

Attention: news desks/science and education correspondents

For immediate release

Brussels, 31 October 2016

Autonomy and academic freedom under further pressure in Turkey
EUA statement of solidarity with universities and scholars

The European University Association (EUA) would like to express its support for the higher education community in Turkey following the further infringements on university autonomy and academic freedom reflected in two new decrees (675 and 676) published in the Turkish Official Journal on 29 October 2016.

These decrees state that from now on university rectors will no longer be elected, but appointed by the President of the Republic who will take the decision based upon three candidates proposed by the Turkish Council of Higher Education (YÖK). In exceptional cases a direct appointment of the university rector by the President of the Republic is possible, without any involvement of YÖK.

EUA has many Turkish members and is deeply concerned by these developments as well as by the immediate dismissal of a further 1.267 academics, and stands firmly behind the internationally recognised principles of freedom of expression and of association, and of university autonomy, without which quality higher education and high level research cannot flourish.

This news comes immediately after EUA's autumn Council meeting in Brussels held on 28 October where recent developments in Turkey were discussed, in the presence of YÖK as one of EUA's 33 national rectors' conferences. EUA was pleased to learn of several positive developments since the failed coup attempt in July and the immediate measures taken at this time:

- The 65.000 students affected by the closure of 15 private higher education institutions have, for the most part, been transferred to other institutions in the same city, and with their scholarships continuing to be paid by the state.
- Of the 1.577 deans who had been asked to step down in July, so far 1.480 of their positions have been refilled, 917 of which by the former deans.
- Of the more than 5.000 academics who lost their jobs in July, it was confirmed that the more than 3.000 staff employed in the closed private universities would be free to seek employment elsewhere, while for the 2.346 academic staff dismissed from posts in public universities an appeals process has been initiated to look at the evidence in each case, and that the process would be concluded in the next few months.

In concluding Friday's EUA Council meeting, EUA President Rolf Tarrach emphasised once more the Association's position that: "It is not our role to get involved in political issues, but it is our role to understand and discuss their consequences for the universities and we are afraid that they are very dire."

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The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of more than 800 universities in 47 European countries and 33 national rectors' conferences (NRCs). The EUA Council is made up of the president, the members of the Board, and of the presidents of all of Europe's NRCs. EUA works closely with its members to ensure that the voice of European universities is heard.