

Protests in Boğaziçi University: What is Really Happening?

By Author Team of PRESENT

Overview

1 January 2021, midnight. Turkish President appointed Melih Bulu as the rector (who is generally referred to as the “*kayyum*”) of Boğaziçi University. A “professor” (frankly, naming a person a “professor” who owes his rise in academia to plagiarism does not sound appropriate) becoming the head of the university was witnessed for the first time since the 1980's military coup. Boğaziçi University, a 157-year-old institution that has a colorful culture based on democratic values, has its own tradition to choose its own rector since 1992. This tradition, which is also a democratic right, has been ignored since 2016, when the President first appointed another academician instead of the elected professor, as the rector.

Since day one of Bulu's arrival, students as well as the academic staff and the alumni, keep protesting the appointment via social media, in the campus, all around Istanbul and Turkey, and also abroad. Gatherings started on 4th January Monday, in front of South Campus, and continued throughout the week and are likely to continue.

Since Monday, we have witnessed so many events. Our campus including the streets nearby has been filled with huge numbers of police forces. Police had used tear gases, plastic bullets, pressurized water towards the protestors. South Gate was literally handcuffed in order to prevent students from entering the campus. In the next few days, the demonstrations continued inside the university. Students composed and sang songs, danced, prepared posters... Even tried to talk with Mr. Bulu, asked them their questions however could not get any proper answers. Instead, heard answers such as “You have a beautiful T-Shirt.” Academia was also present to show their support for the protests. Everyone once again demanded democracy and repeated their request for a rectoral election.

As students, we want our voices to be heard. We want everyone to respect our university's autonomy, values, and traditions. We want to express our thoughts and our aim once again via PRESENT, in order to provide everyone an accurate perspective of the people of Boğaziçi away from the social media contamination.

Why does Boğaziçi want rectorial elections?

Universities are the places where people (usually young adults) come to open their minds and widen their horizons. Since the goals of the attendees require the academic environment to be progressive and thriving, the administration of these universities should allow the environments to achieve their best version of themselves. The only way of ensuring the administrations of these universities to sustain these freedoms is to determine them by an election held within the university members. With the candidates from the university's own team, both the trust of the rest of the university and the understanding of the elected rector would be better and more promising for the university's future. To maintain the academic integrity of the university and the

peaceful relationship between the administration, the academic team, and the students; electing the rector is the only efficient and respectful way.

Throughout its 150-year-old history, Boğaziçi especially has made a name for itself for its well-known culture of freedom, acceptance, and democracy, it is why many of us choose it over other universities. While the fact that it was originally founded as Robert College in 1863 for Christian students is well-known, it is not often known that Boğaziçi has always been accepting of students from other backgrounds. In fact, English was chosen as the language of instruction to give students from different ethnic backgrounds a common neutral language, and despite this, separate cultural studies on Greek, French, Bulgarian, Armenian, and Turkish continued so as to keep the different cultural values of its students alive (1). Boğaziçi still holds this principle and offers multiple courses and certificates in foreign languages, including Turkish Sign Language. American Girls for College also held *Pageant of the Nations* for its students to celebrate different traditions of the varying ethnicities (2). Furthermore, while initially planned as a school with religious goals only, Hamlin and the following presidents of the university expanded its practices to represent the values of education by including other subjects to turn the institution to the university it is today. (3) (4) (5) (6) As a result, the culture of Boğaziçi was born, built on the foundations of freedom of thought, multiplicity, and acceptance. In short, Boğaziçi's culture is not new, it is rooted in over a century of shared love for freedom and education by its presidents, faculty, and students. It certainly has nothing to do with listening to Metallica.

The culture of Boğaziçi, as we know it, values democracy above all else, allows freedom of expression, and gives its members equal footing instead of forming hierarchies. All members of the university strongly uphold these ideals, even when external systems do not allow it. In fact, before 2016, the rectorial elections worked as such that the university would choose 3 names to give to YÖK, and YÖK would choose who was to be appointed. To combat this, Boğaziçi faculty would vote internally, and all participants except for the one with the highest vote would withdraw their candidacy so that the winner would be appointed.

In Boğaziçi, the professors and the *elected* president/rector listen to their students, as students are respected as individuals who have a say in decisions that affect them, rather than being seen as subservients. Actions such as filling the campus with police and refusing to respectfully answer students' questions directly contrast with these values. Right off the bat, appointed rectors, by principle, go against Boğaziçi's culture, the faculty does not get a say in who makes decisions for them, which is absurd. It is even more absurd that all of the members of an institution should, for some reason, be forced into being ruled by someone they strongly expressed they do not recognize. There is no democratic explanation for this.

How are rectors chosen around the globe?

Harvard is a decentralized university in which presidents are mostly elected by Harvard Corporation (also called President and Fellows of Harvard College). Harvard Corporation is one aspect of Harvard's board and the other one is The Harvard Board of Overseers. Harvard's

president is responsible for the Corporation. In Oxford, which is another exclusive university of the world, presidential elections are not more distinctive than Harvard. Presidents are being called Chancellor, and they are being elected by members of Convocation, a body which comprises all graduates of the university. In the University of Bergen, there is a University Board which is responsible for the university's regulation, and it is the university's highest body. The Rector is the Chair of the University Board and on behalf of the Board has the ultimate responsibility for and management of all activity at the University of Bergen. Also, the University's highest position is University Directorship and that position is appointed by the University Board. In conclusion, we ought to see there is an important untruth in Melih Bulu's words. Many universities in the world support their freedom with their choices, so they can provide themselves with a bright future which all includes science and developments.

UCU, which comprises academicians of Oxford University, supported Boğaziçi Students and academicians by saying "Solidarity to our colleagues at Boğaziçi University struggling to uphold academic freedom & democracy in the University. We condemn the police violence and arrests towards students and call Turkish authorities to respect the institutions' academic freedom and autonomy." from their Twitter account called @OxfordUCU. Again, Turkish students who are continuing their studies at Harvard and Yale Universities supported Boğaziçi University's students by sending messages via social media. [\(7\)](#) [\(8\)](#) [\(9\)](#) [\(10\)](#) [\(11\)](#)



Wikipedia

On Plagiarism

Plagiarism can be roughly defined as the uncredited appropriation of another person's work, or the manner of expression of that work, to be used in one's own works. In academic contexts, this work is usually a thesis or an article. Contrary to popular misconceptions, the scope of plagiarism is broader than a person copying a passage from another author verbatim and failing to cite the source of the passage. Students and academics are often expected to cite their sources for any use of another person's work, even if it is not a direct quotation. (12) Similarly, most people would expect that so long as everything is cited properly, nothing is off the table. This is not true either, as all original academic works are expected to contain enough original content to warrant publishing a new article. If all this does not convince you that academia takes plagiarism very seriously, let us talk about the consequences of plagiarism.

Once plagiarism is detected in an author's work, several things may happen. If the author is still on the status of the student, they will most likely fail the course and, depending on the severity of the offense, face expulsion from the establishment they are enrolled at. If the author is part of the academics of an institution, detection of plagiarism can again lead to expulsion, but in many cases, the author will be rejected from other reputable institutions as well, sometimes permanently. (13) In the event that plagiarism is detected after the fact, the author's master's or doctorate degrees can be revoked if the work in question is a thesis. The lightest possible punishment in such cases is the withholding of promotions from the author. So, academia, in general, takes plagiarism very seriously and with good reason. So long as plagiarism is not rooted out, it will stall the development of academic fields (14) and, indirectly, humanity. The bottom line is clear: "Forgetting" to include "some quotation marks" or lifting definitions from outside sources without citation is most definitely plagiarism and in no respectable academic institution can a person who has detected to commit such plagiarism to become even a teaching assistant, let alone a rector.

Mistruths

Another contradictory part of Melih Bulu becoming the rector of Boğaziçi is his media appearances and social media presence. During the very first television appearance on January 5, after the protests on the campus have started and the police were still on the campus (as they are right now), he denied all the plagiarism accusations, claimed he would make Boğaziçi one of the top 100 universities worldwide, and blamed the protestors to be the ones that want to hurt the culture of Boğaziçi. He also claimed that his political career was over by 2009 and when asked about his candidacy for the parliament in 2015, he could not give a definitive answer. He tried to justify the handcuffing of the University's door by saying "the door was broken" which is disputed by the footage that students recorded during the handcuffing. (15) Additionally, he claimed that he started his political career in the Republican People's Party (CHP) which is the major opposition party in Turkey, and his claim was disputed by the party. (16) Very next day, Melih Bulu appeared on a YouTube live stream from the office of rector in Boğaziçi University South Campus while the protests were continuing just outside of the building. During this live

stream; he denied the fact that he let the police into the campus while the police were still on the campus, he claimed the number of students and professors that oppose his appointment to be a very small fraction compared to the entirety of the Boğaziçi University while the shouts of the students could be heard during the live stream, and he also waved his hand through the window to the protestors and got booed, lastly, he refused to answer the questions from students joining the live stream. (17) His effort to convince the media that nothing is wrong and the protests are not significant did not work.

Thus far, you have read the reasons why we are protesting, and we would like to provide you with the reasons why we would stop protesting, unfortunately, we cannot provide you any reasons because we will not stop until the new rector is determined by a democratic election and we will not accept any less of an offering. We know that we are right and we will not let this appointed rector be the legitimate administrator of Boğaziçi University. He is not our rector, the opposition against him is not a minority, and we will not give up.