

JOINT STATEMENT: We stand with “Boğaziçi Solidarity”

PEN Norway & Civic Space Studies Association

January 13, 2021

“Boğaziçi Solidarity” grows on its 10th day. We stand with the students and call all academic and student organizations throughout the world to stand together with “Boğaziçi Solidarity”. We ask for international awareness on the state violence and oppressive practices they are facing.

The Turkish government has been targeting higher education as a democratic space for free expression and the right to assembly. These oppressive practices against universities became prominent at the beginning of 2016, when the first wave of investigations hit those who had signed the Academics for Peace petition. Since then, **822 academics faced trial** only for the Academics for Peace cases. These practices extended ever increasingly after the 2016 coup attempt. **Over 6000 academics were dismissed** from universities, even more were relocated, most by presidential decrees. During the state of emergency, the power to appoint rectors to state universities was given to the President. Today, concerns of deteriorating education standards are combined with politically motivated appointments at all levels of higher education (as well as other fields).

There are over 50,000 imprisoned students in Turkey. Many more students were expelled from universities in the past years. Most of these students were punished merely for using their rights for freedom of expression, or freedom of assembly. All these students are being denied of the right to continue their education. These are

unfortunately estimated statistics since the facts are not transparently published by the Turkish government.

“Boğaziçi Solidarity”

Boğaziçi University, a state university founded in 1863, has a long tradition of high educational standards and a diversified culture. It has been increasingly facing state oppression along with all higher education institutions in Turkey. Boğaziçi University was one of the few institutions that managed to preserve its democratic environment in this atmosphere. No academic members from Boğaziçi were dismissed, but some were forced out by being denied contract renewals. The President used his power to appoint a rector in 2016, but this appointment didn't receive significant reactions from university staff. This was because the appointed rector Prof. Dr. Mehmed Özkan was at least an academic member of Boğaziçi University. On January 1st, 2021; the President used his power once more to appoint Melih Bulu. It is the first time since the military regime in the 1980s that a rector is appointed without having any connections to the university. While not having any connections to the university, the new trustee rector has organic ties to the ruling party: he was a parliamentary candidate of the party during the 2015 elections. Given the facts, **this is an obvious display of overreaching executive power that targets yet another democratic institution and core educational values.**

Interpreting Melih Bulu's appointment as a threat to academic and scientific freedom, students began to organize resistance via social media. The twitter campaign [#BizimRektörümüzDeğil](#) (Not Our Rector) grew larger with the inclusion of students and academics from other universities. As the reactions grew, Boğaziçi University graduates and supporters from outside Turkey joined the campaign. On January 4th, 2021 the first protest took place with **over 3000 in attendance.**

Timeline

- **4 January 2021 - Monday:** With the call of “Boğaziçi Solidarity” over 3000 people (including students, academics and graduates) joined the “No to the Trustee Rector” protest. The protest took place at the entrance of Boğaziçi University's Southern Campus. The police violently attacked the peaceful protestors who were practicing their rights to assembly and demonstration.
- **5 January 2021 - Tuesday:** Following the protests on the Monday, investigations were initiated concerning the protestors. Students' homes were raided by heavily armed police and students were taken into custody. They were charged with “violation of law 2911” (the law concerning the right to assembly and association). Over 40 students were kept in custody for hours, handcuffed behind their backs. LGBTI+ students were threatened with rape and faced sexist and phobic violence. Protests were organized in various other cities in support of the “Boğaziçi Solidarity”. At Ankara, during the protests, one of the student's leg was broken, and another's shoulder was dislocated because of police violence.
- **6 January 2021 - Wednesday:** As the arrests continued, the Istanbul Provincial Governorate declared a protest ban with the pretext of pandemic restrictions. The police barricaded university. The protests began inside the Boğaziçi University Campus with the participation of students. Then a larger protest began on the Asian shore of Istanbul, in Kadıköy, with wider participation. As the detained students were brought to the Çağlayan Palace of Justice, protests spread to numerous other cities in support of the solidarity movement.
- Boğaziçi students continue boycotting their classes. This movement has spread to teachers and students from various institutions.
- A petition was initiated by Boğaziçi graduates “[Biz de Kabul Etmiyoruz](#) (We Refuse This Too!) Over 4.500 Boğaziçi graduates have signed the petition at the time of writing. Another [petition](#) still grows with over 1900 signatories from all over the world, including names such as: Noam Chomsky, Judith Butler, Seyla Benhabib, Marianne Hirsch, Michael Hardt.

- **9 January 2021 - Saturday:** The Boğaziçi Solidarity made a [call](#) for all university students all over Turkey: “Each student must protest against the trustee in their University”.
- The protests against “trustee rectors” continue to grow despite prolonged detentions and increased police violence.
- **11 January 2021 - Monday:** The students put up a tent for cover from the weather conditions in front of the rectorate building (“Trustee Building”) of the Boğaziçi University. They continue to resist and protest in shifts. The students made a call for all participants to join them at the “Resistance Tent” between 12:00 – 18:00.
- While the protests grow without losing its peaceful nature, pro-government attempts to marginalize the protestors are growing too. The Coalition Party leader Devlet Bahçeli [targeted](#) the protests as an “anarchist project” likening them to the Gezi Protests of 2013.
- **13 January 2021 - Wednesday:** Investigations against protesters continue. Warrants are issued against many protesters. Students and lawyers tried to file charges against the police who broke the protesters leg. Five students were the detained and there was an attempt to detain a lawyer
- One protester was taken into police custody after attending of their own volition to give a statement. Several investigations continue concerning protestors.

We call all relevant parties to join us in our support to the “solidarity”.

- The detained protesters should be immediately released.
- All warrants should be lifted, and the practice of detentions should cease against protesters.
- All investigations concerning the protests should be dropped.
- The protesters must be allowed to practice their constitutional rights to assembly and association in peace along with their right to protest.
- All violent offences against protesters should be investigated and prosecuted.
- Universities are core to democratic values and freedom of expression: All oppressive practices against universities should be ceased.

This is a joint statement by [PEN Norway](#) and [Civic Space Studies Association](#)