

Chancellor's Statement on Cancellation of Conference

Sabanci University

May 25, 2005

To the Attention of the Public

The presidency of Bosphorus University that was to host the conference 'Ottoman Armenians at the End of Empire: Academic Responsibility and Issues of Democracy' has been forced to decide to postpone it. The declaration of the Bosphorus University presidency notes that the university was saddened to be confronted with 'serious accusations' because of this conference organized to provide 'a context for scientific discussion;' criticizes the 'expression of prejudices on the contents of a conference that had not yet been actualized;' and conveys that by so doing, a condition and context harmful to academic freedom have been created.

And these are indeed extremely serious issues. The universities in Turkey can, as independent institutions, organize meetings on a variety of topics; likewise, the various initiatives in science and ways of thought can hold, under the roof of the university, meetings around a perspective and platform that they themselves articulate. Those who oppose these meetings can criticize them in one way or another. But what is most important is the freedom to be able to hold such meetings. In addition to being educational institutions, the universities also serve as the guarantors of and as an umbrella for free and creative discussions on topics that are of interest to the country and the world. In the final analysis, they can contribute to societal progress by virtue of their members' total possession of the freedom of research, thought and expression.

It is extremely distressing and dreadful that, in opposition to these universal values that have also been assimilated in Turkey, the 25-27 May conference at Bosphorus University was brought, because of prejudices and serious accusations, to the point of not being actualized. Not only does this consequence seriously harm the development of the freedom of thought, democracy and civil society, but I worry that it will also become, in the future within the international arena, a significant impediment to Turkey.

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