



NEWS & VIEWS

A perspective from CHP

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Boğaziçi Protests

With a Presidential Decree released on January 1, Prof. Melih Bulu has been appointed as the Boğaziçi University's Rector. Bulu's appointment has triggered severe criticism within the university's students and academics, including the academic community elsewhere.

Appointed from outside of the community of Boğaziçi, one of Turkey's most prestigious universities, Bulu was a candidate for the 2015 parliamentary elections for the ruling Justice and Development Party, (AKP) of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Under the hashtag **#kayımrektöristemiyoruz** (We don't want a trustee rector), students and several student clubs at the university have also been protesting on social media.

After Prof. Melih Bulu was appointed Rector of the University of Boğaziçi, the university students and faculty members have been protesting against that kind of appointment onto their campuses.

In the face of strong criticism by students and faculty members, Prof. Bulu shared a post on his Twitter account, embracing his appointment to the position, saying, "We are all in the same boat."

The students protested the appointment of Prof. Bulu in front of the University's Southern Campus in Istanbul on January 4. The police, however, intervened in the rally with tear gas and plastic bullets.

The next day, the police announced that there were arrest warrants against 28 people for "violating the law on meetings and demonstrations" and "resisting the officer on duty." Later that day, 22 of them were detained. In total, forty people were detained during the protests. They were released on 7 and 8 January 2021.

Protests by students and faculty members at Boğaziçi University's South Campus have been going on since January 4.

On February 1, the police raided the South Campus and clashed with the students. Earlier in the day, students gathered in front of the campus to protest. Police prevented the rally from taking place while also keeping students from joining their friends outside the South Campus.

Fifty-one students were taken into custody inside the campus in the evening; however, the number of detainees increased to 159 by night. The statement released by the Office of the Governor of Istanbul in the early morning hours of February 2 confirmed that 98 students were released from detention.

On February 2, students of the University of Boğaziçi assembled at the waterfront in Kadıköy for another protest. The police attacked with plastic bullets and tear gas, then took 104 people into custody.

On 4 February, Turkish police detained dozens of protesters in the Kadıköy district of Istanbul during another protest. The same day, an Istanbul court freed all students of Boğaziçi University who had been detained in the protest while imposing a ban on 30 students travelling abroad. On February 9, the 53 people detained in Kadıköy district of Istanbul on 4 February, were released on probation.

On 8 February, Beyza Buldağ, a former student at Boğaziçi University, was arrested for organising Boğaziçi Solidarity's social media account, even though she did not do so. Buldağ said she handed over the account to other students when she was transferred from Boğaziçi, and the account is used almost exclusively for protests against Prof. Bulu.

Targeting LGBT+

During the ongoing protests opposing Erdoğan's appointment Prof. Bulu as rector, two Bogazici University students were arrested following the inclusion of an illustration of Kaaba, a sacred site for Muslims- with LGBT+ flags, in an exhibition. The exhibition was part of a month-long protest against the appointment of Melih Bulu. The incident soon escalated into a lynching campaign against students, as well as against the LGBT+ community in Turkey.

The pro-government media has been following the protests that have taken place for a month to discredit the students since they often deem students to be "terrorists" for their attitude against rector Melih Bulu's anti-democratic appointment.

The head of the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) Ali Erbaş said on 29 January that he condemns the 'aggressive behaviour' towards Kaaba and 'our Islamic values.' Erbaş quoted a verse from the Qur'an to target the LGBT community and said: "We'll be following this case and file complaints against those who were disrespectful."

On 30 January, Süleyman Soylu, Interior Minister, targeted LGBT+ community by calling them "perverted." "Four LGBT perverts were detained for disrespecting Kaaba at Boğaziçi University" tweeted Soylu. On February 2nd, Twitter has limited engagement on two tweets of Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu over hateful conduct. The tweets targeted Turkey's LGBT+ community and called them "perverted."

The President of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in government, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, congratulated the youth for not being the LGBT+. On February, Erdoğan addressed online to AKP representatives of four provinces, saying "We'll carry our youth to the future, not as LGBT+ youth, but like the youth from this country's glorious past. You are not LGBT + youth."

"You are not the youth who vandalizes, but you are those who mend those vandalized hearts" he said. According to Erdoğan, the AKP "respects" all views and ideas if they don't include "terror, immorality, perversion and violence."

While Erdoğan praised his party's youth for not being LGBT+, his ally, Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli, also joined the hate choir via calling LGBT+ flags "rags."

Students were initially arrested for "insulting religious values." However, the charge was modified since a prison sentence can't meet it. Instead, the accusation was turned into "inciting the public to hatred and enmity" that could be punishable with a prison sentence.

On February 8, Addressing Prof. Bulu, mobster Alaaddin Çakıcı wrote, "Don't resign. If you resign, you will clear the way for terrorist protesters. You don't have the right to open a hole in this holy alliance."

Again on February 8, reading out a joint statement, the academics have demanded the annulment of the Presidential decree that has opened faculties of law and communication at the university. They have also condemned Erdoğan's remarks targeting academic Prof. Ayşe Buğra.

International Reactions

The European Commission, the United Nations Human Rights Office and the United States have also shared serious concern about the detention of students of Boğaziçi University. They also condemned the anti-LGBT rhetoric used by Turkish officials. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs has refused international criticism of its response to the current protests at Boğaziçi University.

Statements from CHP

CHP leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu released a message, sending video tweets to support students. "Rector Melih Bulu should resign and put an end to this ugly situation" stated Kılıçdaroğlu. "Release the children of Turkey and put an end to the tension that you have created" Kılıçdaroğlu called on the government.

"A trustee rector has been appointed to Boğaziçi University. No one wants it. Neither students and faculty members nor the alumni of the university... He cannot find a person to work with" Kılıçdaroğlu of CHP said, warning that "the tension has been increasing."

"Violence is being imposed upon our children. Tonight, I would like to call not on our precious students, but their mothers and fathers: we are dealing with a political power holder who has lost control of it. He builds himself with conflict. We need to behave in common sense."

"I am making an open call to the government from here: Release the children of Turkey and put an end to this tension that you have created."

"I spoke to the related authorities about the situation at Boğaziçi, while the Metropolitan Mayor Ekrem İmamoğlu said, 'I also talked to the related authorities. I called for a dialogue to be developed, and my efforts will continue.'"

Mansur Yavaş, the Mayor of the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality, [sent an open letter to Prof. Bulu and requested him to resign.](#)

"I am writing this letter to you with the responsibility of the executive," Yavaş said in the introduction to his letter, adding, "In our country, which is tired of tension, you have grasped a historic opportunity. With one move, you can do a great favour to our country and nation."

"You have described the culture of Boğaziçi as 'a culture that can solve problems without contributing to a struggle.' Calling on Prof. Melih Bulu to behave with common sense, Mansur Yavaş said that Bulu should resign so that "neither the young people will get hurt nor will they come up against the police." He also emphasized that "the issue is now not a discussion on his academic career, but driving the country into a new crisis through his name and position." Yavaş emphasized that removal from office is "his responsibility both as an academic and a patriot."

"Do not deprive yourself and our country of this national obligation and do what is required without hesitation. In this way, you will write history with sacrifice and encourage our country, which is on the verge of a new crisis, to have a sigh of relief," concluded Ankara Mayor Yavaş.