



Science Academy Bulletin on Academic Freedoms – No. 1 February 2021

Introduction

The Science Academy has been issuing Reports on the state of Academic Freedoms in Turkey since 2015. These Reports deal with the working conditions of academics within the context of scientific freedom and human rights in general. The Reports monitor the legislation on higher education from the point of view of compliance with international standards and pinpoint those regulations which violate scientific freedoms. Due to the large number of rights violations, only a few cases can be considered in detail and some conclusions can be drawn regarding the general picture. These Reports are disseminated within the academia and the general public, in certain cases they are addressed to the pertinent agencies, and also translated into English, to be shared with the federations such as ALLEA and ISC, of which the Science Academy is a member, and IHRNASS, the International Human Rights Network of Academies and Scholarly Societies.

The appointment, on January 2nd, 2021, of a rector to the Bogazici University by Presidential Decree, without any consultation with the academic bodies, have raised the question of academic freedoms and institutional autonomy, not just at Bogazici University but universities in Turkey at large. The Science Academy issued a statement, on February 3rd, 2021, expressly dealing with the basic principles and legal issues involved. In the face of a salvo of libelous allegations from some high-ranking officials and certain members of the press against some scientists (including a number of our members) the Science Academy issued a second statement on February 8th, 2021. Since then, personal attacks against members of the Science Academy and other academics, as well as violations of academic freedoms and institutional autonomy, continue unabated.

The Council of the Science Academy has decided to closely follow the developments and share them with the public by means of brief bulletins.

The case of Sami Gulgoz. (Prof. Dr., Bogazici University, Psychology. Member of the science Academy.)

Sami Gulgoz, shared his views concerning recent events via e-mail with other academics of Bogazici University. His message, which had been shared only within a closed circle, did not contain any offensive expression. Nevertheless, it was carried by a number of daily newspapers and he was *accused* of being a “provocateur,” a “militant” and of “supporting the uprising”.

The case of Ustun Erguder. (Prof. Dr., Bogazici University, Political Science) Ustun Erguder, is an honorary member of the Science Academy. He has served as the president of Magna Charta Universitatum and rector of Bogazici University, with important contributions to the development of higher education in Turkey. The Minister of Interior called up Ustun Erguder mentioned that his name came up very often at Bogazici University and asked for his opinion regarding what was going on at Bogazici. After Erguder's interviews on the media however, the Minister took on a very hostile stand, with accusations of provocation and immorality.

**

We have repeatedly asserted in our previous reports that, in Turkey, any view or opinion differing from those of the government is now apt to be labelled as betrayal or treason, and those holding such views accused of being terrorists or immoral; the expression of independent opinion is all but stifled. The targeting of universities, considered to be the cradles of free thought, as well as university staff and students, is no different from what is encountered in anti-democratic regimes. No country, especially one who aspires to having at least two of its universities being included in the top 100 universities in the world, or conquering the moon, can make progress without setting up autonomous universities. Without free universities, there cannot be innovation, scientific leadership or prestige. It is very sad that the press, instead of taking up the role demanded of them in democratic countries, are becoming accomplices to such attacks.

The Magna Charta Universitatum Observatory has conveyed their apprehensions regarding the events on the Bogazici University campus on February 11, 2021, by means of an open letter to the President of Turkey, sent via the Higher Education Council. We expect that the recipients shall carefully evaluate the contents of this letter published by the Observatory, who monitors the adherence of universities all over the world (including 35 from Turkey) to the tenets of the Magna Charta Universitatum, which is a manifesto of academic freedom and institutional autonomy.

The European Universities Association (EUA), founded by European Universities to foster quality education and research as well as academic freedoms and institutional autonomy, has issued a statement (<https://eua.eu/news/627:turkey-and-university-autonomy-criticism-rises-as-government-appoints-new-rector.html>) regarding the autonomy of universities in Turkey. The membership commitments spelled out for the members, including 55 universities from Turkey, besides the Rectors' Council of the Higher Education Council of Turkey, can be found here (https://eua.eu/downloads/content/eua%20membership%20commitment%20statement_2019.pdf).