



Statement in support of the students of Boğaziçi University (Istanbul)

Protests continue, and continue to be brutally crushed, in the battle for who controls a top Turkish university.

Statement co-signed by the European Youth Forum, European Students' Union and Go-For (Youth Organisations Forum, Turkey)

At Boğaziçi University, students have been protesting for more than 10 months. Their university is one of the most prestigious and progressive Turkish Universities, and it is considered a stronghold of academic freedom and freedom of thought. At the beginning of 2021, a “trustee rector” (Melih Bulu) was appointed as the head of the school by a presidential decree.

Since the appointment of Bulu, students of Boğaziçi University have been protesting relentlessly, despite facing police violence, arrests and detentions (at least 557 detentions of students in January and over 900 in the first 100 days of protests). Students have been arrested for wanting to attend a press statement, for posting messages on social media, or for showing up at the court hearings of other students. The charges used against them are of ‘provoking the public to hatred and hostility’ or ‘insulting the President’, accusations frequently used after the Gezi incidents, and clearly outside the rule of law and fundamental freedoms.

After over 6 months of protests, Melih Bulu has been dismissed by another presidential decree. But this did not mean a return to normality for Boğaziçi University: on 20th of August another rector, Naci İnci, who was the vice-rector under Bulu’s tenure, was appointed by presidential decree, despite he received a dissenting vote by 95% of the academic staff. Therefore, protests have continued at the start of the academic year. On the 6th of October, ten students were detained and two arrested for participating in a protest against the appointment of Naci İnci. The day afterwards, a protest was organised in response to these arrests and 14 more students have been detained. On the 22nd of October, police entered the campus and took at least 45 students into custody.

While the international community, from academics to NGOs and civil society, have given vocal support to the students protesting in Istanbul in Spring, the dismissal of Melih Bulu has resulted in fading attention from outside of Turkey. Though, academic freedom, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are still under attack in Boğaziçi. Students are experiencing for the second year in a row an academic environment where freedom of thought is systematically not respected, where one can face police violence, unfounded

detentions and arrests just for peacefully protesting or for being associated with any dissenting cause. Students belonging to the LGBTI+ community are especially targeted, and displaying any symbol related to LGBTI+ rights has disciplinary consequences.

The events at Boğaziçi University are an unacceptable violation of young people's freedom of speech and freedom of thought, and have made young people feel unsafe and threatened in the very place which should contribute the most to their personal growth.

In this respect, it must not be forgotten that academia is an autonomous place, and all people are entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms as indicated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which Turkey is a part of.

As the European Youth Forum, European Students' Union and Youth Organisations Forum (GoFor), we stand in solidarity with our friends in Turkey and we commit to spreading the word and helping make sure they are not forgotten in the media or in their fight.

Turkey is an EU candidate country, and even though since 2018 the Council has frozen accession negotiations, rule of law and fundamental rights are an integral part of the current EU-Turkey positive agenda, as it was remarked in the Council conclusions in March and June 2021. The international community and EU institutions should not turn a blind eye to the deterioration of democracy in Turkey, and should support those citizens and civil society who continue resisting.

We call on the Council of the EU to continue demanding the respect of fundamental rights and the rule of law by the Turkish governments, while supporting civil society and academia in their fight for independence.