



**Middle
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Studies
Association**
of North America, Inc

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11 August 2025

H.E. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan
President of the Republic of Turkey
T.C. Cumhurbaşkanlığı Genel Sekreterliği
Cumhurbaşkanlığı Külliyesi 06560 Beştepe - Ankara
Türkiye

Dear President Erdoğan,

We write on behalf of the Middle East Studies Association of North America (MESA) and its Committee on Academic Freedom to express our profound concern regarding the recent reinstatement of your office's sole authority to appoint university rectors despite the Constitutional Court's constitutionality review of file E.2018/117—which removed this authority—being set to take effect in June 2025. Political control over universities undermines their core functions and autonomy, and results in long-term negative repercussions for public trust, scholarly excellence, and the quality of education.

Founded in 1966, MESA is the leading academic association for the study of the Middle East and North Africa in North America. It publishes the prestigious *International Journal of Middle East Studies* and has nearly 2,800 members worldwide. MESA is committed to ensuring academic freedom and freedom of expression, both within the region and globally.

MESA has documented the erosion of university autonomy in previous letters to your office (including letters dated [7 January 2016](#), [7 November 2016](#), [8 June 2020](#), [20 January 2021](#)). While the 1980 military coup marked a pivotal moment in curtailing university self-governance with the creation of the Council of Higher Education (YÖK), our letters have clearly documented how political control over universities has intensified under your government. Following the failed coup attempt in 2016, emergency decrees (KHK 676 and KHK 703) have granted the Office of the Presidency the power to directly appoint university presidents, eliminating previous processes, such as university rector elections, as well as the eligibility requirements necessary to run for this post. As noted in our 20 January 2021 letter, following the suspension of university elections, twenty former MPs, mayoral candidates, MP hopefuls, and relatives of parliamentarians—all from the Justice and Development Party (AKP)—were appointed directly by the President as rectors. The authoritarian track record of some of these appointed rectors, as documented in our letters, includes decisions that have undermined

academic freedom and faculty and students' right to expression and assembly, dismantled faculty governance, imposed disciplinary action against faculty and students, and terminated faculty contracts in direct violation of academic norms and procedures.

The 2024 [ruling](#) of the Constitutional Court, effective as of June 2025, deemed [unconstitutional](#) the direct presidential appointment of university rectors without due process. Despite this decision, an omnibus law dated 1 July 2025 has returned this power to the President and retained the removal of eligibility requirements for rectorship. This reversal undermines both judicial authority and academic autonomy, raising serious concerns regarding the future legal prospects of academic freedom amid ongoing debates about drafting a new constitution for Turkey.

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 academic freedom, which is grounded in the 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. Additionally, these rights are enshrined in articles 25-27 of the Turkish Constitution. Lastly, Turkey is a signatory to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which includes obligations to “respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research” (Article 15(3)).

Pursuant to our letter dated 20 January 2021, we respectfully urge you again to enact institutional reforms that uphold academic freedom, establish transparent and merit-based appointment procedures, and ensure faculty governance. We hope that, as part of the new constitutional process, you will undertake the necessary reforms to secure academic freedom and enhance the credibility and international standing of Turkish universities.

We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey D. Reger
MESA Executive Director



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

Cc:

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

Ali Yerlikaya, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti İçişleri Bakanı (Minister of Interior, Republic of Turkey)

Yılmaz Tunç, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti Adalet Bakanı (Minister of Justice, Republic of Turkey)

Selin Sayek Böke, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Genel Sekreteri (Secretary General of the Republican People's Party)

Deniz Yücel, Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi Sözcüsü (Spokesperson of the Republican People's Party)

Sera Kadıgil, Türkiye İşçi Partisi Sözcüsü (Spokesperson of the Workers Party of Turkey)

Ayşegül Doğan, DEM Parti Sözcüsü (Spokesperson for Peoples' Equality and Democracy Party)

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

Kemal Irmak, Eğitim ve Bilim Emekçileri Sendikası (Eğitim-Sen) Genel Başkanı (President of the Education and Science Laborers' Union)

Mounir Satouri, Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Elodie Laborie, Press Officer for the Committee on Human Rights of the European Parliament

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

Kyriakos Klossidis, Press Officer for the Committee on the European Democracy Shield of the European Parliament

Yasmina Yakimova, Press Officer for the Committee on the European Democracy Shield of the European Parliament

Kaja Kallas, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission

Sibylle Bikar, Cabinet Expert in the Cabinet of Kaja Kallas, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Calin Ungur, Cabinet Expert in the Cabinet of Kaja Kallas, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

Marta Temido, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Łukasz Kohut, Vice-Chair of the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights

Michael O'Flaherty, 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

Emmanouil Kefalogiannis, Chair of the European Parliament's
Delegation to the EU-Türkiye Joint Parliamentary Committee

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

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