



Bologna, 18<sup>th</sup> February 2022

Dr Erol Özvar  
President of YÖK  
Council of Higher Education (CoHE)  
06539 Bilkent/Ankara  
Turkey

Re: Restoration of Academic Freedom and Autonomy at Boğaziçi University

### **Statement by the Magna Charta Observatory of Fundamental University Values and Rights**

Dear President Erdoğan, Professor Dr. Özvar, and Professor İnci:

The Magna Charta Observatory of fundamental values and rights has international responsibility for overseeing the Magna Charta Universitatum – an international declaration and affirmation of fundamental principles upon which the conduct and mission of universities should be based. The document has been signed by just short of 1000 universities and is recognised and supported by many international and regional higher education associations. The 1988 version was drafted in accordance with United Nations agreements and the 2020 revision updated this to reflect the current global environment in which universities operate.

The 1988 version states ‘The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies differently organised because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.’

The Magna Charta 2020 states that ‘Intellectual and moral autonomy is the hallmark of any university and a precondition for the fulfilment of its responsibilities to society. That independence needs to be recognised and protected by governments and society at large, and defended vigorously by institutions themselves’.

In the context of this the Magna Charta Observatory continues to be concerned about the violation of the autonomous operation of universities in Turkey. We wrote previously concerning the appointment of a new rector of Boğaziçi University by the country’s President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. On 1 January 2021 an emergency decree from 2016 (KHK 676) was used by the President to appoint Professor Melih Bulu, who is not a member of the Boğaziçi University faculty, as rector of Boğaziçi University. This violated the established rules and practices of university governance and infringed the autonomy of the university.



Most recently we understand that on 18 January 2022 three academics, Professor Özlem Berk Albachten, Professor Metin Ercan and Prof. Yasemin Bayyurt were removed from their roles as Deans, to which they were properly elected, by the Council of Higher Education (YÖK). This also violates the established rules and practices of university governance and infringes the autonomy of the university.

The reaction to and harsh treatment of staff and students of Boğaziçi University who have voiced opposition to these and other interventions in the University is also of concern as this is not conducive to free academic enquiry and expression.

Boğaziçi University and 34 other universities in Turkey have signed the Magna Charta Universitatum.

The Magna Charta Observatory therefore calls upon the President of Turkey to enable Boğaziçi University and all universities in Turkey to reach their full potential for the benefit of Turkey and the world by respecting the letter and spirit of UN agreements and enabling universities to operate in accordance with the Magna Charta.

*Dr Patrick Deane*

*President of the Governing Council*

*For and on behalf of the Governing Council*

*Magna Charta Observatory*