



**The Council of Higher Education**

06539 Bilkent, Ankara - TURKEY

**The Office of the President**

Phone : + 90 (312) 266 4725

Fax : + 90 (312) 266 5153

e-mail : baskanlik@yok.gov.tr

URL : www.yok.gov.tr

Ref : 95916564-724.01 416.

July 29, 2016

Yükseköğretim Kurulu (Giden No)



01.08.2016 10 39 - 46458

Prof. Rolf Tarrach  
President

European University Association (EUA)  
Avenue de l'Yser, 24  
1040 Brussels  
BELGIUM

Dear Prof. Rolf Tarrach,

Turkey has experienced a bloody coup attempt to overthrow its democratically-elected government on July 15, 2016. This dreadful coup attempt has failed thanks to the citizens of this country, the parliament including all oppositional parties and especially the leadership of our President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan who have courageously and decidedly stood up against the armed and violent attacks.

The Council of Higher Education of Turkey, appreciating the friendly and welcoming concerns of the academic world, wishes to address the recent unprecedented attack to democracy in Turkey and the measures that have been taken to eliminate the continuing potential risks. We assure the free and democratic world that we are also aware of and well understand the importance of academic freedom for the future of our nation.

We wish to explain with utmost sincerity the incentives and motivations behind all of the administrative measures that we have been taking in the Turkish Universities. We strongly value the remarks coming from the free world, since what we are trying to maintain in Turkey is also the freedom of self-rule. We, as a constitutionally independent non-political body, have been achieving this by supporting and maintaining the free academic institutions in Turkey.

There is no doubt that the recent coup attempt was organized by an illegal organization which has infiltrated into many state agencies for decades. Recent happenings in Turkey has provided strong signals that the members of this illegal organization may have penetrated into our higher education system, too. We see such well-organized illegal organizations as one of the biggest threat to autonomy of our institutions and the academic freedom of our faculty members. Therefore, we need to be vigilant in cutting the ties of any illegal organization with our universities.

As one of the precautionary measures we have taken after the failed coup attempt, we asked for all of our deans to step aside in order to protect the confidentiality of the investigation process related to members of above-mentioned illegal organization. It is utmost important to emphasize that the rectors of our universities have collaborated swiftly and willingly with our kind request and it took less than twelve hours for the deans to step aside. It should also be clarified that deans have resigned only from their temporary administrative positions and all of them still continue to work as academics in their institutions.

According to related law and regulations, university deans are appointed directly by the Higher Education Council while appointments to other administrative and academic positions are under the authority of the university administrations. As of today, the Council of Higher Education has begun the process of reinstating the deans and planning to complete the entire process promptly. The rectors will propose candidate deans according to long existing rules of higher education in Turkey. It is very likely that most of the universities will reinstate their previous deans back to their duties once the investigations are completed.

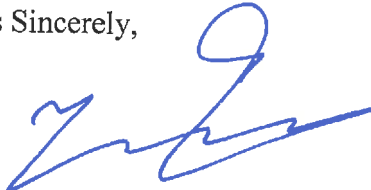
Great majority of the academicians in Turkey agree that Turkish Democracy has been under a very serious attack. Although Turkish public have courageously eradicated the attack, the risks will remain if the crucial state institutions, including the universities, are not cleared from the perpetrators. The universities, with their academicians and students, understand that the measures will have only some temporary drawbacks. For example, after the announcement of the state of emergency the right to travel abroad was suspended for university staff in order to control the illegal extrication, but fortunately this limitation lasted only for two days and the rectors have been re-authorized to give permission to those traveling abroad on duty. Academic mobility in the universities has already resumed its normal pattern.

During this period, we also show utmost care for our overseas visitors not to experience any problems, and so far there is no report of a complain that we know of. We do our best to ensure that academic, scientific, and educational functions of our universities continue without any interruption.

We believe that the great majority of the international views, which are critical of the recent developments in our higher education sector, are usually articulated by those who are not aware of the extent and the depth of the great dangers that our entire nation, including higher education system, faces. Therefore, we hope the facts as stated above will circumvent the misconceptions and help to clarify the international public opinion. As explained above, all our measures are directed towards ensuring and maintaining the academic autonomy of our universities. We strongly believe that a university system taken hostage by an illegal organization can neither exercise its freedom nor its academic autonomy.

If you have further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to share them with us. As the Turkish Higher Education Council, we are willing to continue to communicate with you in order not to let any misunderstanding about the regulatory measures we have to take while dealing with the difficulties we are going thorough.

Yours Sincerely,



Prof. Dr. M. A. Yekta SARAÇ  
President  
Council of Higher Education of Turkey