from members of the academic community. Faculty members brought together under the Higher Education Studies Group published a text entitled “Opinion on the Duration of Undergraduate Programs within the Framework of the Principles of a Free, Autonomous, Democratic, and Scientific University.”<sup>41</sup> The statement argued, in essence, that YÖK had exceeded the authority granted to it under Law No. 2547 by interfering with the powers of university senates, which are the competent bodies responsible for binding decisions regarding undergraduate education. It further emphasized that proposing such changes without a broad and participatory consultation process within universities, grounded in scientific evidence and accompanied by discussion of the pedagogical implications of the proposal, its impact on different disciplines, and its possible effects on professional qualifications, constituted a serious violation of the principle of democratic university governance.

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<sup>38</sup> “YÖK President Announces New Regulations on the Use of Artificial Intelligence in Theses and Articles” (4 November 2025), T24.

<sup>39</sup> “Statement by the Bilim Akademisi on the Production of Forged Documents and Signatures” (11 August 2025).

<sup>40</sup> “A Signal of ‘Radical Change’ from YÖK President Özvar: Four-Year Education to Be Reduced to Three Years” (21 December 2025), T24.

<sup>41</sup> “Opinion on the Duration of Undergraduate Programs within the Framework of the Principles of a Free, Autonomous, Democratic, and Scientific University” (28 January 2026), Üniversite Forumu.

The Bilim Akademisi also issued a statement on the matter dated 31 December 2025:

*“During a live broadcast on the CNN Türk news channel on 20 December 2025, the President of the Council of Higher Education, Professor Erol Özvar, announced to the public that work was underway on a proposal to reduce four-year undergraduate education in Türkiye to three years. Özvar stated that students would still complete eight semesters, but that this process could be completed within three years through a more intensive curriculum. He further noted that, should the proposal not be ready for implementation in the 2026–2027 academic year, it would be introduced in the following year.*

*The Bilim Akademisi considers it inappropriate for a structural transformation of this scale in higher education to be introduced without comprehensive debate across the academic community, without a holistic assessment of its potential academic, pedagogical, social, and psychological consequences, and without ensuring the effective participation of universities, faculty members, and students in the process.<sup>42</sup> Such reforms should be addressed not through merely administrative and time-oriented approaches, but through a participatory and transparent process grounded in scientific evidence.”*

-İstanbul Medeniyet University announced that Professor Ahmet Akın, a faculty member in the Faculty of Educational Sciences against whom allegations of child abuse and harassment had been raised, had been removed from his position as Head of the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance. The university further stated that an examination and investigation process had been initiated.<sup>43</sup>

-Following the dismissal of Harun Çiftçi, the Rector of Çankırı Karatekin University, after he reportedly arranged for himself to receive 1.2 million Turkish lira from revolving fund revenues, a similar controversy emerged at Karabük University. According to information reported by Cumhuriyet on the basis of the local news website Nethaber in Karabük, the monthly income of Karabük University Rector Professor Fatih Kırışık had reached 1.2 million Turkish lira.<sup>44</sup> Despite allegations of corruption amounting to 60 million Turkish lira, former Çankırı Karatekin University Rector Professor Harun Çiftçi was reportedly bid farewell by the university with a commemorative plaque.<sup>45</sup>

-At Akdeniz University, it was determined that Mehmet Altunkaya, a former vice rector and long-serving dean of the Faculty of Law, had committed plagiarism and had been appointed to a professorship by presenting non-existent publications as if they were genuine academic works. The university’s executive board subsequently annulled Altunkaya’s professorship and submitted the decision to the Council of Higher Education for approval.<sup>46</sup>

-Controversies surrounding the interviews conducted after the “2024 YÖK Central Examination for Promotion and Change of Title” at Boğaziçi University continued throughout the year. Official responses provided to a parliamentary inquiry submitted by CHP İzmir deputy Yüksel Taşkın further exposed the university administration’s problematic approach to transparency. Public attention focused particularly on the fact that candidates who had received the highest scores in the written examination were eliminated during the interview stage, alongside allegations concerning appointments from outside institutions and the administration’s apparent disregard for harassment claims. According to the official responses, four candidates who ranked among the top five in the written examination were eliminated during the interview

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<sup>42</sup> “Statement on YÖK’s Plan to Reduce Undergraduate Education to Three Years” (31 December 2025), Bilim Akademisi.

<sup>43</sup> “Professor Ahmet Akın Removed from Duty Following Allegations of Harassment” (5 March 2025), Cumhuriyet.

<sup>44</sup> “Fortune-Like Salaries for Rectors: Even the Rent of the Villa He Lives In Is Paid by the University!” (30 May 2025), Cumhuriyet.

<sup>45</sup> “An Unbelievable Farewell in Çankırı: Ceremony for a Rector Accused of Embezzlement!” (28 May 2025), ABC Gazetesi.

<sup>46</sup> “Former Dean’s Professorship Annulled and Sent to YÖK for Approval” (26 May 2025), Cumhuriyet.

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process, while a candidate who had ranked eleventh in the written stage was elevated to first place following the interviews. The rectorate of Boğaziçi University defended this outcome on the grounds of the candidate's "superior oral performance." The university further acknowledged that the interviews had been audio- and video-recorded, but stated that the recordings would not be disclosed to the public due to obligations arising under the Law on the Protection of Personal Data (KVKK). This development reignited public debate concerning "transparency" and "accountability."<sup>47</sup>

-At Munzur University, another case reminiscent of the broader diploma scandals attracted public attention in the form of a controversial promotion process. It emerged that an individual who had previously served as a technician responsible for the university's heating boiler and electrical systems had first been appointed as Rector's Advisor for Technical Affairs and later assigned to a faculty with the title of faculty secretary. Subsequently, this individual applied for an academic position announced on 27 December 2024 for the Underwater Technologies Program within the Motor Vehicles and Transportation Technologies Department of Munzur University's Pertek Sakine Genç Vocational School and was appointed to the post.

However, another applicant who had received a higher score but had not been appointed filed a lawsuit, upon which the administrative court issued a stay-of-execution order. The process did not end there. A second recruitment announcement was issued, and the application of the individual who had initiated the lawsuit was rejected on the grounds that the eligibility requirements had allegedly not been met. The position was then once again awarded to the same individual, who was transferred from the faculty secretary position into the academic post.<sup>48</sup>

-It was reported that the wedding ceremony of the son of Emrullah Erkuş was held on the Davutpaşa Campus of Yıldız Technical University. Reacting to the event, students stated: "Only recently, a 15-year-old child was killed during a wedding held at Boğaziçi University. Universities are centers of science; they are not places where outside individuals can hold weddings at their convenience."<sup>49</sup>

-No classes were scheduled on Fridays in the 2025–2026 fall semester program of the Faculty of Law at Istanbul University. According to the course schedule published on the faculty's website, the only class scheduled for Fridays was an online course on Atatürk's Principles and the History of the Turkish Revolution for first-year students, held between 15:30 and 17:00. Kadem Özbay, President of the education union Eğitim-İş, criticized the schedule of Istanbul University Faculty of Law, one of Türkiye's oldest academic institutions, stating that "this picture reflects not a structure shaped by science, but one shaped by the demands of religious sects and reactionary groups." Arguing that it was unacceptable for one day of the week to be effectively rendered inactive in a faculty expected to generate scientific knowledge, Özbay further stated: "This situation undermines academic culture, secular education, and scientific production. This picture, which constitutes concrete evidence of how universities are being reshaped in accordance with religious considerations and sectarian pressures, amounts to an open attack on scientific autonomy."<sup>50</sup>

-President of the Council of Higher education, YÖK, Erol Özvar stated that departments with declining student interest were being closed, while new programs aligned with employment needs were being introduced. He further noted that the university preference guide would be prepared in line with this approach. Accordingly, the number of universities offering 17 different artificial intelligence-based programs—first launched at 20 universities in 2024—

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<sup>47</sup> "Interview Scandal at Boğaziçi University: Recordings Exist but No Disclosure — 'Boğaziçi Deflected the Issue'" (17 May 2025), Cumhuriyet.

<sup>48</sup> Tahincioğlu, G. (7 August 2025). "From Heating Boiler Technician to Rector's Advisor and Lecturer: Who Needs a Fake Diploma?" T24.

<sup>49</sup> "A Wedding Was Held at Yıldız Technical University for the Son of an AKP District Chair" (6 September 2025), T24.

<sup>50</sup> "'Friday Holiday' at Istanbul University Faculty of Law: Shaped Not by Science but by the Demands of Religious Sects and Reactionary Circles" (6 October 2025), T24.

would be increased to 80. Özvar also emphasized the need for personnel capable of using artificial intelligence technologies across various commercial, administrative, social, and cultural fields, adding: “We encourage prospective students to consider the programs we have introduced in areas such as digital agriculture and the digitalization of agriculture. A field known as ‘telemedicine’ is developing very rapidly across the world. We have also established programs in this area.”<sup>51</sup>

-The existence of numerous universities and faculties established without adequate planning for academic staffing—the most fundamental component of any higher education institution—was once again reflected in the 2025 ÖSYM admissions guide. According to the guide, 1,278 undergraduate programs at public universities did not have a full professor, while 990 lacked an associate professor. In 400 programs, neither a professor nor an associate professor was employed. Among the programs operating without a professor were medicine, law, dentistry, nursing, computer engineering, psychology, social work, and software engineering. Notably, some of the artificial intelligence programs that YÖK has promoted as part of its vision for the future also lacked a single full professor.<sup>52</sup> The problem, however, extends beyond the mere presence or absence of faculty members holding senior academic titles. Equally concerning is the fact that the academic criteria required for promotion to these ranks vary considerably from one university to another and remain unanchored to any meaningful quality-based minimum standard.

-Despite the continued expansion in the number of universities, YÖK reduced admission quotas for undergraduate and associate degree programs at public universities by a cumulative 23 percent between 2023 and 2025.<sup>53</sup> According to reporting by Figen Atalay in Cumhuriyet, these reductions affected 123 public universities nationwide.<sup>54</sup>

-Under the headline “Türkiye Risks Losing a Generation of Its Youth,” the French newspaper *Le Monde* drew attention to the increasingly bleak professional outlook facing university graduates in Türkiye. According to the newspaper’s Istanbul correspondent, Nicolas Bourcier, the deepening crisis in Türkiye’s higher education system risks depriving the country of an entire generation of young people.<sup>55</sup> Data from Eurostat and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development indicate that approximately one-third of individuals aged 18–24 are neither in education, employment, nor training. The situation appears even more severe among young women, 42 percent of whom in the same age group are not engaged in education or employment. Türkiye ranks last among 33 European countries in terms of graduate employment outcomes. The unemployment rate among university graduates exceeds the overall unemployment rate. Experts attribute this situation to structural mismatches between the education system and the economy, as well as to a growing gap between labor market demand and the number of graduates produced by a rapidly expanding higher education system. In addition, experienced academics earn only 29 percent more than their less experienced counterparts. Public expenditure on education has also declined from 12.9 percent of the national budget in 2018 to just above 10 percent in recent years.<sup>56</sup>

-The outflow of highly educated graduates from Türkiye’s most qualified universities through brain drain continued to intensify in 2025. Data released by the Turkish Statistical Institute on

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<sup>51</sup> “YÖK President Özvar Announces: Departments with No Future Are Being Closed” (20 June 2025), T24.

<sup>52</sup> Kömüş, M. (4 August 2025). “1,278 Programs Have No Professors and 990 Have No Associate Professors.” *BirGün*.

<sup>53</sup> “YÖK President Özvar Announces the Strategic Transformation of Admission Quotas” (17 February 2025), Council of Higher Education News.

<sup>54</sup> “Admission Quotas Reduced: Public Universities to Admit 190,000 Fewer Students” (1 August 2025), T24.

<sup>55</sup> Bourcier, N. (October 2025). “La Turquie risque de perdre toute une partie de sa jeunesse, ni employée, ni scolarisée, ni en formation” [“Türkiye Risks Losing an Entire Segment of Its Youth, Neither Employed, Educated, nor in Training”]. *Le Monde*.

<sup>56</sup> “Le Monde: Türkiye Risks Losing a Generation of Its Youth” (November 2025), *Yabancı Basın*.

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24 October 2025 showed that the emigration rate among higher education graduates reached 2 percent, while the figure rose to 4.3 percent among graduates of foundation universities.

The United States (19.6 percent), Germany (19.4 percent), United Kingdom (11.3 percent), Netherlands (7 percent), and Canada (5.2 percent) were the principal destinations chosen by graduates.<sup>57</sup> A noteworthy feature of this pattern is that these destinations rank not only above Türkiye in terms of economic prosperity, but also significantly higher on the V-Dem Democracy Index (United States: 24th, Germany: 14th, United Kingdom: 22nd, Netherlands: 20th, and Canada: 26th).<sup>58</sup> The migration trend may therefore reflect more than economic motivations alone; it may also indicate a growing preference among graduates for societies offering stronger democratic institutions, civil liberties, and governance standards.

## Interventions Affecting Students' Right to Education and Freedom of Expression

The student protests that erupted across Türkiye after 19 March 2025, and the measures taken in response to them, had a direct and severely detrimental impact on students—the primary stakeholders of the higher education system. Police interventions against peaceful assemblies and demonstrations, often involving disproportionate use of force, were accompanied by detention and arrest measures, followed by disciplinary proceedings, criminal investigations, and expulsions from student dormitories. Collectively, these actions formed a comprehensive pattern of intervention that placed students under pressure on multiple fronts and encroached upon the very substance of their right to education.

-The administration of Boğaziçi University dismissed the executive boards of 28 student clubs and suspended the activities of six additional student groups until 28 March 2025. The affected clubs and groups had been among the signatories of a statement concerning the venue known as the “Occupation Café” (*İşgal Kafe*). The rectorate justified its decision by claiming that these organizations had encouraged actions constituting the offense of “unlawful occupation of property” under Article 154 of the Turkish Penal Code.<sup>59</sup> Faculty members expressing solidarity with the students criticized the measure, emphasizing the historic role of student organizations within the university. In a public statement, they noted: “The student clubs of Boğaziçi University are indispensable elements of our institutional culture. In our 162-year history, including the most repressive periods of Türkiye’s political past, student club activities have never been banned. Our campuses have always been places where students could express themselves freely.”<sup>60</sup>

-At Boğaziçi University, ten students who sought to stand for election to the Student Representative Council (ÖTK) were prevented from running after the university administration removed their names from the list of candidates. Following their objections, the students discovered that disciplinary investigations had been initiated against them and that they had been disqualified under a provision introduced through earlier amendments to the ÖTK Regulations requiring candidates to have no pending disciplinary proceedings.<sup>61</sup>

-In the aftermath of the “Occupation Café” (*İşgal Kafe*) protest, approximately twenty students were prohibited from entering the campus for three days. According to journalist Mehmet Baran Kılıç, Boğaziçi University justified the suspension of students from the university by invoking

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<sup>57</sup> “Higher Education Brain Drain Statistics,” Turkish Statistical Institute Data Portal.

<sup>58</sup> *Democracy Report 2023: Defiance in the Face of Autocratization* (March 2023), V-Dem Institute; *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot* (March 2024), V-Dem Institute; *Democracy Report 2025: 25 Years of Autocratization – Democracy Trumped?* (March 2025), V-Dem Institute.

<sup>59</sup> Dinç, A. (25 February 2025). “Penalty for the ‘Occupation Café’ at Boğaziçi University: ‘We Are Not Afraid of Batons.’” *Bianet*.

<sup>60</sup> “Boğaziçi University Academics React to the Decision Targeting Student Clubs” (28 February 2025), *BirGün*.

<sup>61</sup> “Obstacle to Student Representative Council (ÖTK) Candidates” (28 February 2025), *BirGün*.

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Article 54(6)(f) of the Higher Education Law. Kılıç pointed out, however, that this provision had already been struck down by the Constitutional Court in a decision published in the Official Gazette on 19 April 2024.<sup>62</sup>

-At a panel entitled “Human Rights in Gaza: Israel’s Actions and the Global Response,” organized by the New Media Club at Marmara University, students demanded that the university sever its institutional ties with University of Haifa, its designated “sister university.” Following these calls, the university administration initiated disciplinary proceedings against one of the participating students. According to press reports, the student was suspended for one month for allegedly “undermining the honor and dignity of university administrators and employees” by displaying a banner, repeating the message verbally during the event, and sharing it on an X account.<sup>63</sup>

-The modest increase in scholarships provided by the Credit and Dormitories Institution (KYK), coupled with significant increases in meal prices at public universities, further intensified the economic pressures faced by students in Türkiye. As a result, students organized protests across a number of universities to challenge rising living costs and deteriorating access to basic support services.<sup>64</sup> At the same time, the gradual reduction of already insufficient public dormitory accommodations prompted additional criticism and demonstrations, reflecting broader concerns regarding the affordability and accessibility of higher education.<sup>65</sup>

-Following the annulment of Ekrem İmamoğlu’s diploma, a wave of detentions and arrests targeted university students participating in demonstrations across Türkiye. Students placed in pre-trial detention were charged with violating the Law on Meetings and Demonstrations, while some were additionally accused of insulting the President or resisting law enforcement officers. Lawyers representing the students, most of whom were between 18 and 20 years old, noted that they had been detained on charges for which pre-trial detention had rarely been ordered in the past. They further alleged that the students had been subjected to ill-treatment during the detention process, including being required to remain standing for hours in buses and police stations.<sup>66 67</sup>

-In the aftermath of the arrests, students launched protests and boycott campaigns demanding the release of their detained classmates.<sup>68</sup> These mobilizations led some universities to employ forms of digital surveillance that were reported to have restricted—and in certain instances discouraged—the exercise of students’ right to protest. According to press reports, universities entered what was described as the era of “QR Code Attendance Monitoring.” Institutions such as Hacettepe University and Üsküdar University reportedly began using digital tracking systems to monitor classroom attendance and identify students and academics who, although present on campus, chose to participate in demonstrations rather than attend lectures. Through QR-code attendance checks conducted in lecture halls, university administrations were reportedly able to determine which individuals had joined the protests.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “A Sultan’s Decree from the Rector” (18 February 2025), BirGün. The Constitutional Court’s annulment decision no. E. 2023/78, K. 2024/55 was published in the Official Gazette on 19 April 2024 and entered into force nine months after publication, on 19 January 2025.

<sup>63</sup> Vural, A. (13 February 2025). “Student Suspended for Saying ‘Cut Relations with Israel.’” Bianet.

<sup>64</sup> Vural, A. (3 February 2025). “Cafeteria Price Increase at Boğaziçi: Once Again, University Students Bear the Burden of the Economic Crisis.” Bianet.

<sup>65</sup> Dinç, A. (23 May 2025). “Dormitory Protest at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University: ‘A Rector Appointed by Trusteeship Does Not Make a Rector, and a Campus Does Not Replace a Dormitory.’” Bianet.

<sup>66</sup> Sülün, Ü. G. (30 March 2025). “Attorney of Detained 19-Year-Old Ögetürk: There Is an Effort to Profile Young People.” Bianet.

<sup>67</sup> “Police Intervention Against Students at Dokuz Eylül University: Ten Students Detained” (21 March 2025), BirGün.

<sup>68</sup> Demirel, N. S. (6 April 2025). “University Students: We Will Continue to Stand Firm Until Our Friends Are Released.” Evrensel.

<sup>69</sup> “University Students to Be Monitored Through QR Codes” (18 April 2025), Evrensel.

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-YÖK joined the measures taken against students and academics involved in the protest movement by sending a directive to university rectorates calling for the initiation of the necessary “administrative and judicial” proceedings against students, faculty members, and administrative personnel who had either supported or participated in boycott actions.<sup>70</sup>

-In Hatay, Görkem Akşit, a university student and the child of a fallen soldier, was reportedly expelled from a KYK dormitory after posting a message in a WhatsApp group stating: “While our fellow university students across the country are resisting these injustices, it troubles me deeply to remain sitting here without taking action.”<sup>71</sup>

-Faculty members of the Faculty of Medicine at Hacettepe University issued a statement assessing the developments that followed the arrest of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. In their statement, they noted: “Our valued students, the pride of our university, are voicing their views and concerns regarding both the past and the present. They are calling for rights, justice, and the rule of law. Despite various pressures, they are expressing their thoughts and demands by exercising their democratic rights in a contemporary manner. They march together. They are determined. They are conscientious. Without harming anyone or resorting to insults, they seek to defend their rights and their future. They wish to receive a university education and to be treated with the respect and recognition they deserve. What they seek is not a privilege or a favor, but their most fundamental rights. We all know very well that they deserve far more than what they are asking for.”<sup>72</sup>

-Marmara University issued reprimands to students who had protested the murders of İkbâl Uzun and Ayşenur Halil—widely referred to in public debate as the “Wall Murders” (*Sur Cinayetleri*)—on the grounds that they had organized an unauthorized press statement and disrupted campus traffic.<sup>73</sup>

-At Hacettepe University, nearly thirty students became the subject of disciplinary investigations after criticizing the “Symposium on the Protection and Strengthening of the Family” in a WhatsApp group. The students defended their actions by arguing that “if the rectorate has the right to organize such a symposium, we also have the right to criticize it.”<sup>74</sup>

-Esila Ayık, a participant in the “Solidarity Stage” demonstration held in Kadıköy, Istanbul, on 8 April and attended by thousands of university students, was placed in pre-trial detention on charges of “insulting the President” after carrying a placard reading “Dictator Erdoğan.” Ayık, who was reported to have serious health conditions, remained detained for 36 days before being released at her first hearing. The court ordered the release of Ayık, Arda Öğüşlü, and Mehmet Efe Erdoğan despite the prosecutor’s request that their detention be maintained.<sup>75</sup>

-At Yıldız Technical University, disciplinary investigations were initiated against four students in connection with the “Boycott Café” protests. At Dicle University, students of the Faculty of Communication were not permitted to display a banner bearing the name of Musa Anter. Meanwhile, Kemalettin Aydın, Rector of Health Sciences University, reportedly issued warnings to students participating in protests, while students at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts

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<sup>70</sup> “YÖK Orders Investigations Against Academics and Students Participating in the Boycott” (8 April 2025), Evrensel.

<sup>71</sup> “Supported the İmamoğlu Protests... A Martyr’s Child Expelled from a KYK Dormitory” (27 March 2025), Cumhuriyet.

<sup>72</sup> “Support from Hacettepe University Faculty Members to Their Students: They Are Fighting for Their Future; What They Seek Is Not a Favor but Their Most Fundamental Rights!” (27 March 2025), T24.

<sup>73</sup> “Reprimand Issued by Marmara University for the Protest of the ‘Wall Murders’ (*Sur Cinayetleri*)” (16 March 2025), T24.

<sup>74</sup> “Nearly Thirty Students at Hacettepe University Face Investigation: Criticizing the ‘Year of the Family’ Symposium Cited as the Reason” (16 May 2025), Evrensel.

<sup>75</sup> “Student Prisoner Esila Ayık, Who Suffers from Serious Health Problems, Released from Detention” (15 May 2025), Bianet.

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University (MSGSÜ) faced administrative intervention in connection with their demonstrations.<sup>76</sup>

-At Boğaziçi University, it was reported that the graduate application of Pelin Gümüşdağ, who graduated first in the History Department with highest honors in 2025, was annulled by decision of the Institute of Social Sciences despite having been accepted by the department. Similarly, Berat Kaşkaloğlu, who had been admitted to a graduate program in Chemical Engineering, was removed from the program by the Institute of Science. His alumni card was also revoked, and he was banned from entering the university campus. According to reports, both students had participated in protests against the annulment of Ekrem İmamoğlu's diploma.<sup>77</sup>

-In a separate incident, Doruk Dörücü, a member of the CHP Youth Branches, was taken into custody after tearing up his diploma during the graduation ceremony at Boğaziçi University.<sup>78</sup>

-A third-year student at Trakya University who had participated in the 19 March protests and was detained during the demonstrations was subsequently notified by the Selimiye Dormitory Administration that he had been expelled from the dormitory. According to the notice served on the student, the decision was based on Article 24 of the Dormitory Services Regulation, which provides for expulsion in cases involving conduct deemed contrary to the constitutional characteristics of the Republic of Türkiye, activities alleged to undermine national unity and integrity, or participation in actions such as hunger strikes, sit-ins, carrying or displaying banners, and organizing or taking part in demonstrations, meetings, ceremonies, or public statements for ideological or political purposes.<sup>79</sup>

-At Bilkent University, students organized a forum to protest restrictions imposed on dormitory visiting hours, which they argued had been introduced without adequate justification. Following the forum, the university administration reportedly sent warning e-mails to the clubs and student groups that had called for the event. On the same day, the Women's Studies Society received a formal warning after organizing a march concerning the killing of Rojin Kabaiş, while a stand operated by the Vegan Society—which had been approved by the Student Activities Unit—was shut down by campus security on the grounds of materials distributed at the stand.<sup>80</sup>

-At Istanbul Bilgi University, students marched to the rectorate building chanting slogans in protest against the cancellation of the university's Spring Festival. Students participating in the demonstration carried slogans such as "Can Holding will leave, we will remain" and "The festival belongs to us and will remain ours," while also calling for the release of their detained fellow students.<sup>81</sup>

## C. Violations Concerning Scientific Freedom, the Personal Rights, and the Security of Academics

-A notable dispute concerning the employment rights of academics arose at Üsküdar University, which had failed to implement Additional Article 8(2) of Law No. 2547 requiring salary parity

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<sup>76</sup> Ayhan, K. (29 May 2025). "Pressure, Restrictions, and Interventions Continue at Universities." BirGün.

<sup>77</sup> Evrim, O. (20 July 2025). "Graduate Admission of Boğaziçi University's Top History Graduate Revoked." Evrensel.

<sup>78</sup> "CHP Announces: Doruk Dörücü, the Boğaziçi University Student Who Tore Up His Diploma, Taken into Custody" (4 July 2025), Diken.

<sup>79</sup> "Trakya University Student Who Participated in the 19 March Protests Expelled from Dormitory" (4 August 2025), T24.

<sup>80</sup> "Pressure on Students at Bilkent Intensifies: Penalty for Calling a Forum, Warning for a Women's March, and Intervention Against a Vegan Society Stand" (16 November 2025), Siyasi Haber.

<sup>81</sup> "Students Defend Cancelled Festivals" (13 May 2025), BirGün.

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between foundation and state universities.<sup>82</sup> An academic who served as an Assistant Professor at the university between 2019 and 2022 brought legal action before the Istanbul 4th Administrative Court after the institution refused to apply the salary equalization requirement during his period of employment. Following approximately eighteen months of litigation, the court ruled in the academic's favor and ordered the university to compensate him for the salary shortfall, together with interest.<sup>83</sup>

-The deteriorating economic position of academics has emerged as a major concern within Türkiye's higher education system in recent years. Against this backdrop, the Academic Solidarity Platform (ADAP) called for salary increases and the introduction of a guaranteed minimum salary framework for academic staff. In its statement, ADAP recalled that the poverty threshold in Türkiye had reached 78,292 Turkish lira in April 2025 and argued that academic salaries had failed to keep pace with the rising cost of living. According to the Platform, a professor's salary, which had stood 41 percent above the poverty threshold in April 2015, was only 19 percent above it a decade later. Over the same period, the salary of a research assistant fell from 18 percent below the poverty threshold to 22 percent below it.

ADAP further stated that, under increasingly difficult economic conditions, it was unacceptable for newly appointed research assistants to earn approximately 60,000 Turkish lira per month and for professors with twenty-five years of service to receive salaries of around 90,000 Turkish lira. The Platform therefore demanded that academic salaries be restructured, beginning with research assistants, so that the minimum salary level would be set at no less than twice the poverty threshold.<sup>84</sup>

## Non-Compliance with Judicial Decisions and Legal Uncertainty

Academic freedom is safeguarded not merely by the existence of constitutional and statutory protections, but by the consistent and effective enforcement of those protections. In 2025, one of the most serious challenges observed in the higher education sector was the failure of university administrations to comply with judicial decisions issued in favor of academic staff. Court rulings ordering reinstatement, invalidating decisions of university bodies, or determining that disciplinary sanctions were unlawful were, in a number of instances, either ignored or rendered ineffective in practice. This pattern has contributed to a growing sense of legal uncertainty and has weakened the effectiveness of judicial remedies, raising concerns about the practical enforceability of rights within the higher education system.

The consequences of this problem extend well beyond individual cases. By undermining the credibility and deterrent force of legal guarantees, the failure to comply with judicial decisions weakens the very mechanisms intended to protect rights within higher education. The belief that favorable court rulings may ultimately remain unenforced discourages affected individuals from pursuing legal remedies, broadens the space for arbitrary administrative action, and fosters deep mistrust within the academic community.

The examples presented below demonstrate that the rule of law in higher education is being eroded not only in principle but also in its day-to-day operation. For this reason, the report treats non-compliance with judicial decisions as a separate category of structural violation.

-Legal proceedings arising from the dismissal of members of the Academics for Peace (BAK) initiative, which began in 2016, remained largely unresolved in 2025 despite the passage of

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<sup>82</sup> Additional Article 8(2): "Faculty members employed by foundation universities may not be paid less than the remuneration paid to faculty members holding equivalent academic titles at state universities. For the purposes of this provision, the calculation of the equivalent remuneration paid at state universities shall take into account payments attached to positions for which salary provisions are applied under the relevant legislation."

<sup>83</sup> "Landmark Ruling Against Üsküdar University for Failing to Comply with YÖK's Salary Equalization Decision" (14 February 2025), T24.

<sup>84</sup> Sağol, B. (7 June 2025). "Academics on the Brink of Poverty." BirGün.

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nearly a decade. Of the 385 academics who challenged their dismissal, only 117 succeeded in obtaining reinstatement decisions. The appeals of the remaining applicants have been awaiting review before the Council of State for years. As a result, among the hundreds of academics dismissed eight years ago, only four have received final and enforceable reinstatement rulings.<sup>85</sup>

-A further development illustrating the persistence of legal uncertainty occurred during the first week of March 2026, when the Fifth Chamber of the Council of State adopted a new line of jurisprudence in a case concerning the Academics for Peace. The decision, issued over two dissenting opinions, raised serious concerns regarding both academic freedom and the effective implementation of constitutional rights. The Chamber effectively concluded that the Constitutional Court's finding of a violation of freedom of expression in the *Zübeyde Füsün Üstel* judgment<sup>86</sup> did not bind its assessment of related administrative disputes. It also held that acquittals rendered by criminal courts would not necessarily influence administrative proceedings arising from the same facts. This approach echoed the institutional tensions previously seen in the Can Atalay case, in which the Third Criminal Chamber of the Court of Cassation publicly refused to implement a Constitutional Court judgment and initiated criminal proceedings against the Constitutional Court judges who had supported it.

In its reasoning, the majority of the Fifth Chamber relied on an information note prepared by the General Directorate of Security and endorsed its assessment of the Peace Petition. As a result, the significant advances in freedom of expression associated with the *Üstel* judgment have been substantially called into question.

According to a report by Gökçer Tahincioğlu published on 14 March 2026, the Fifth Chamber of the Council of State subsequently reconsidered the issue in an enlarged formation after two conflicting decisions had been issued by the same chamber within a period of five months. During deliberations attended by the presiding judge and seven members, the Chamber overturned a regional administrative court decision that had upheld the exclusion of a dismissed academic from public service.

In its majority judgment, the Chamber underscored the binding nature of Constitutional Court decisions and stated that there was no longer any need for alternative interpretations regarding the reinstatement of academics dismissed solely for signing the Peace Petition. The judgment also examined the concepts of loyalty to the state and alleged links to unlawful organizations. Significantly, the Chamber observed that even failure to comply with Constitutional Court judgments, although potentially incompatible with the duty of loyalty to the state, could not by itself be interpreted as evidence of organizational affiliation.

Relying on the Constitutional Court's Academics for Peace jurisprudence, the Chamber concluded that signing the petition constituted an act protected by freedom of thought and expression and therefore could no longer provide a lawful basis for claims of affiliation or connection with the PKK/KCK. It further held that the content of the petition did not justify associating its signatories with a terrorist organization. The Chamber therefore found the reasoning of the Regional Administrative Court to be legally flawed and emphasized that reaching the opposite conclusion would effectively amount to disregarding the Constitutional Court's judgment.<sup>87</sup>

-Levent Dölek, a research assistant at the Faculty of Economics of Istanbul University and a member of Eğitim-Sen, was detained and subsequently placed in pre-trial detention after participating in protests that followed the arrest of Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu. Dölek had also joined a one-day strike organized by Eğitim-Sen in support of the academic boycott launched by university students. On 26 March, police officers raided

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<sup>85</sup> Şenol, F. (7 February 2025). "Eight Years of Exile: The Current State of the University Purge." *Gazete Duvar*.

<sup>86</sup> *Zübeyde Füsün Üstel* Application (Official Gazette, 19 September 2019).

<sup>87</sup> Tahincioğlu, G. (14 March 2026). "Council of State: 'Failure to Comply with Constitutional Court Judgments Is Also Contrary to the Duty of Loyalty'; Opens the Door to the Reinstatement of the Academics for Peace."

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his home and took him into custody. After being transferred to the courthouse, he was reportedly remanded in custody by the court without first being questioned by the prosecutor.<sup>88</sup> Although Dölek was released approximately fifteen days later, reports indicated that his trial would not begin until September 2025.<sup>89</sup> Although no information could be obtained regarding subsequent developments in the case, the length of time between his release and the scheduled trial date is striking.

-According to a statement by the Ankara Branch No. 5 (Universities) of Eğitim-Sen, an instructor assigned to teach courses at the Faculty of Education of Hacettepe University had his appointment terminated after expressing support for students' boycott action. The decision reportedly followed a complaint submitted by a student through CİMER (the Presidential Communication Center), after which the Faculty Board decided to sever the instructor's affiliation with the university.<sup>90</sup> A similar measure was reportedly taken at Gebze Technical University on the same grounds.<sup>91</sup>

-Members of the Alternative Academy Community at Ankara University publicly criticized what they described as unlawful police intervention during a student orientation and networking event held at the beginning of the academic year. According to the students, police officers present on campus collected the identity information of those seeking to attend the gathering. The Community further alleged that, in the days following the event, students whose information had been recorded—as well as members of their families—were contacted by individuals claiming to be police officers and subjected to harassment and intimidation. Members of the Alternative Academy Community argued that these practices were intended to hinder students' academic and social activities and issued their statement at the offices of Eğitim-Sen Branch No. 5.<sup>92</sup>

## Employment Rights, Job Security, and Academic Freedom at Foundation Universities

The situation of academic staff employed at foundation universities warrants particular attention not only from the perspective of labor rights but also with regard to academic freedom. Current practices, including annual or short-term contracts, the threat of non-renewal, arbitrary dismissals, allegations of non-compliance with court decisions, and claims of wage inequality, make it difficult for faculty members at these institutions to feel secure in their employment. In an environment where job security is weakened, academic staff may face disincentives not only in relation to their employment but also when exercising their rights to express public views within their fields of expertise, criticize university administrations, demonstrate solidarity with students, or participate in trade union activities.

Throughout 2025, numerous developments at foundation universities illustrated the concrete manifestations of this structural problem. The dismissal of long-serving academics solely on economic grounds, legal disputes concerning compliance with equal-pay obligations, and cases in which reinstatement orders were implemented selectively, delayed, or carried out in a manner that created new forms of hardship all point to a problem that extends beyond isolated incidents. These examples indicate that the status of academic staff at foundation universities has become increasingly dependent on institutional managerial discretion and that the principle of legal

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<sup>88</sup> Sülün, Ü. G. (27 March 2025). "Sayın: Levent Dölek Was Detained on the Basis of a Single Photograph." Bianet.

<sup>89</sup> "Release Ordered for Academic Levent Dölek" (10 April 2025), Bianet.

<sup>90</sup> "Eğitim-Sen: Academic at Hacettepe University Dismissed for Supporting the Academic Boycott" (12 May 2025), Evrensel.

<sup>91</sup> Kozan, H. G. (27 May 2025). "Two Academics Subject to Investigation at Gebze Technical University." Evrensel.

<sup>92</sup> "Students Protest Profiling at Ankara University" (22 October 2025), BirGün.

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certainty has been weakened. The consequences appear particularly significant for early-career academics and research assistants, affecting critical inquiry, institutional commitment, and the capacity to make long-term academic investments.

-A notable example of personnel practices that may undermine legal certainty at foundation universities emerged at Altınbaş University. Professor Alper Kaliber and Lecturer Esra Kaliber, who had served at the university for eleven years, were dismissed solely on the stated ground that the institution was “operating at a loss.”<sup>93</sup>

-With the conclusion of the 2024–2025 academic year, lecturers at foundation universities once again faced unemployment, as has occurred in previous years. Reports indicated that at least 79 lecturers across several institutions had lost their positions by July. According to a statement issued by the Foundation Universities Unit of the Private Sector Teachers’ Union, academics working at foundation universities regularly encounter collective dismissals during the summer months. The statement asserted that these dismissals are often carried out without clear justification, sometimes on the basis of vague administrative decisions and at other times for financial or managerial reasons. The Union further stated that information and applications received through various channels indicated that dozens of academics had been dismissed at multiple foundation universities during the year. It argued that these cases reflected not merely individual grievances but a broader structural problem. According to the statement, the widespread use of annually renewed contracts leaves academics without meaningful job security and uncertain as to whether they will continue in their positions from one year to the next. The Union maintained that annual contracts, dismissal decisions taken without effective oversight, and restrictions on academic freedom arising from administrative discretion risk transforming universities from institutions of scholarship into precarious and temporary workplaces.<sup>94</sup>

-While allegations of arbitrary dismissals continued at foundation universities, court-ordered reinstatements likewise continued to face implementation problems. A notable example occurred at Kadir Has University. Zeliha Gizem Sayın, a lecturer who had been dismissed in September 2024 on the grounds that she had completed her doctoral studies, challenged the decision before the courts. On 30 May, the court ruled that the termination decision should be annulled and that the rights and benefits of which she had been deprived should be restored. However, reports indicated that the university administration failed to implement the decision despite having been formally notified of it on 22 June. One hundred and thirty-six days after the reinstatement ruling, the university had reportedly neither reinstated Sayın nor paid the sums owed to her. In a statement, Eğitim-Sen Istanbul Branch No. 6 (Universities) called on foundation universities, and particularly Kadir Has University, to refrain from practices undermining job security. The union further emphasized that unlawful dismissals confirmed by judicial decisions should not be repeated and stressed that, like all institutions, foundation universities are obliged to implement court judgments without delay.<sup>95</sup>

## D. Gender Equality

According to YÖK statistics published in March 2026, the proportion of women in academic positions at state and foundation universities stood at 35.49 percent among full professors, 44.32 percent among associate professors, and 48.17 percent among assistant professors. By contrast, women accounted for 55.32 percent of research assistants—the entry-level position in

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<sup>93</sup> “Professor Alper Kaliber and Esra Kaliber Dismissed from Altınbaş University” (21 February 2025), T24

<sup>94</sup> Sağol, B. (16 July 2025). “A ‘Private-Sector’ Purge in Academia.” BirGün.

<sup>95</sup> “Court Judgment Remains Unimplemented for 136 Days: University Fails to Comply with Ruling.” BirGün.

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the academic career path and the category that largely consists of master's and doctoral students.<sup>96</sup>

These figures illustrate the persistence of a “glass ceiling” within academic career progression. While women constitute a majority at the entry stage of academic careers, their representation steadily declines at higher academic ranks. The proportion of women falls by approximately twenty percentage points between the research assistant level and the rank of full professor.

No gender-disaggregated data concerning academics holding administrative positions could be identified on YÖK’s statistical portal. However, an online survey conducted for the purposes of this report found that, as of 6 March 2026, only four of Türkiye’s 128 active state universities and thirteen of its seventy-four foundation universities were headed by women rectors.<sup>97</sup>

Information regarding the number of women serving as deans is even more difficult to obtain. The production and publication of gender-disaggregated statistics on academic leadership positions by YÖK would constitute an important component of gender equality policies that have been promoted throughout Türkiye’s European Union harmonization process.

The practice of requiring women’s studies and gender studies initiatives across universities to be framed under the broader category of “family and women” continued during the reporting period. One example of this policy, which has been criticized as an interference with academic freedom, can be found in the amendment of the regulation governing the Women’s Issues Research and Application Center at Zonguldak Bülent Ecevit University.

Under a new regulation published in the Official Gazette on 20 July 2025, the center’s name was changed to the “Women and Family Studies Research and Application Center.” The amendment removed the term “women’s issues” from the regulation and replaced it with “women and family studies.” As a result, research activities focusing specifically on women’s issues may increasingly be conducted within a framework emphasizing family-related themes.<sup>98</sup>

The rejection of a comprehensive approach to gender equality policies, the limited understanding of temporary special measures as an important tool for achieving equality, and continuing interventions in universities’ efforts to institutionalize such policies have increasingly hindered progress toward equality in higher education. An employment advertisement issued by Karadeniz Technical University illustrates this phenomenon.

In December 2024, the university published a vacancy announcement for an administrative staff position in the Official Gazette that, unlike comparable positions, included a requirement that applicants be male. A woman who challenged the announcement before the Ombudsman Institution (KDK) argued that the gender requirement unlawfully prevented female candidates from applying and requested that the advertisement be withdrawn and reissued without a gender restriction.

In its response, the university rectorate stated that the position involved market research, procurement procedures, and post-purchase acceptance processes. The rectorate further explained that women previously employed in similar positions had reported exposure to offensive language and inappropriate behavior and had subsequently requested reassignment. According to the university, these circumstances justified limiting the position to male applicants.

The Ombudsman Institution, however, concluded that the requirement violated both the principle of equality before the law and the right of access to public service. It recommended

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<sup>96</sup> [Higher Education Information Management System \(YÖKSİS\)](#).

<sup>97</sup> State and Foundation University Rectors. As of March 2026, this source listed the rectors of 128 state universities and 74 foundation universities.

<sup>98</sup> “The Term ‘Women’s Issues’ Removed from the Regulations of Bülent Ecevit University” (20 July 2025), Bianet.

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that the advertisement be cancelled and that future recruitment processes be based on objective and general qualifications directly related to the requirements of the position.<sup>99</sup>

Reports of sexual harassment in higher education continue to reveal a recurring pattern in which female students are subjected to misconduct by male members of academic staff occupying different positions within the academic hierarchy. The available evidence suggests that many university administrations remain either unwilling or insufficiently equipped to develop effective institutional mechanisms for preventing sexual harassment and responding appropriately when allegations arise. The effective investigation and sanctioning of sexual harassment and sexual violence in universities depend on the existence of stable institutional structures, clear procedures, and sustained administrative commitment. Where investigations fail to produce meaningful outcomes or sanctions remain unenforced, reporting mechanisms risk losing credibility and complainants may be discouraged from coming forward. The examples discussed below, together with disciplinary proceedings initiated against individuals who reported harassment, illustrate some of the shortcomings in the way these issues have been addressed.

-At Istanbul University, disciplinary proceedings were initiated against students who publicly alleged that a member of the Department of Physics in the Faculty of Science had verbally harassed female students during classes. The students protested the academic by pouring purple paint outside his office and displaying messages condemning the alleged misconduct.<sup>100</sup>

-A similar development occurred at Kocaeli University, where disciplinary investigations were opened against students who participated in a protest demanding an investigation into allegations that Research Assistant Dr. A.A. of the Department of Philosophy had harassed students. On 20 October 2025, the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences sent the students notices requesting their defense statements as part of disciplinary proceedings. The notices alleged that the students had disrupted disciplinary order by organizing an unauthorized demonstration in front of the faculty building and summoned them to appear before the dean's office on 3 November 2025 pursuant to Article 54 of Law No. 2547. According to statements given by students to Bianet, the university administration was perceived as responding to the protest rather than addressing the underlying allegations.<sup>101</sup>

-The tension between gender equality policies and gender-segregated practices was also reflected in a debate at Istanbul Technical University (İTÜ). The university administration announced that separate sports facilities would be opened exclusively for women students and staff within the Olympic Swimming Pool Complex. In a public statement, Rector Hasan Mandal explained that the initiative had been developed in response to requests and feedback received from students. Despite the rectorate's characterization of the project as demand-driven, the decision generated criticism from some students, who described it as a form of gender segregation. The controversy highlighted broader disagreements over whether separate facilities for women should be viewed as a measure expanding access and participation or as a practice reinforcing gender-based separation in public spaces. Speaking to *Cumhuriyet*, Eğitim-Sen Higher Education and Education Secretary Evrim Gülez argued that directing women toward separate facilities does not enhance their security but instead risks limiting their visibility and participation in public life. According to Gülez, such measures may reproduce gendered boundaries within the university environment under the guise of protection.<sup>102</sup>

The expectation that universities should provide an environment consistent with contemporary approaches to education, social life, and equal participation is widely regarded as a fundamental

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<sup>99</sup> “‘Cancel the Advertisement’: Recommendation to a University Seeking Male Staff Because ‘People Use Slang’” (20 June 2025), Diken.

<sup>100</sup> “Students Who Publicized Harassment Allegations at Istanbul University Face Disciplinary Investigation” (14 July 2025), T24.

<sup>101</sup> Vural, A. (7 November 2025). “Disciplinary Investigation Against Students Who Said ‘We Do Not Want a Harassing Academic’.” Bianet.

<sup>102</sup> “İTÜ Rector Announces Separate Sports Facility for Women Students” (25 November 2025), Cumhuriyet.

feature of higher education in secular societies. For this reason, gender-based practices on university campuses and restrictions arising from attitudes toward relations between women and men could, in principle, be addressed under several of the rights violations discussed above. However, the issue extends beyond individual incidents or isolated restrictions. A broader concern is the extent to which traditional gender roles continue to be reinforced through institutional policies and practices adopted by university administrations.

At many regional universities, Gender Equality Action Plans can no longer be found on institutional websites. At the same time, a growing number of universities have established or maintained “Women and Family Studies Research and Application Centers” in place of structures explicitly oriented toward gender equality.<sup>103</sup> This development cannot be understood merely as a change in institutional terminology. Rather, it reflects a broader shift in policy orientation, from a framework centered on gender equality toward one that increasingly prioritizes the family as the primary reference point for addressing women’s issues. Critics contend that this transformation has altered the focus of public policy and institutional practice in ways that weaken efforts to achieve substantive equality. In their view, it also risks diluting the state’s obligation—arising from both international commitments and Article 10 of the Constitution—to promote gender equality and adopt measures capable of achieving equality in practice.

## E. Structural Trends and Vulnerable Groups

The violations documented throughout 2025 indicate that the problems affecting higher education in Türkiye cannot be reduced to a series of isolated incidents. Rather, they reveal recurring patterns that point to deeper structural dynamics. The growing concentration of authority in rectorates and university administrations, the increasing reliance on disciplinary measures and dormitory sanctions against students, and persistent practices affecting academic staff—such as contract non-renewal, dismissals, and failures to implement reinstatement decisions—have contributed to a broader climate of insecurity and deterrence across the higher education sector.

The burden of this climate falls disproportionately on vulnerable groups, including early-career academics, research assistants, faculty members employed at foundation universities, student clubs, student representatives, and students who become publicly visible through protest, advocacy, or criticism. Pressure directed at these groups does not merely result in individual rights violations; it also weakens intellectual pluralism, institutional participation, and the capacity of universities to function as spaces of open inquiry and democratic engagement.

The findings of this report suggest that one of the most significant consequences of the contraction of academic and civic freedoms in Turkish higher education has been the emergence of a pervasive sense of insecurity and self-censorship among members of the academic community across different institutional and professional statuses.

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<sup>103</sup> The following universities maintain research and application centers organized under the framework of “Women and Family” studies rather than gender equality studies: Bayburt University, *Women and Family Issues Research and Application Center*; Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University, *Women and Family Studies Research and Application Center*; Hitit University, *Women and Family Issues Research and Application Center*; Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, *Family and Women’s Issues Research and Application Center*; Çukurova University, *Women and Family Studies Research and Application Center*; and Anadolu University, *Women and Family Studies Research and Application Center (AKAUM)*.

## F. Conclusion

The freedom of science and the arts, guaranteed under Article 27 of the Constitution, provides that “everyone has the right to learn and teach science and the arts freely, to explain, disseminate, and conduct all kinds of research in these fields.” In this respect, it constitutes a specific manifestation, within the sphere of academic and artistic activity, of the freedoms of thought, opinion, expression, and dissemination protected by Articles 25 and 26 of the Constitution. One of the essential preconditions for the effective enjoyment of these freedoms is the right to liberty and security of person guaranteed under Article 19.

During the 2025 academic year, one of the most significant challenges observed in universities was the extent to which the right to liberty and security of person—particularly for students, but also for academic staff—was subjected to interventions that appeared to function as deterrent measures regardless of whether the legal conditions for such restrictions had been fully satisfied. These practices frequently operated as forms of advance sanction, creating a chilling effect on the exercise of academic and civic freedoms. The development and flourishing of free and critical thought depend on individuals feeling secure within their working and learning environments and being able to pursue their core activities of inquiry, teaching, learning, and knowledge production in conditions that do not threaten the exercise of fundamental freedoms. The findings of the 2025 academic year suggest that it is difficult to conclude that all members of the university community were able to carry out their roles within such an environment of security and confidence.

As in the previous year, the deterioration of freedom of expression and academic freedom in Türkiye during 2025 largely mirrored broader patterns of democratic decline observed both within the country and internationally. The safeguards and institutional achievements of a democratic, secular, and rule-based constitutional order remained under pressure throughout the reporting period. Universities occupy a unique position in responding to these challenges. Their role is not only to transmit the values and principles associated with democracy, secularism, and the rule of law through teaching and research, but also to serve as spaces of critical inquiry capable of identifying, questioning, and publicly addressing developments that threaten those principles.

While the 2025 Academic Freedom Report was being prepared, the Fifth Chamber of the Council of State issued a decision departing from the established case law of the Eighth Chamber, holding that the Constitutional Court’s judgment in the *Zübeyde Füsun Üstel* case was not binding in the matter under consideration. Subsequently, after two conflicting decisions had been issued by the same chamber within a period of five months, the Fifth Chamber reconvened in an enlarged composition to reconsider the issue. In its new majority decision, the Chamber overturned a lower administrative court ruling that had denied the reinstatement of a dismissed academic. Although this jurisprudential correction represented a significant development, legal uncertainty persists because of the inconsistency in the Chamber’s case law and the absence of a unifying decision by the Administrative Chambers Assembly of the Council of State. As a result, uncertainty regarding the legal status of similar cases continues to affect the protection of academic freedom.

Universities, composed of academic staff, students, and administrative personnel, have a responsibility both to participate in and help shape debates that contribute to societal development and to cultivate the questions of the future within an environment of free inquiry. As the Science Academy, we remain committed to promoting and monitoring the fulfillment of this mission in accordance with universal standards.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Science Academy, *Research–University* section of the Sarkaç popular science platform, featuring articles and interviews on academic freedom, institutional autonomy, structural challenges in higher education, and examples of good practice.

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Respectfully submitted to the public.

**Board of Directors**  
**Science Academy**