

Statement of the Society of Turkic, Ottoman and Turkish Studies (GTOT)

Academic Freedom in Turkey

The Society of Turkic, Ottoman and Turkish Studies is highly concerned about the violation of academic freedom in higher education institutions in Turkey, which lately became manifest because of the disputed appointment of a new chancellor to Boğaziçi University (Istanbul) and the planned restructuring of the university. Moreover, we express our deepest concern about the situation of faculty members and students who have been subjected to verbal and physical attacks, legal threats and hostilities for several weeks because of their (peaceful) protests against university policies. We are dismayed at how professors and students are publicly accused of treason and support of terrorism, and are being made targets of hate and harassment. We express our solidarity and support.

The independence of research and teaching is an indispensable prerequisite for understanding the world we live in, for the positive development of societies and for the quest for solutions to social, regional as well as global challenges. For many years, Boğaziçi University has embodied an outstanding example of an internationally highly esteemed academic institution committed to the independence of research and renowned for its excellent research. Its graduates are among the best in the country. The current protests by teachers and students are also an expression of concern for the future development of higher education in Turkey and for the freedom of teaching and research. With their peaceful actions and the arguments they put forward, these students are making an important and critical contribution to the formation of public opinion - the cornerstone for a vibrant democracy in Turkey.

Together with 24 Turkish universities, Boğaziçi University is an 'individual full member' of the European University Association (EUA) and has thus committed to the principles of the Magna Charta Universitatum. The fundamental principles of the Magna Charta and EUA are independence and academic freedom.

Through its membership in the Council of Europe and its membership application to the European Union, Turkey and its government have also explicitly and publicly committed themselves to the protection of academic freedom and the institutional independence of educational institutions.

As friends of Turkey, we appeal to the Turkish government to recognize the important contribution independent academia is making to the well-being of the society and to stop destroying academic self-government with repressive measures.

The GTOT will reach out to European academic organizations and university chancelleries to try to promote dialogue with the relevant institutions in order to achieve greater understanding for the state of the freedom of expression and academic freedom in Turkey.

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