



Science Academy, Türkiye

Academic Freedoms Report 2022-2023

A. Introduction

It is disheartening that on the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Turkish Republic, there remains a necessity to compile an 'Academic Freedoms Report.' Furthermore, the tragic earthquakes of February 6, which claimed the lives of over fifty thousand individuals and left more than one hundred and twenty thousand injured, underscore the detrimental impact of the constrained practice of science over the past two decades. The erosion of emphasis on science and scientific data intensifies our sorrow as members of the Science Academy. Despite all the warnings expressed by many scientists for years, construction of buildings in defiance of earthquake regulations, interventions compromising building stability, and the decision to legitimize such structures through issued 'amnesties' continued, despite the well-known risks to human life.¹ As a result, the people of Türkiye were once again forced to experience the bitter consequences of the government's fight with science and scientists.²

In addition to ignoring the justified criticisms and suggestions of scientists, we are also going through a period in which it is becoming increasingly difficult to train good scientists. As the Science Academy has repeatedly underlined in its reports,³ while the number of universities opened in Türkiye between 1923 and 2006 was 75 (52 public universities/23 foundation universities), 41 universities were established in 41 provinces in the period 2006-2008, i.e. in three years. From 2006 to the end of 2023, a total of 125 universities were established. Of these, 74 are public universities and 51 are foundation universities. Apart from questioning the extent to which these universities, opened without the essential academic staff and falling short of meeting minimum scientific standards,⁴ align with the government's

¹ See the indictment on the İsiyas Hotel, where 72 people lost their lives: <https://t24.com.tr/haber/isias-davasi-skandallar-zincirini-ortaya-cikardi,1144678>. According to the news report, 'In the indictment with 11 defendants revealing the scandals related to the hotel building, it was emphasised that the foundation of the building was laid without obtaining a ground survey report, the licence was issued as a "residence", the construction of 13 floors was condoned although the licence was issued for 9 floors, and when the licence was converted into a hotel, a report was obtained from engineers "that the building was strong"'. The illegal floor built on the building benefited from the zoning amnesty in 2018.

² See ŞEYLA BENHABİP <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/02/22/erdogan-war-academia-university-experts-earthquakes-deadly/>; for translation see: <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/erdoganin-akademiye-karsi-verdigi-savasin-olumcul-bedeli-haber-1605250>.

³ See [Academic Freedoms Report \(2021-2022\)](#), Bilim Akademisi – Science Academy Türkiye p. 16, [Academic Freedoms Report \(2020-2021\)](#), Bilim Akademisi – Science Academy Türkiye p. 6-7; [Academic Freedoms Report \(2016-2017\)](#), Bilim Akademisi – Science Academy Türkiye p. 3.

⁴ Alongside decisions to establish a university, the choices to open faculties or colleges within a university are similarly made through unscientific methods. Compare for example for the founding of 52 new faculties, institutes and colleges in

planned politics,⁵ the generated 'scientific output' is unmistakable.⁶ For example, about the tragic earthquake, a physics professor said: "*Earthquakes or buildings do not kill, God does. He kills those who are destined to die. Even if those who died in the earthquake had been on Mars at the same time, they would still have died. Death depends on time, not space...*"⁷ The fact that he can make a statement like this is a simple indication of the state of universities in the Centennial of the Republic of Türkiye. The occurrence of earthquakes, floods, droughts, and various other natural events cannot be scientifically predicted with absolute certainty in terms of *when* they will happen. Nevertheless, it is scientifically certain that these events will occur. Our country is in the earthquake zone and is one of the countries that will be affected by global warming, which already shows its effects all over the world. Scientists are aware of this and are constantly working to minimise the consequences of such natural events. Not benefiting from this information as a state as well as not paving the way for the production of this information in Türkiye, intervening in every aspect of the universal higher education system in order to ensure mediocrity in universities, and applying unimaginable tactics to bring our best universities to the median⁸ are collectively contributing to the decline of quality higher education in our country.

Unfortunately, what is happening in Türkiye is a reflection of a trend that can be observed worldwide.⁹ It is now generally recognised that the state of academic freedoms within universities is the litmus test of democracies. Free universities are as integral to a functioning democracy as free elections and free press. There is a great need for these institutions to test, question, refute/confirm and improve the knowledge 'produced' by the rulers. On the other hand, universities are the institutions we need the most to find solutions to the major threats facing humanity. However, the common reaction of authoritarian regimes is to intervene with inquisitive universities and to prevent independent production of scientific findings.¹⁰

Indeed, the Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research adopted by the European Research Area (ERA) Ministerial Conference in 2020,¹¹ the EU Parliament's Forum for Academic Freedom ('EP Forum for Academic Freedom') launched in November 2022, and the report 'The State of Academic Freedom in EU Member States - An Overview of Actual Trends and Developments'¹² published in

40 universities: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/egitim/40-universite-bunyesinde-52-yeni-fakulte-enstitu-ve-yuksekokul-kuruldu/2961014>

⁵ For a very detailed and important study on this subject, see TUĞBA TEKEREK, Taşra Üniversiteleri, AKP Parti'nin Arka Kampüsü, İletişim 2023.

⁶ See e.g. SELÇUK BEŞİR DEMİR, Predatory Journals: Who publishes in them and why? *Journal of Informetrics* 12 (2018) 1296-1311, 1296: '[...] *the majority of predatory/fake journals (PJs) are located in developing countries; 119 journals provide false postal addresses; the largest number of researchers publishing in PJs are located in India, Nigeria and Turkey, indicating that most of the publications in PJs are made by researchers in developing countries.*' For a detailed analysis, see UFUK AKÇIĞIT/ELIF ÖZCAN TOK, Turkey Science Report, TÜBA Reports No. 43, 2020.

⁷ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/prof-dr-ali-ihsan-goker-deprem-veya-binalar-oldurmez-allah-oldurur-haber-1602168>.

⁸ See below section B/1 on Boğaziçi University.

⁹ See e.g. KIRSTEN ROBERTS LYER/ILYAS SALIBA/JANIKA SPANNAGEL, University Autonomy Decline, Causes, Responses, and Implications for Academic Freedom, Routledge 2023.

¹⁰ See e.g. V-Dem, DEMOCRACY REPORT 2023, Defiance in the Face of Autocratisation, https://www.v-dem.net/documents/30/V-dem_democracyreport2023_highres.pdf, 24 et seq.

¹¹ [Bonn Declaration on Freedom of Scientific Research](#)

¹² STOA, [State of play of academic freedom in the EU Member States - Overview of de facto trends and developments](#), March 2023.

March 2023 by the EU Parliament Panel on the Future of Science and Technology¹³ to this end, focus on the threats facing freedom of science. According to this report:

*'Ever since the early history of European Universities, academic freedom has been acknowledged to be a fundamental feature of any higher education research system or institution. The emergence of the research university model in Germany in the early 1800s, highlighting the basic concepts of *Lehrfreiheit* and *Lernfreiheit*, contributed strongly to the central position of academic freedom in present-day higher education systems. Following the widespread democratisation of Europe and other parts of the world during the second half of the 20th century, academic freedom became no longer simply an abstract concept; in many countries it was codified as a specific freedom. More recently, academic freedom has been recognised as a basic condition for a healthy democracy and an essential feature of any democratic political order.*

Currently, major breaches of and threats to academic freedom can be observed across Europe and the world. Presenting independent research into the de facto state of play of academic freedom in the EU Member States, this study has been designed to contribute to a better understanding of potential and real threats to academic freedom in the EU Member States, and ways in which the protection of academic freedom can be strengthened.'

In our country, not only does the Council of Higher Education (CoHe) not come up with ideas about the erosion of academic freedom in this way,¹⁴ the fact that Türkiye continues to be in the lowest 'E country category' according to the 2023 *Academic Freedom Index* is of no interest to anyone.¹⁵ However, in this lowest category, Türkiye is paired with countries such as China, North Korea, Egypt, Iran, Rwanda and Syria.¹⁶ While Türkiye's average was at its highest point in 2004 with 0.56 out of 1, today it has fallen to 0.08. In the last 50 years, Türkiye had fallen below this average only once, after the 1980 military coup (0.05).¹⁷ On the other hand, in the *University Autonomy Index* prepared for the universities of European countries, the following observation about institutional autonomy in Türkiye is striking¹⁸ :

'The Turkish case stands out as a notable exception, as it does not fit any of above-mentioned categories. Since 2018, the president exclusively selects and appoints the rectors of both public and foundation universities. Türkiye was already a special case in the first Scorecard edition regarding the appointment of rectors.¹⁹ At state universities academic staff would elect six candidates, three of whom would be retained by YÖK, the Turkish Council of Higher Education

¹³ [Panel for the Future of Science and Technology \(STOA\)](#) and [European Parliament Forum for Academic Freedom](#)

¹⁴ For such an independent idea generation project, see the Final Report of the Workshop on Restructuring the Higher Education Field in Türkiye held in Ankara on 30 June - 1 July 2022, published on 9 December 2022: https://univ-forum.org/images/pdf/Calistay_Sonuc_Raporu_Dijital.pdf.

¹⁵ See OLGA SELIN HÜNLER, *Academic Freedom in Türkiye*, in Roberts Lyer, Saliba, Spannagel (eds.), *University Autonomy Decline, Causes, Responses, and Implications for Academic Freedom*, Routledge 2023, 147-174; <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-01545-5>; <https://www.chemistryworld.com/news/academic-freedom-is-at-stake-in-turkish-elections-researchers-warn/4017497.article>.

¹⁶ About the project see <https://www.v-dem.net/our-work/research-programs/academic-freedom/>. For the 2023 report see https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update.pdf

¹⁷ <https://academic-freedom-index.net>

¹⁸ ENORA BENNETOT PRUVOT/THOMAS ESTERMANN/NINO POPKHADZE, *University Autonomy in Europe - IV, The Scorecard 2023*, European University Association, 20.

¹⁹ The year mentioned is 2011. Türkiye did not participate in the 2017 evaluation.

(whose members were also appointed by the president). Out of these three, the president could choose whom to appoint. Due to this exceptional situation, Türkiye already received the lowest possible score for this indicator in the first edition of the autonomy Scorecard. However, the current situation has degraded to the point where the president now selects and appoints the rector without any election process at the university. This practice does not exist in any other system in Europe.'

In contemporary scientific research, the significance of democratic institutions, judicial independence, and the extent of academic freedoms for a country's growth potential and development is often emphasized.²⁰ The apparent belief of Turkish governments that they can foster scientific progress within an autocratic framework is a clear and notable indication of their disregard for scientific data.

B. Continuing Erosion in the Field of Institutional Autonomy of Universities

1. Developments at Boğaziçi University

Unfortunately, it is still necessary to open a special section in this year's report for what happened at Boğaziçi University (BU). In view of the fact that university rankings are indicative, albeit unrepresentative, we can start with the following observation: While BU ranked 139th in the world rankings in 2015, in 2023 it has fallen among the universities in the 801-1000 band.²¹ The result of the determined efforts to 'discipline' this university, the apple of Türkiye's eye, is clear. Considering the intimidation that has been carried out with the logic of an 'occupier' since three years, the extent of the academic potential wasted in this institution is also unveiled. Those who are uncomfortable with the fact that BU is an exceptional science-producing institution have succeeded, albeit partially, despite the efforts of many BU stakeholders who have fought tirelessly for academic freedoms and a transparent and accountable university. This is an embarrassment for Turkish science. The following is a list of news items that have appeared in the press about the actions taken by BU's administration, which was appointed against the will of all stakeholders of BU:

- Allegations of cadre recruitment in both faculty and staff recruitment;²²
- Making vacancy announcements and recruitment without the knowledge of the heads of the departments;²³
- Closure of a large number of university committees, or appointment of new members without consultation with stakeholders;²⁴
- Allegations of corruption in tenders;²⁵

²⁰ See, e.g., NICLAS BERGGREN, Academic Freedom Boosts Productivity Growth - Given Strong Judicial Quality, Research Institute of Industrial Economics, Newsletter, 2022/1; see generally DARON ACEMOGLU/JAMES ROBINSON, Why Nations Fail - The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty, 2013.

²¹ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/world-university-rankings/bogazici-university>

²² <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesinde-bir-akademisyene-goreve-baslamadan-koltuk-verildi/>; <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesine-ak-genc-amir/>; <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/bogazici-universitesinde-skandallar-bitmiyor-dekan-kendi-actirdigi-profesorkadrosuna-yerlesti-2068179>; <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/egitim/bogazici-universitesinde-adrese-teslim-kadro-2089278>

²³ <https://www.birgun.net/haber/cem-say-bogazici-nde-baskani-oldugum-anabilim-dali-icin-profesor-ilani-verilmis-444138>

²⁴ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesinde-komisyon-ve-kurullara-kayyim-ayari/>

²⁵ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesi-bes-ihaleyle-11-milyon-tl-dagitti/>

- Some faculty members who supported the ‘silent protests’ in front of the university's rectorate building were investigated and others live under the threat of investigation. For example, a letter sent contains the following statements: "*Please kindly be informed that press statements, setting up stands, distributing leaflets, setting up tents, sitting, standing and other actions without permission are prohibited and criminal, and in order to ensure security, well-being, internal peace, education and training within our university and to prevent disruption of administrative activities those who exhibit such behaviours will be subject to judicial and administrative proceedings within the framework of the legislation*";²⁶
- The banning of many retired academics, including our members Bülent Sankur and Orhan Yenigün, Sumru Özsoy, Yaman Barlas, Uğur Ersoy, Alpar Sevgen, Cevza Sevgen, Ali Rıza Kaylan, Oya Başak, Ayfer Hortaçsu, Güler Fişek and Fatma Gök, from entering the university and the inactivation of their cards and other rights on the grounds that they participated in the same silent protests.²⁷ In the lawsuit filed by seven academics, including Oya Başak, Güler Fişek, Fatma Gök, Sumru Özsoy, Ayfer Hortaçsu, Cevza Sevgen and Alpar Sevgen, the Istanbul 13th Administrative Court issued a stay of execution on 18 September.²⁸ However, following the court's decision, the rectorate completely abolished the BU Card application that allowed retired academics to enter the campus;
- Prof. Dr. Taner Bilgiç, a faculty member of the Department of Industrial Engineering, was dismissed as a member of the Boğaziçi University Executive Board with a decision taken at the meeting of the BU Senate dated 11.05.2022 and numbered 2022/5 on the grounds that "*he deliberately abstained from his duty as a member of the university board of directors by not contributing and not voting, since he abstained from voting in some of the decisions taken in the meetings*". As reported in the press, the Rectorate suspended Prof. Dr. Taner Bilgiç, who requested information on the issue and the minutes of the meeting be sent to him, on the grounds that he objected to the online meeting procedure two years ago and did not vote.²⁹ Although Prof. Dr. Bilgiç's lawsuit against this decision was concluded in his favour by the Administrative Court,³⁰ the BU rectorate did not take the necessary steps and suspended him for three months 'as a precautionary measure'.³¹ It is incomprehensible that the decision of the Administrative Court was overturned by the Regional Administrative Court on 29.11.2023. The Regional Court based its decision on Article 61 of the Higher Education Law No. 2547, which states that "*In the juries and committees mentioned in this law, each member is responsible for casting his/her vote by acceptance or rejection. Abstentions cannot be cast*". However, it is very controversial whether Prof. Dr. Bilgiç's behaviour can be equated with abstaining from voting, and whether the sanction for violating this provision is a removal from

²⁶ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesi-yonetiminden-eylem-yapanlara-islem-yapariz-tehdidi/>

²⁷ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesi-emeritus-prof-dr-bulent-sankurun-okula-girisini-yasakladi/>; <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-yonetimi-50-yillik-mezunun-universiteye-girisini-yasakladi/>. The relevant decision was challenged in court by a number of academics: <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesine-girisi-engellenen-emekli-akademisyenlerden-toplu-dava/>.

²⁸ https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/egitim/bogazici-universitesinde-akademiye-yasak-geldi-2132364?utm_medium=AramaSonuc&utm_source=AramaSonuc

²⁹ <https://www.birgun.net/haber/universiteyi-belediye-gibi-yonetmek-istiyor-455113>.

³⁰ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/488517/mahkeme-bogazici-universitesi-yonetim-kurulundan-cikarilan-prof-dr-taner-bilgici-hakli-buldu>.

³¹ <https://www.birgun.net/haber/universiteyi-belediye-gibi-yonetmek-istiyor-455113>.

the University Executive Board as in the case of Prof. Bilgiç. On the other hand, this is also an exemplary case in terms of showing to what extent higher education in Türkiye is centrally regulated and the kind of details the regulations go into.

- The dismissal of Prof. Dr. Cem Ersoy from the position of the Head of Computer Engineering Department, on the grounds of not working in harmony with the dean;³²
- The dismissal of Prof. Dr. Ali Tekcan from the position of the Head of the Department of Psychology, without justification;³³
- The Rectorate's decision not to extend the tenure of Faculty Member Can Candan for the third time, despite the fact that the two decisions of the Rectorate not to extend his tenure were found unlawful by the administrative court and a reinstatement decision had been issued;³⁴
- Dr. Mohan Ravichandran, a faculty member in the Department of Mathematics, was denied the extension of his term of office by the Rector's Office because he used his democratic rights to criticise the administration at BU; although he won the lawsuit against this decision, he was prevented from entering Türkiye by the Ministry of Interior on the grounds that he "posed a security threat";³⁵
- The appointment of nearly a hundred people to the board of trustees of the Boğaziçi University Foundation (BÜVAK) in four months.³⁶ In addition, the establishment of the Boğaziçi University Development Foundation (BUVAKIF) as an alternative foundation;
- The cancellation of the mass graduation ceremony, one of the most important days of a university, in 2023, as an indication that the Rectorate of the University cannot tolerate even the slightest democratic opposition;³⁷
- The decision to evacuate the facilities of Boğaziçi University Alumni Association,³⁸ despite the court's decision to stay the execution of the evacuation;³⁹
- Demolition order for the 40-year-old Aptullah Kuran Library in BU North Campus;⁴⁰
- Increased pressure on BU students not to exercise their democratic right to dissent.⁴¹
- The establishment of a Media and Communication Coordinator's Office to completely control the flow of information at the university. News, especially regarding the academic accomplishments of faculty members perceived as 'dissidents,' such as their election as full members of Academia Europae or the Bilim Akademisi – Science Academy Türkiye, went unreported.⁴²

³² <https://www.birgun.net/haber/prof-dr-cem-ersoy-bogazici-universitesi-ndeki-gorevinden-alindi-418350>.

³³ <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/egitim/prof-dr-ali-tekcan-gorevden-alinmasina-tepki-hukuksuzluk-bitmiyor-2108096>

³⁴ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-yonetimi-mahkeme-kararina-ragmen-can-candanin-gorevine-ucuncu-defa-son-verdi/>

³⁵ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/bogazicinin-hindistanli-akademisyeni-turkiyeye-alinmadi-haber-1622440>.

³⁶ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesinde-vakif-operasyonu-98-atama/>

³⁷ <https://www.birgun.net/haber/bogazici-akademisyenlerinden-toplu-mezuniyet-toreni-yapilmamasina-tepki-452354>

³⁸ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesi-mezunlar-dernegi-yerinden-tahliye-ediliyor/>

³⁹ <https://www.diken.com.tr/mahkeme-kararina-uymayan-bogazici-universitesi-yonetimi-hakkinda-suc-duyurusu/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesi-aptullah-kuran-kutuphanesi-yikiliyor/>

⁴¹ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-depremin-ikinci-gunu-yurt-yonetmeligini-degistirmis-tweet-atma-bira-icme-atilma-nedeni/>; <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazici-universitesi-kulupleri-odalarindan-atiliyor-ogrencilere-gozalti-tehdidi/>

⁴² <https://yetkinreport.com/2024/01/01/universiteyi-dunyaya-kapatmak/>

Finally, a decision on the restructuring of faculties was taken at the meeting of the BU Senate on 20 December 2023. According to a statement made by some BU faculty members⁴³ :

"The proposal to close the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration and to divide the Faculty of Arts and Sciences into two faculties, (i) the Faculty of Science and (ii) the Faculty of Society and Human Sciences, was notified to the senators only two days before the senate meeting. This proposal was changed again on the morning of the meeting, this time to add the departments of the former School of Applied Sciences to the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, which had been structured under a new faculty only 16 months ago by the same appointed administration. With the sudden change in the agenda, senators were forced to make decisions without any consultation with the units they represent. In addition, although all units in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences had expressed negative opinions about the division of the faculty into two months before, the issue was brought to the agenda of the senate not having been discussed in any academic board. The imposed procedure reveals how sloppily and arbitrarily such a large-scale restructuring was undertaken. Unfortunately, the top-down decision-making approach, far from transparency and accountability, which we have been objecting to for three years at our university, has unfortunately emerged once again."

As rightly stated in another statement on this subject:

"Boğaziçi University has been successfully implementing the academic education based on the integrated structure of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences despite all administrative difficulties and quotas increased without considering or supporting the infrastructure of the university. [...] However, in our age when interdisciplinary/multidisciplinary research and education is inevitable, the policy of a university should not be to disrupt this integrated structure, which functions successfully at our university and enables interdisciplinary research, but to increase the collaborations between departments in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, which holds the basic sciences together."⁴⁴

2. Disregarding the Need for Merit-Based Appointment

As emphasized in our previous reports, the issue of nepotism in universities is widespread and of significant magnitude across the country.⁴⁵ In many universities, the appointment of individuals, particularly those known for their proximity to the government and/or the university administration, not only to administrative positions but also as academics through custom-tailored announcements, poses a serious issue for the university structure that should be built on meritocracy.⁴⁶

⁴³<https://bianet.org/haber/bogazici-universitesi-akademisyenleri-yonetimin-istifasini-talep-ediyoruz-289738>. Students who protested against this decision had their cards deactivated and were prevented from entering the school. Upon the request of the students, the court issued a stay of execution on this decision of the rectorate (<https://www.diken.com.tr/mahkeme-bogazicili-ogrencilerin-girisini-yasaklayan-kayyima-dur-dedi/>).

⁴⁴ <https://www.diken.com.tr/bogazicinde-fen-ve-edebiyat-fakultesinin-bolunmesine-bolumlerden-tepki/>

⁴⁵ For detailed information, see TEKEREK, S. 105 et seq.

⁴⁶ <https://www.diken.com.tr/ege-universitesinde-kadrolasmaya-karsi-cikan-akademisyenlere-sorusturma/>;
<https://www.diken.com.tr/ege-universitesindeki-torpil-zincirinin-tepesindeki-isme-sorusturma/>;
<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/rector-hotarin-adrese-teslim-atamasi-meclis-gundeminde-2075140>;
<https://www.diken.com.tr/itude-mustafa-sentopun-oglu-icin-atanan-dekan-kadrolasmaya-devam-ediyor/>;
<https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/mahkemeden-yoke-kotu-haber-akpli-rector-nukhet-hotar-bu-kez-sorusturulacak->

3. Problems in Using the Authority to Establish a University/Faculty

The custom of establishing new faculties without carrying out the slightest assessment of infrastructure needs and without sharing the reasons of the decisions with the public is still widespread.⁴⁷ We refer to the findings we have made in our previous Reports on this subject.⁴⁸

4. Forcing all universities in Türkiye to switch to distance education after the earthquake and allocating student dormitories to earthquake victims

After the 6 February 2023 earthquakes, the Council of Higher Education decided, without consulting the universities, that all universities across the country should switch to compulsory distance education in the spring semester⁴⁹ and partially revised this decision as of 30 March.⁵⁰ This is another example of how institutional autonomy is ignored.⁵¹ It is important to criticise CoHe for taking away the right to education of millions of students with this uniformising and top-down decision-making process that does not take into account the differences between institutions.⁵²

Although it is an urgent need to provide accommodation in the most appropriate conditions for our citizens who lost their loved ones and homes in the earthquake, the use of university dormitories for this purpose was a step that could not be supported, especially in the face of the fact that there were many hotels for the accommodation of earthquake victims with available capacity in the off-season.

On the other hand, while it is evident from the experiences during the pandemic that distance education has a negative impact on the learning process and quality, and it is doubtful that our earthquake-stricken students were able to benefit even from this education, this decision of CoHe has also damaged equal opportunity in education. Considering the main functions of universities, it would be in the interest of our country for these institutions to remain open and for students and faculty members to be together in order to continue their educational activities, to provide support mechanisms to their stakeholders, to organise aid and similar activities, and for researchers at all levels in these institutions to come together to produce scientific solutions that will minimise the negative effects of the earthquake.

The function of the Council of Higher Education should have been limited to investigating and coordinating the options for students in the earthquake zone to take voluntary leaves of absence,

2069859; <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/istanbul-esenyurt-universitesi-rektoru-prof-dr-selman-ogut-kimdir-2146938>.

⁴⁷ <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/egitim/40-universite-bunyesinde-52-yeni-fakulte-enstitu-ve-yuksekokul-kuruldu/2961014>; <https://www.birgun.net/haber/erdogan-imzaladi-bazi-universitelerde-yeni-fakulteler-kuruldu-480430>.

⁴⁸ E.g. [Academic Freedoms Report 2021-2022](#), [Bilim Akademisi – Science Academy Türkiye](#) p. 6;.

⁴⁹ <https://www.yok.gov.tr/HaberBelgeleri/BasinDuyurusu/2023/basin-duyurusu-universitelerde-uzaktan-egitime-gecis.pdf>.

⁵⁰ <https://www.yok.gov.tr/Sayfalar/Haberler/2023/yok-baskani-ozvar-2022-2023-egitim-ogretim-bahar-donemi-ne-iliskin-alinan-yeni-kararlari-acikladi.aspx>.

⁵¹ On this subject, see [Bilim Akademisi – Science Academy Türkiye statement of 12.2.2023](#).

⁵² <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/482582/odtude-bolumler-yuz-yuze-egitim-dedi-rektorluk-yoku-isaret-etti>. In Change.org's most signed campaign in 2023, with almost three hundred thousand signatories, students also demanded that the right to education should not be limited and that different solutions should be sought for earthquake victims: <https://www.change.org/l/tr/change-org-turkiye-2023-degisim-raporu>

granting leaves of absence for faculty members and allocating them in the facilities of other universities to enable continued education.

C. Freedom of Science

As we reported in our 2021-2022 Report,⁵³ lectures of faculty members, questions they ask in exams, their publications as well as their signatures on academy-related announcements are used as means for intervention. For instance, according to press reports, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bülent Yücel, Head of the Department of Constitutional Law at Anadolu University Faculty of Law, faced criticism for including questions on contemporary political issues in the exam. He was suspended for 3 months without justification with a message sent from the rectorate, and the exam was renewed.⁵⁴

Regarding the matter, it seems appropriate to quote a decision from the Constitutional Court, given its relevance and alignment with the correct perspective. The applicant, who is an academic staff member at a university, was punished with a reprimand for not properly fulfilling his duty of teaching by delving into political topics during an international law course. The decision pertains to the allegation that his freedom of expression was violated. According to the court:⁵⁵

'28. Academic freedom, as one of the oldest and most fundamental realms of freedom, is a result of the inclination rooted in the core of human dignity and values, involving thinking, curiosity, exploration, and engaging in appropriate activities. Humanity can only question accurate knowledge when this realm of freedom exists. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware that the safeguards of freedom of expression are not limited to statements and information considered to be true (Mutia Canan Karatay, Case No: 2018/6707, 31/3/2022, § 33). Indeed, academic freedom is specifically regulated in Article 27 of the Constitution. According to this article, everyone has the freedom to learn, teach, explain, disseminate, and conduct research. In this sense, it can be stated that academic staff, in principle, have freedom of expression within the scope of the teaching right enshrined in the Constitution during the courses they conduct. [...]

36. Looking at the student statements obtained within the scope of the investigation, it is observed that, in a class with over five hundred registered students, only nine students were interviewed. Among these statements, there is no consensus regarding the common view that the applicant's political expressions were unrelated to the course. Higher education students also possess social sides such as having political views, being interested in national issues, and making preferences as individuals. Therefore, it cannot be expected that political discussions conducted in a course will appeal to the thought world of all students under any circumstances. Hence, it is understandable that students may have different opinions about the conduct of the course.

37. On the other hand, students are expected to tolerate critical discourse and discussions that contribute to the integrity of the course, even if they are contrary to their value judgements, provided that they are related to the subject matter of the course. Otherwise, the existence of

⁵³ [Academic Freedom Report 2021-2022, Bilim Akademisi – Science Academy Türkiye](#) p. 8

⁵⁴ See <https://bianet.org/haber/universite-akademisyenin-sinav-sorularini-begenmedi-gorevden-uzaklastirdi-272822>; <https://www.tolgasirin.com/post/bulentyucel>.

⁵⁵ Constitutional Court, Hasan Mor Application, No: 2019/20996, Decision Date 25.5.2022, OG 1.9.2022, no. 31940.

the right to teach, which is part of the freedom of science, is jeopardised and scientific questioning or scepticism is replaced by a dogmatic point of view. [...]

Unfortunately, being governed by dogmas and unquestioning obedience to dogmas has become the reality of our country for many years.

D. Violations of Personal Rights and Security of Academics

In addition to freedom of science in general, a number of problematic examples regarding academics' freedom of expression and job security have been published in the press. For example, the faculty members of ITU Faculty of Architecture, Department of Urban and Regional Planning published a statement reacting on scientific grounds to the "Presidential Decree on Settlement and Structuring within the Scope of the State of Emergency" issued after the devastating earthquakes. Three days after publishing the statement, on 31.03.2023, the official account of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, "<https://sehirbolge.itu.edu.tr/>", was blocked and social media posts were removed.⁵⁶

Dismissed by Decree Law No. 686, Eğitim-Sen (Trade Union of Educators) chair Prof. Dr. Nejla Kurul was once again dismissed from her university due to the stay of execution decision issued after Ankara University's objection, although she was reinstated by a judicial decision.⁵⁷ In our country such lower court decisions have unfortunately become commonplace, despite the often overlooked fact that the decisions of the Constitutional Court are binding on the legislative, executive and judicial organs, administrative authorities, real and legal persons in accordance with Article 153 of the Constitution .

On the other hand, the pressure on academics who make statements to the media continued in 2023. For example, the Rectorate of Dokuz Eylül University imposed a penalty of "1/8 salary deduction" on Prof. Dr. Semih Çelenk, Head of the Department of Performing Arts at the Faculty of Fine Arts, due to his statements to ANKA News Agency and Birgün Newspaper, but the İzmir 3rd Administrative Court ruled that the decision was unlawful and ordered that the amounts deducted from the salary be returned to Prof. Dr. Çelenk with interest.⁵⁸ The news that foundation universities have also received instructions from the Council of Higher Education to rethink extending the contracts of academics who make regular statements to the media is worrying.⁵⁹

In this context, it should be emphasised that the rector of Dokuz Eylül University⁶⁰ is often reflected in the press with decisions such as the termination of the contracts of dissident faculty members.⁶¹ We emphasize that, upon the rejection of the application to the Council of Higher Education to open criminal and disciplinary investigations against her, the Ankara 4th Administrative Court ruled that the complaints should be examined by the Council of Higher Education.⁶² According to the court, "*While the complaints against the university president should have been examined by the board, it has*

⁵⁶ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/486356/itulu-akademisyenlerin-erdoganin-kararnamesine-tepkilerine-getirilen-erisim-engeline-ogrencilerden-tepki>

⁵⁷ <https://www.diken.com.tr/egitim-sen-genel-baskani-nejla-kurulun-universiteyle-bagi-bir-kez-daha-kesildi/>.

⁵⁸ <https://politikahaber.com/mahkeme-basina-demec-verdigi-icin-profesorun-maasini-kesen-rektorlugu-haksiz-buldu/>.

⁵⁹ <https://www.diken.com.tr/ozel-universitelere-sozlesme-yenilemeyin-baskisi/>.

⁶⁰ <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/rektor-hotarin-adrese-teslim-atamasi-meclis-gundeminde-2075140>.

⁶¹ <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/rektor-hotarin-doc-dr-cengizin-is-akdini-feshetmesi-mahkemede-2064495>

⁶² <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/mahkemeden-yoke-kotu-haber-akpli-rektor-nukhet-hotar-bu-kez-sorusturulacak-2069859>.

been concluded that there is no legal compliance in the rejection of the plaintiff's request without any investigation by the defendant administration regarding the complaint against Prof. Dr. Fatma Seniha Nühket Hotar, the Rector of Dokuz Eylül University."

E. Gender Equality

1. Quantitative data and action plans on gender equality

According to the 2022-2023 statistics announced by the Council of Higher Education, women make up 46.6 % of assistant professor, 40.8 % of associate professors and 33.9 % of professors.⁶³ As of December 2023, official data regarding the current number of female university rectors is not accessible within the scope of this report. However, as of May 2023, according to information shared in the press,⁶⁴ there are only 17 female rectors in 204 universities. The existing situation is evidence of the entrenched nature of "vertical discrimination," manifested as the low representation of women in higher education in top-level academic administrative positions. Despite this, gender equality action plans that systematise the egalitarian transformation of universities through goals and programmes continue to be widespread in 2023 (e.g. Düzce University, Bartın University, Malatya Turgut Özal University).⁶⁵ This situation is important and pleasing in terms of reinforcing the scientific potential of universities with egalitarian policies and the development of an inclusive academic research and teaching culture. The medium and long-term effects of action plans should definitely be monitored.

2. Prevention of sexual harassment and assault

According to the news in the press, harassment at universities remained on the agenda in 2023. A female student at Anadolu University Faculty of Fine Arts was the subject of a complaint alleging that she was verbally harassed by a lecturer.⁶⁶ The statement made by the Rectorate of Anadolu University is noteworthy in terms of the importance given to the issue. The university announced that it had both initiated an investigation and suspended the faculty member concerned.⁶⁷ Another similar case that came to the attention of the public was the case of verbal and sexual harassment at Istanbul University - Cerrahpaşa Faculty of Medicine.⁶⁸ This case also involved complaints about a lecturer's verbal expressions towards a student during an oral examination. According to the news in the press, the investigation into this complaint resulted in suspension from duty and deduction of salary. Bilkent

⁶³ Sefa Uyar, Male-dominated academia: According to CoHe's higher education statistics, the rate of female professors is only 33 per cent, Cumhuriyet, 2.5.2023, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/siyaset/erkek-egemen-akademi-yokun-yuksekogretim-istatistiklerine-gore-kadin-profesor-orani-sadece-yuzde-33-2077041>

⁶⁴ Menekşe Tokyay, Women Rectors Spring, 6.5.2023, <https://www.perspektif.online/kadin-rektorler-bahari/>

⁶⁵ <https://duzce.edu.tr/duyuru/818c/universitemizde-kadin-erkek-esitligi-eylem-plani-2023-2027-1an-edildi>;
<https://cdn.bartin.edu.tr/kasom/f9dac5b95b3637cd61e6c705bc839a8f/kadin-erkek-firsat-esitligi-plani.03.02.2023.pdf>;
<https://matukam.ozal.edu.tr/wp-content/uploads/sites/247/2023/03/MTU-Gender-Equality-Action-Plan-MTUGEAP.pdf>.

⁶⁶ Harassment investigation against faculty member in Eskişehir, NTV, 16.11.2023, <https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/eskisehirde-ogretim-uyesine-taciz-sorusturmasi,EUu6gMSZ7UKoNmdQ4YXFTQ#>

⁶⁷ Anadolu University faculty member 'harassment' investigation, Cumhuriyet, 16.11.2023, <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/turkiye/anadolu-universitesinde-ogretim-uyesine-taciz-sorusturmasi-2141787>

⁶⁸ Harassment of a student at Istanbul University Cerrahpaşa Faculty of Medicine! Prof Dr. suspended from duty for 3 months, Latest News, 21.9.2023, <https://www.ensonhaber.com/gundem/cerrahpasa-tip-fakultesinde-ogrenciye-taciz-prof-dr-3-ay-gorevden-uzaklastirildi>

University has also announced that the investigation process is ongoing in relation to the allegations, some of which have been reported in the press and some of which involve faculty members' acts of sexual harassment towards students and institutional indifference.⁶⁹ All these examples show that universities are not unresponsive to the problem and they react to allegations of sexual harassment. Compared to the cases that were reported in the press in previous years, the biggest difference is that institutional processes were carried out and public statements were made.

There has in fact been an example where demands for institutional mechanisms to prevent sexual harassment and assault at universities have yielded positive results. At Istanbul University, the "Committee for the Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Sexual Assault and Discrimination" (CİTÖK), which had been demanded by students for a long time - and was the subject of both signature and social media campaigns - and supported by faculty members, was established and took office. While the institutional existence of CİTÖK was recognised by the decision of the Istanbul University Senate, its functioning was determined and secured by a directive.⁷⁰ The directive adopts the principle of representation and participation based on gender equality by recognising that the number of female members cannot fall below the number of male members in the representative structure of CİTÖK. In the current institutional structure, the representation of the Women's Studies Application and Research Centre in CİTÖK is also ensured. It is also noteworthy that CİTÖK plays a guiding role in the face of allegations of sexual harassment and assault, has the authority to investigate, and has the function of taking action to initiate disciplinary proceedings. In this respect, CİTÖK provides an example of a strong institutional mechanism.

Finally, interuniversity cooperation processes and communication networks in the prevention of sexual harassment and assault continue to function. In December 2023, the "Interuniversity Network Against Sexual Harassment and Assault" organised the conference "Violence in the 100th Anniversary of the Republic - Transformation of Language from Victim to Applicant and Sexual Harassment and Assault (CTS) Units".⁷¹ In this framework, the necessary actions to be taken in interviews regarding sexual harassment and assault applications, the practices of CTS units, and the process and best practices in the transformation of the victim to the applicant were discussed.

F. Conclusion

In this year's report, despite some positive steps in the field of gender equality, unfortunately, we find ourselves compelled to note a regression in academic freedoms, a decline in academic standards, and an increase in mediocrity. Univocality and centralisation have now reached the point of serious interference with different life styles in every field, and the culture of tolerance and understanding has weakened even further. The fact that neither the comedian who makes a joke about the inadequate

⁶⁹ Harassment allegation at Bilkent University, Evrensel, 26.3.2023, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/485860/bilkent-universitesinde-taciz-iddiasi>

⁷⁰ As a result of the students' efforts, the Sexual Harassment Prevention Board started to serve at IU, Evrensel, 26.12.2023, <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/506661/ogrencilerin-cabalar-sonucunda-iude-cinsel-tacizi-onleme-kurulu-hizmete-basladi>; For the CİTÖK Directive, see also <https://www.istanbul.edu.tr/tr/content/cinsel-tacizi-cinsel-saldiriyi-ve-ayrimciligi-onleme-kurulu-638390953728283160/kurul-ve-yonerge>

⁷¹ <https://www.cu.edu.tr/haber-detay/xx%C4%B1%C4%B1%C4%B1-universiteler-arasi-cinsel-taciz-ve-saldiriya-karsi-%C4%B1s-birligi-destek-ve-%C4%B1letisim-grubu-calistayi/>

infrastructure of a university,⁷² nor the student who wears shorts⁷³ or wants to decorate a Christmas tree,⁷⁴ nor even the student who wants to give the exact same political message but is labeled as part of the opposition group,⁷⁵ can be tolerated anymore is worrying in terms of the freedom expected in the university environment. On its Centennial, the universities of the Republic of Turkey are perceived not as bastions of freedom and creativity but rather as institutions where uniformity, centralized management, and mediocrity prevail.

Respectfully submitted for the information of the public, 3.1.2024.

Bilim Akademisi - Science Academy Türkiye, Executive Board

⁷² <https://www.diken.com.tr/firat-universitesi-hasan-can-kayanin-elazig-sakasini-yargiya-tasiyor/>

⁷³ <https://www.diken.com.tr/universitelilerden-rektorluge-sikayet-akademisyen-kisa-sorta-mudahale-etmis/>

⁷⁴ <https://bianet.org/haber/iu-de-cam-agaci-suslemek-isteyen-ogrencilere-ozel-guvenlik-mudahalesi-289456>

⁷⁵ <https://www.diken.com.tr/fatih-altayli-bogazici-universitesinin-ilkel-yonetimi-kendinden-bekleneni-yapti/>