

Academic sector unions in North America stand in solidarity with Boğaziçi University faculty and students in their ongoing fight for academic autonomy and freedom against authoritarianism in Turkey!

We are highly concerned about the recent attacks on academic autonomy and freedom in Turkey. On 1 January 2021, Dr. Melih Bulu was appointed as the new rector of Boğaziçi University by a presidential decree. He is widely regarded as unqualified for the position and is known for his close ties to the AKP, the ruling party in Turkey since 2002. Melih Bulu is not a member of the Boğaziçi University faculty, which violates the established norms and practices of the University's governance structure.

This appointment has sparked widespread faculty and student protest. Boğaziçi faculty, joined by other constituents of the university, unequivocally reject this appointment. Since 4 January 2021, heavy police presence on and around the campus of Boğaziçi University continues to threaten the security and freedom of both faculty and students, while restricting their rights to peaceful assembly. Police violence accompanied Melih Bulu on his arrival in the campus, evident in the oppressive practices such as beatings of student activists, handcuffs chained to the main gate, detention of hundreds of student activists, physical destruction of students' homes and even snipers being placed on the roofs of buildings nearby campus gate. We strongly condemn the use of torture, mistreatment, harassment and other forms of extra-judicial violence against peaceful protestors.

We are also extremely troubled by the hate speech sponsored by Turkish government against LGBTIQ+ community. Upholding human rights necessitates an acceptance that queer individuals exist. It is clear that Melih Bulu acts in contrast to this principle as his first action as an illegitimate rector was to shut down the student-run LGBTIQ+ organization. From the onset, the assault on the peaceful movement has been accompanied by an official discourse of stigmatization of the queer community on campus as 'deviants' and 'immoral', criminalization of the protesting students as 'terrorists' and labeling of the entire Boğaziçi community as 'elites' by the highest offices in the government. The government-sponsored media outlets currently amplify the government discourse by targeting individuals, spreading misinformation and using hateful language against the students and faculty.

Academic freedom, institutional autonomy, right to organize have been under severe attack in Turkey for years. We have seen thousands of our academic fellows being dismissed, arrested, harassed and exiled for expressing their dissenting opinions against the government over the last five years. Adding to these unaccounted actions, we witness yet more outright assault on the peaceful student movement.

We call for the government in Turkey to abandon its practices that prioritize partisan affiliation over academic values, anti-democratic appointment through presidential decrees over participatory consultation, and centralized governance of higher education over academic autonomy. To this end, we invite the government to rescind the legal framework that allows the President to appoint unelected rectors, to release the activists who are still detained and stop all the coercive practices deployed to suppress the voices of dissenting students and academics.

Solidarity with the Boğaziçi University faculty and students!