



SCIENCE ACADEMY, TURKEY STATEMENT ON THE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS AT BOĞAZIÇI UNIVERSITY

In many of its statements to this day, The Science Academy, Turkey- Bilim Akademisi has, in line with its founding philosophy, underlined the importance of the freedom of organization for academic freedoms and university autonomy.¹ In our last statement dated February 3rd, 2021, we had reiterated that for the academic success of a university, determining its organization and directors is a *sine qua non*. No institution or person can assign the president of a university better than the university body itself. It would be a great mistake to believe that in a country with 207 universities, all the university presidents can be best selected by a single person/institution. Expecting such a practice to have beneficial results or to contribute to the advancement of science in the country would be a gross mistake. A system that relies on a single person's decision-making is likely to have a higher margin of error than any system based on elections. The fact that the appointed president of Boğaziçi University (BU) was removed in less than six months, without specifying any reasons,² clearly indicates how problematic the current 'system' is. As much as the overnight appointment of the previous president was a fundamental violation of the University's autonomy, the method to remove him from office was no less a grave violation.³

Even though we would like to interpret the removal of the appointed president as the success of the righteous resistance of all stakeholders of BU, the Board of Higher Education's (YÖK) announcement⁴ accepting nationwide applications for the BU Presidency invalidates these aspirations. In addition, the interim president Prof. Dr. Naci İnci's decision to discharge several faculty members without consulting their colleges or departments is a move that signals further deterioration.⁵

¹ <https://en.bilimakademisi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/science-academy-turkey-bilim-akademisi-report-on-academic-freedoms-2019-2020-eng.pdf>

² According to the press, Prof. Melih Bulu's removal from office has been a consequence of the Board of Higher Education's investigation due to allegations of plagiarism.

<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/melih-bulunun-intihal-iddialariyla-ilgili-sikayetler-yoke-gonderildi-1852530>

³ Besides, the overnight founding of a faculty of law and a faculty of communications at BU (without serving any reason) indicates that the purpose is not to increase the university's scientific qualifications but rather to hamper them. This was possible due to the Law on Organization of Higher Education, Annex Art. 30 that endows the President of Turkey with '*the authority to establish faculties, institutes and colleges, and to combine, close, link and rename such institutions*'. Cf. on the unconstitutionality of this provision Burak Oder, [Cumhurbaşkanının Yükseköğretim Kurumlarında Akademik Yapı Değişikliği Yapma Yetkisine İlişkin Bazı Değerlendirmeler](#), www.idare.gen.tr, March 2021). The 'tailor-made' job-[announcements](#) for hiring academic staff to these newly-founded faculties also show that a merit-based employment is not at the foreground.

⁴ <https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/DuyuruDetay.aspx?did=1097>

⁵ <https://t24.com.tr/haber/bogazici-universitesi-nde-akademisyen-can-candan-in-derslerine-son-verildi.966423>

Like many other countries governed with a mindset that views universities as ‘adversaries’ and aims to suppress all sorts of opposition, the desire to subdue universities has become all too clear in Turkey. However, governments in dispute with science and scientific institutions are impeding the efficiency of universities and thereby wasting the country’s resources under the false belief that scientific productivity is possible while operating in a chain of command.

Democracy is not monophony. It is also not a regime where the majority is always right. Only a polyphony of voices minimizes the margin of error of any system. In fact, the main objective of democracy is not to hand over power to the majority but to provide minorities and opposing voices the liberty to express themselves. Only when governments respond to criticisms with respect and scientific basis, can we be sure that their acts will also serve the common good. This is where the most prominent role of the universities comes into play: A government that respects its country, land, younger generations, and the future is one that works with scientific institutions at every step and allows for the broadest possible challenges to its viewpoints. Yet, the ongoing suppression of universities, not only in Turkey but also around the globe, is an ominous sign that we are drifting apart from democracy day-by-day.

In this regard, we are pleased to learn that in November 2021, YÖK will be organizing the first Higher Education Forum with participation from all stakeholders and is planning to open to discussion topics such as ‘the organization and management of higher education,’ ‘accountability and transparency,’ ‘freedom of science and administrative autonomy,’ ‘merit and proficiency in the academy.’⁶ The most urgent issue in the Turkish higher education system is legal reform. It is not possible to form an institutional structure that seriously recognizes the university autonomy as defined in Art. 130 of the Constitution, without first acknowledging that universities are separate legal entities possessing the human capital necessary for self-governance.

As the Science Academy, we shall be participating in the Forum and support all moves towards re-establishing the university autonomy in our country. However, prior to the Council meeting, it is YÖK’s utmost duty to take the necessary steps to correct the wrongdoings in the BU president appointment process and pave the way for the appointment of a new president that stakeholders of BU will accept.

Respectfully announced to the public,

Executive Board, The Science Academy, Turkey- Bilim Akademisi
July 19, 2021

⁶ https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/2021/1_yuksekokretim_surasi.aspx