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Studies  
Association**  
of North America, Inc

**Headquarters & Secretariat**

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10 April 2024

H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan  
President of the Republic of Turkey  
T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Genel Sekreterliği  
06689 Çankaya, Ankara  
Turkey

Dear President Erdoğan:

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) of North America and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our grave concern regarding the government's attempt to transform Boğaziçi University against the expressed will of its faculty and students. Boğaziçi University is considered to be one of the best public universities in the Middle East and North Africa. Its reputation derives from the quality of education, its distinguished faculty and enduring commitment to research excellence. It also holds a distinct place among institutions of higher education in the region because of its tradition of faculty self-governance and student participation in the life of the university. However, Boğaziçi has become the target of a coordinated campaign that aims to undermine its relative independence from government interference, erode its standards of rigor, and eliminate faculty and student participation in governance structures, all the while demoralizing, disciplining, and ultimately pushing out dissenting faculty and penalizing vocal students. We are therefore deeply concerned about the Turkish government's overreach into this distinguished academic institution and the resultant violations of academic freedom and freedom of expression on Boğaziçi's campus.

MESA was founded in 1966 to promote scholarship and teaching on the Middle East and North Africa. The preeminent organization in the field, the Association publishes the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and in connection with the study of the region in North America and elsewhere.

The escalating administrative interference at Boğaziçi University by your government, particularly in recent years, has led to a significant erosion of academic self-governance and an increase in rights violations, reaching levels unparalleled even during periods of military rule in Turkey. The appointment of Melih Bulu as rector and,

following his dismissal, the subsequent appointment as rector of his former aide Naci Inci against the faculty vote and widespread opposition have severely undermined the autonomy and stature of Boğaziçi University. Rector Inci's tenure has been marked by diminishing faculty self-governance, a decline in administrative accountability, the neglect of meritocratic principles and due process in faculty recruitment, the arbitrary creation of decanal positions and departments without due process, and the initiation of non-essential construction projects while essential academic resources are steadily depleted.

One of Rector Inci's most damaging initiatives has been the overhauling of the university's established hiring practices and the direct appointment of new hires without consultation with existing faculty, thereby circumventing the traditional, competitive selection process based on departmental and faculty council approvals and meticulous academic scrutiny. Since Inci took office, existing deans have been removed from their posts by the Higher Education Council and replaced by faculty who are not part of Boğaziçi. Inci has also arbitrarily replaced many of the department chairs. The new appointees are often assigned multiple roles in an effort to dilute faculty governance and centralize control. The recent appointment of approximately 100 new faculty members, some with qualifications well below established standards, aims to reshape the academic curriculum, interfere in departmental operations, and alter the institution's culture. Additionally, the administration has imposed frivolous and groundless disciplinary actions on dissenting faculty, obstructed deserved promotions, and set up arbitrary administrative obstacles to prevent faculty participation in international academic engagements, including attending conferences, taking up residential fellowships, and making intellectual contributions to global scholarly communities that Boğaziçi faculty have long enriched.

Students at Boğaziçi are subjected to considerable censorship and face the possibility of repression through disciplinary investigations undertaken by the Administration. Student clubs, the democratic spaces representing a long-standing campus tradition, are subject to either closure or displacement to the margins of campus, as are student dormitories, effectively eliminating student life on campus. Law enforcement has become a regular presence on university grounds, marking a level of surveillance not seen even during the military regime following the 1980 coup d'état. Finally, it should be noted that similar hostility is directed against alumni and emeriti faculty, who have strong connections to a campus where they had studied and worked for years. Some alumni and nearly 150 emeriti

faculty are now banned from entering the university on arbitrary grounds.

We have written numerous letters to you regarding the politically motivated interventions at Boğaziçi University (among them, see letters dated [January 26, 2023](#); [December 22, 2021](#); [August 3, 2021](#); [February 9, 2021](#); [February 4, 2021](#); [January 7, 2021](#)). Recent developments demonstrate that what is happening at Boğaziçi is part of a long-term, deliberate strategy of institutional capture. We note, with alarm, the ways in which new appointments, imposed by government-appointed administrators, are diluting faculty appointed through time-honored procedures of faculty governance, thereby compromising well-established academic norms, academic freedom, and the fundamental right to education that has been the hallmark of Boğaziçi's reputation as a public institution of higher education. This systematic undermining threatens the university's ability to fulfill its educational mission, sustain its day-to-day operations, and protect its intellectual environment.

As a member state of the Council of Europe and a signatory to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, Turkey is required to protect freedom of thought, expression, and assembly. Turkey is also a signatory to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), all of which protect the rights to freedom of expression and association, which are at the heart of academic freedom and university autonomy. Furthermore, Articles 25-27 and 42 of the Turkish Constitution guarantee the rights and liberties that the new Boğaziçi administration's practices are violating.

Finally, we observe that the situation at Boğaziçi University, described in this letter, is a stark illustration of a broader pattern of purges and appointments that has severely impacted the integrity of higher education across Turkey. We urge your government to end such harmful practices. Furthermore, we urge your government to respect democratic faculty governance at Boğaziçi University, adhere to customary practices of administrative and faculty recruitment, and cease the instrumentalization of disciplinary practices to drive out existing faculty. We call upon your government to restore academic freedoms in Turkey's universities and do your utmost to protect the rights to freedom of expression and assembly.



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Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Reger  
MESA Executive Director

Laurie Brand  
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom  
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

cc:

Numan Kurtulmuş, Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi Başkanı (President of the Turkish National Assembly)

Erol Özvar, Türkiye Yükseköğretim Kurulu (YÖK) Başkanı (President of the Turkish Higher Education Council)

Naci İnci, Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Rektörü (President of Boğaziçi University and professor of Physics)

Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Mezunlar Derneği (Bogazici University Alumni Association)

Selin Sayek Böke, Secretary General of the Republican People's Party

Sera Kadıgil, Spokeswoman of the Workers Party of Turkey

Ayşegül Doğan, Spokeswoman for DEM Party

Udo Bullmann, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Viktor Almqvist, Press Officer for the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament

Snježana Kobešćak Smodiš, Press Officer for the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament

Josep Borrell Fontelles, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Fiona Knab-Lunny, Member of Cabinet of Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Zane Rungule, Member of Cabinet of Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Philip Holzapfel, Member of Cabinet of Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Hannah Neumann, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Raphael Glucksmann, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Bernard Guetta, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Christian Sagartz, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Dunja Mijatović, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

David McAllister, Committee on Foreign Affairs, European Parliament

Nacho Sanchez Amor, Member of European Parliament and European Parliament Standing Turkey Rapporteur

Kati Piri, Member of the Dutch Parliament (The House of Representatives)

Volker Türk, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

Irene Khan, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression



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Farida Shaheed, United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to education

James O'Brien, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs, United States Department of State

Young-Kee Kim, President of the American Physical Society.

Magdalena Skipper, Editor in Chief at *Nature*.

Richard Webb, *Nature*, Chief Magazine Editor.

Colin Sullivan, *Nature*, Managing Editor