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of North America, Inc

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15 July 2024

Dr. Mehmet Naci İnci
Rector, Boğaziçi University
34342 Bebek/Istanbul
Turkey

Dear Professor İnci,

Thank you for your letter dated 13 May 2024 in reply to our letter of 10 April. We appreciate your response and would like to address three key points you raised regarding the Middle East Studies Association (MESA)'s concerns about academic freedom and governance at Boğaziçi University. We offer a corrective to these points.

First, regarding your comment about MESA's alleged neglect of academic freedom issues in the United States, we would like to direct your attention to the work conducted by the North America wing of our Committee on Academic Freedom (CAFNA). MESA's CAFNA has been actively involved in addressing and responding to the rampant [attacks on academic freedom](#) across [North America](#), including those related to the war in Gaza. CAFNA and MESA's Board have issued [numerous interventions](#) and [public statements](#) condemning these violations, along with the [many letters](#) issued by CAF's Middle East and North Africa wing (CAF-MENA), illustrating our consistent and comprehensive commitment to academic freedom globally.

Second, concerning the research methods employed in preparing our letters, the Committee on Academic Freedom (CAF) adheres to a rigorous and confidential fact-finding method. Our process involves a thorough collection of data from multiple reliable sources, including first-hand accounts, verified news from national and international media, and assessments from international human rights and academic freedom watchdog organizations. In addition, we have followed the court decisions that have annulled your decisions to randomly remove faculty from their positions. This approach ensures that our claims are based on substantial evidence and reflect a balanced perspective. Confidentiality is paramount to protect our sources and ensure their safety, hence specific references may not always be publicly cited. However, we have included below a few additional public sources for your convenience.

Third, MESA is certainly not alone in its evaluation of the disconcerting situation at Boğaziçi University. In fact, some of the addressees included in your response have themselves voiced similar

concerns. For example, reports from reputable transnational human rights organizations and those who monitor academic freedoms across the world, such as [Amnesty International](#) and [Scholars at Risk](#) have highlighted instances of violations at your institution, calling for such things as the reversal of punitive actions against faculty and students for peaceful expression, refraining from retaliatory measures, restoration of the faculty's role in rector and dean appointments, and addressing police abuse of students. Likewise, international scientific journals such as *Nature* and *South Atlantic Quarterly*, as well as Turkish organizations such as *Bilim Akademisi* (the Science Academy) have published articles and [reports](#) on authoritarian governance and the erosion of academic freedoms at Boğaziçi University. These organizations' reports and findings corroborate our assessment.

Furthermore, Turkey's Constitutional Court has declared unconstitutional key provisions of the Higher Education Law (YÖK) that were changed by emergency decrees and that underpin the practices we critically address in our letters. On 4 June 2024, the Court annulled the 2016 amendment allowing the President to appoint rectors from among three candidates recommended by YÖK, as it contradicted the constitutional provision that universities are public legal entities with scientific autonomy. This ruling has implications for your appointment and for decisions taken by your administration. Before your appointment by presidential decree, 95% of the 746 stakeholders at Boğaziçi University voted against your candidacy in a poll with 82% participation. Despite this, you were appointed as rector, thus raising concerns about the decision-making process. The recent ruling by the Constitutional Court suggests that the concerns regarding your appointment and subsequent decisions, highlighted in our 10 April 2024 letter and several letters that preceded it, were warranted.

In an earlier ruling on 22 February 2024, the Constitutional Court also found provisions of the YÖK Law, which stipulate disciplinary action against students who organize meetings and distribute leaflets and posters without the university administration's permission, and the criminalization of such students without a court decision, unconstitutional. There are, as well, administrative court rulings against your termination of some faculty members. Cumulatively, these court decisions demonstrate that the recent administrative practices at Boğaziçi University about which we have raised concerns in our letters are based on unconstitutional regulations. We call for a prompt end to such practices.



Re: Response to 13 May 2024 letter

15 July 2024

Page 3

We hope this letter clarifies MESA's position and the meticulous process behind our advocacy efforts.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey Reger
MESA Executive Director

Laurie Brand
Chair, Committee on Academic Freedom
Professor Emerita, University of Southern California

The Constitutional Court Decision regarding the rector appointments can be found here:

<https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/gundem/aym-rektorlerin-cumhurbaskani-tarafindan-atanmasina-iliskin-duzenlemeyi-iptal-etti-/3239804>

European University Association's statement on the procedures with regard to political rector appointment following the constitutional Court Decision:

<https://www.eua.eu/news/eua-news/eua-encourages-tuerkiye-to-reform-the-appointment-of-university-rectors-following-constitutional-court-decision.html>

The following academic article documents issues with academic freedom, as well as the top-down appointment of Professor Naci Inci as Boğaziçi University's rector, delineating how in a university-wide poll, 95% voted against his appointment as rector (with a participation rate of 82% of the 746 stakeholders):

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14767724.2023.2173150>



Re: Response to 13 May 2024 letter

15 July 2024

Page 4

Below is an earlier letter from [Magna Charta Universitatum](#), established to commit to university values globally—a commitment consolidated with a statement signed by 388 universities around the world, including Boğaziçi University:

<https://www.magna-charta.org/activities-and-projects/observations/public-statement-regarding-deans-2022.pdf/@@download/file/Public%20statement%20regarding%20Deans%20-%202022.pdf>

The following is Amnesty International’s call to action about the abuse of Bogaziçi students under police custody:

<https://www.amnesty.org.uk/urgent-actions/students-allege-ill-treatment-detention>