



ADVOCATES OF SILENCED TURKEY THE UN UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW

Since July 15th, 2016, there has been a tremendous crackdown on civil society, which was fueled by the state of emergencies. Hundreds of thousands of people from every level of society have been dismissed from their jobs.¹ Over half a million people have been investigated on terror and coup linked charges according to an official statement by the Turkish Justice Minister on January 18, 2019.² Many serious human rights issues have been reported including arbitrary killing, suspicious deaths of persons in custody; forced disappearances; torture; arbitrary arrest and detention of tens of thousands of persons, including opposition members of parliament, lawyers, journalists, foreign citizens, and three Turkish-national employees of the U.S. Mission to Turkey for purported ties to “terrorist” groups or peaceful legitimate speech; political prisoners, including numerous elected officials and academics; closure of media outlets and criminal prosecution of individuals for criticizing government policies or officials; blocking websites and content.^{3,4,5}

¹ For the scope of the purge see http://www.ihop.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SoE_17042018.pdf

² <https://turkeypurge.com/ministry-of-justice-half-a-million-people-in-turkey-investigated-on-coup-terror-related-charges-to-date>

³ As of July 2018, Bianet compiled the arrests, detentions, discharges and their reflections in the international reports since the coup attempt on July 15, 2016. 2 Years of July 15 Coup Attempt with Figures, Reports, available at <http://bianet.org/english/politics/199231-2-years-of-july-15-coup-attempt-with-figures-reports>. The courts had convicted 16,684, and another 14,750 were in prison awaiting trial.

⁴ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkey/>

⁵ <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/turkey>

Crackdown on Academics

Academics in Turkey after the July 15, 2016 coup attempt stands as certainly one of the most severely affected branches of the civil structure if not the most. In the wake of the coup attempt, the government passed statutory decrees that closed universities, forced resignations, suspensions, detentions and travel bans of thousands of individuals Turkey.⁶ Immediately after the coup attempt, the Council of Higher Education (YOK) suspended 4,225 academics and forced all 1,577 university deans to resign – staging a direct assault on the institutional autonomy of Turkey’s universities. On July 23, 2016, 2 days after the emergency decree-laws were established, the state ordered the closure of 15 universities displacing over 60,000 students and rendering 2,808 academicians jobless according to the State of Turkish Higher Education’s report.⁷

The government also imposed an immediate travel ban on academics and their spouses- reportedly “a temporary measure as accomplices of the coup plotters in universities were a potential flight risk.” Those who were abroad at the time of the attempted coup were ordered to return, facing investigations at the airports, detention or arrest once they are in Turkey. The Council of Higher Education (YOK) further ordered each university to compile lists of faculty staff suspected of links to the Gulen Movement.

According to most recent numbers provided by Turkey Purge, an organization established to track the extensive witch-hunt in Turkey, 2988 schools and dormitories have been shut down since the failed coup attempt.⁸ Nonetheless, more than 7300 academics (including more than 1500 deans) have been purged and 15 universities expropriated by the Government of President Recep T. Erdogan.⁹ Another state decree in September 2016 targeted 15,000 research assistants for their alleged links to the Gülen movement. They were part of an Assistant Professor Training Program (ÖYP) that was launched in 2010 to meet the need for academics in Turkey.¹⁰ In total, as stated by another report compiled by BBC Turkey at least 23,427 academicians lost their jobs either due to direct dismissals or reasons about university closures.¹¹

⁶ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/turkeys-persecution-academics-unmatched>

⁷ <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/2018/01/sar-turkey-letter-january-2018>

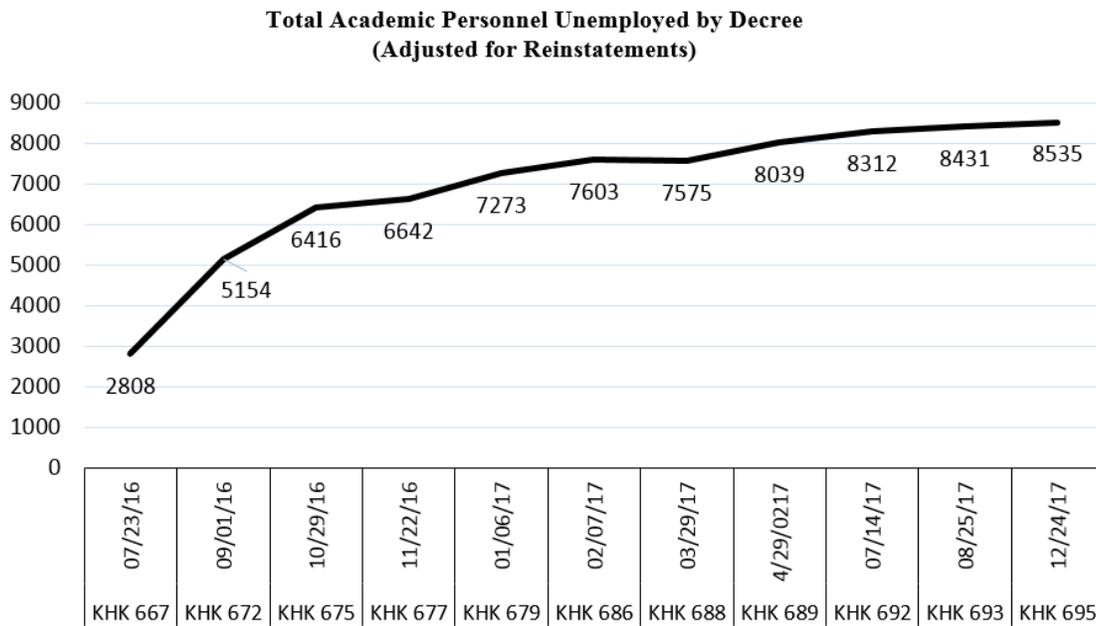
⁸ <https://turkeypurge.com/>

⁹ https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/class-dismissed-the-demise-of-academia-in-erdogans_us_58e413bce4b09deecf0e1b54

¹⁰ <http://injusticelogbook.com/2017/12/26/report-5822-academics-dismissed-by-turkish-govt-so-far/>

¹¹ <http://injusticelogbook.com/2017/12/26/report-5822-academics-dismissed-by-turkish-govt-so-far/>

Most of the scholars that have not been able to leave Turkey cannot continue their academic careers. Hüseyin Çamak, CHP Member of Parliament, indicated that there are currently 13 thousand unemployed young scholars with Ph.D.¹² Given the developments in Turkey, "people don't feel safe in their country anymore regarding human rights, democracy, and justice."¹³ The Turkish government has taken strict measures to silence dissidents from various ideologies. Due to crackdowns, many academics seek academic positions in other countries. The transition is not easy. Especially academics with Ph.D. from universities affiliated with the Gulen/Hizmet Movement have difficulties meeting some of the application components such as official sealed transcripts and reference letters. They cannot get an official transcript because their institutions are closed, and they may not get letters either because their advisors are in jail or are unwilling to write one due to political pressures. Until the beginning of 2018, the purge actions mostly via government decree have rendered jobless some 8,535 academic personnel (see chart below), as well as at least 1,349 administrative personnel as illustrated in Figure below¹⁴



¹² <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/337957/13-bin-genc-akademisyen-doktorali-issiz-adayi>

¹³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-42433668>

¹⁴ <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/2018/01/sar-turkey-letter-january-2018/>

Also, sixty-eight Turkish students studying abroad with a stipend provided by the Scientific Research Council of Turkey (TUBITAK) were also stripped of their student status. Even before the coup, reports indicated that there were nearly 500 imprisoned students in Turkey. The current number of imprisoned students is not known.

Academics for Peace

The first major violation of academic freedom occurred in January 2016, six months before the coup attempt, as 1128 academicians released “Academics for Peace” petition entitled “We won’t be a party to this crime” to support peace and call for an end to violence in the south-east of Turkey. These signatories, which are called Academics for Peace, were composed of academics and researchers from 89 universities in Turkey, and over 355 from abroad. In their petition, they condemned both the state violence against the Kurds and the Turkish state’s ongoing violation of its own laws and international treaties and called for the preparation of negotiation conditions. In response to the petition, Erdogan fired off an angry tirade against “those so-called intellectuals” accusing them of treason and being the “fifth columns” of foreign powers, sympathizing with terrorists and bent on undermining Turkey’s national security. Over 1,000 university lecturers who signed a petition criticizing government policy in the southeast subjected to a criminal investigation for “insulting” the Turkish state (January 2016), and 68 were fired by decree in September and October.¹⁵ By the end of April 2017, 372 signatories to the petition had been dismissed from their positions as academics under the decrees. The vast majority of them are among the 1,128 original signatories to the petition, rather than those who added their support later.¹⁶ Throughout the year, courts issued sentences for 28 academics, known as the Academics for Peace, for “terrorist propaganda.” Among them, an Istanbul court sentenced prominent physician and chairwoman of the Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, Sebnem Financi, on December 19 to two years and eight months in prison for “spreading terrorist propaganda.”¹⁷

Council of Higher Education Board

¹⁵ Human Rights Watch Reports, Turkey: Events of 2016 (January 2017), p.3, para.4

¹⁶ Amnesty International Reports, Turkey: no end in sight: purged public sector workers denied a future in Turkey (May 2017), p.11, para.3

¹⁷ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkey/>

The president appointed rectors to state and foundation-run universities, leading critics to assert that the appointments compromised the independence of the institutions. Hundreds of additional professors lost their jobs or faced charges due to a political speech during the year. Many of those dismissed were prohibited from traveling abroad, as were their spouses and children. During the first half of the year, rectors required the permission of the chairman of the Council of Higher Education to travel abroad. That requirement was lifted later. Other administrators and some professors were also required to seek permission from supervisors for foreign travel. Some academics and event organizers stated their employers monitored their work and that they faced censure from their employers if they spoke or wrote on topics not acceptable to academic management or the government. Many reported practicing self-censorship. Human rights organizations and student groups criticized legal and Higher Education Board-imposed constraints that limited university autonomy in staffing, teaching, and research policies.¹⁸

Tragedies

Credible reports point to serious allegations of ill-treatment and torture against academics and other higher education personnel deprived of their liberty, including severe beatings, verbal and psychological abuse, as well as denial of food, water, and medical treatment. Dr. Ahmet Turan Ozcelik no doubt is an exemplar of this persecution. Dr. Ozcelik was confined in Balikesir Bandirma prison for 14 months after 21-day psychological torture inflicted before his transfer. During his imprisonment, he developed colon cancer, notwithstanding his health issues he was denied preventive treatment. After rigorous efforts he was released, yet soon after following his release he passed away from colon cancer on February 12, 2018.¹⁹ Recently on May 21st, Erdogan's police officers cracked down his family's home and detained his wife and his 19 years old daughter who is a university student, and she is still in police custody as of today (May 24th).²⁰

Haluk Savaş, one of the most experienced psychiatry professors in Turkey, lost his job at a university in a government crackdown following the failed coup in 2016, has been denied a passport even though he was acquitted by a court of charges of terrorist organization membership. Dr. Savaş has

¹⁸ <https://www.state.gov/reports/2018-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/turkey/>

¹⁹ <https://silencedturkey.org/?s=ahmet+turan&submit=>

²⁰ <https://stockholmcf.org/son-of-late-purge-victim-launches-campaign-for-release-of-sister-from-detention/>

received hundreds of citations in his publications and is known around the world. He was jailed for months for terrorist organization membership, but the court subsequently acquitted him of all charges, revoking a travel ban that had been imposed on him. Since he was diagnosed with cancer and Turkish doctors said it was incurable, he wanted to travel abroad to receive immunotherapy that would help the body's immune system to fight cancer. Savaş posted a series of tweets complaining about the police department, which had refused to issue him a passport due to the government decree. "I don't want to spend the remaining nine months of my life mired in bureaucratic correspondence," he tweeted. In an interview with Euronews, the professor said: "This is my basic human right. If the Turkish state and government are not giving me my basic right as a human, that means the state is not practicing basic international law, humanitarian and moral values."²¹ After his tweets, a social media hashtag #HalukSavaşPasaport (Passport for Haluk Savaş) drew support from various political figures and some purged public servants experiencing the same situation.²²

Yunus Pakdemir, the former President of the Canik Basari University, was arrested on September 2016, and after a detention period of almost two years. He was sentenced to 8 years and nine months of imprisonment.²³ According to written statement Dr. Pakdemir provided²⁴ a) "*Disregarding the contents of the official reports issued after the search-and-seizure operation at my residence, fabricated witness statements and distorted claims were inserted in the indictment.*" b. "*In the presence of the panel of judges and front of hundreds of people in the courtroom, one of the witnesses had especially said, "I was **inculcated** and forced by the police to write the accusative statements in my testimony taken by them."* This disclosure is officially noted in the hearing record". He also reported that "*I have been suffering from four different chronic illnesses. Recently, doctors recommended I should be urgently operated for hemorrhoids. However, later they withdrew, expressing that my recuperation would be extremely difficult under the existing detention conditions. Due to the same conditions, I am unable to use the CPAP device to alleviate my severe sleep apnea.*"

Closing of higher education institutions and consequences

²¹<https://www.euronews.com/2019/05/15/turkish-cancer-patient-with-months-to-live-denied-passport-for-treatment>

²²<https://stockholmcf.org/turkish-professor-diagnosed-with-cancer-denied-passport-although-acquitted-of-all-charges/>

²³<https://www.gercekbizde.com/yerel/samsun-da-eski-rektore-feto-den-8-yil-9-ay-hapis-cezasi-h120050.html>

²⁴Original written document can be provided by our organization upon request by United Nations officials.

In the aftermath of the attempted coup 15 universities, employing 2,808 academics and attended by 64,533 students, were closed and sealed as they were deemed crime scenes. The closure left 61,382 students in academic limbo, wondering if they could continue their studies and worried about the black mark of a “Gülen movement school” on their college record.²⁵ The majority number of academics in closed 15 universities were detained and charged for “supporting terrorist organization.” For instance, academicians and university staff in the trial against the Zirve University, which is one of the closed universities, were sentenced to prison terms ranging around 6 to 7 years on May 14, 2019. The court sentenced former deputy dean Vahap Aktaş to 7 years and 6 months, former student affairs manager Sezai Şimşek 6 years, 10 months and 15 days, former vice-rector Fatih Töremen, and former foreign languages department chair Şaban Çepik, dean of the faculty of economics and administrative sciences, Çetin Doğan, the former permanent education center director Mehmet Tamer, academics Abdulkadir Nağaç, Aydın İpek, Ömer Akgöbek, Serdar Pehlivanoğlu, university staff Mesut Kuşdemir, Ramazan Özer, Mustafa Şanver and Suat Kılıç, former social sciences Institute Secretary Osman Şenyurt, Özmen Özgüven and Yunus Göç sentenced him to 6 years and 3 months in prison.²⁶

On October 1, 2016, more than 50 Nigerian students, mainly from Fatih University, which was closed in the aftermath of the attempted coup, were detained by Turkish police at İstanbul Atatürk Airport for allegedly being students of a “terrorist organization.”²⁷ The Nigerian House of Representatives subsequently gave the Turkish government a seven-day ultimatum to release the students. Representatives stated that the detained students were forced to sign documents for deportation, pay penalties on the allegation of illegal entry into Turkey, humiliated and abused. Press reports also reported that members of the House of Representatives warned Turkish citizens in Nigeria of the risk of indiscriminate arrest in retaliation for the “unjustifiable assault” on Nigerian students.²⁸

The list of closed universities and the number of academics – students²⁹:

Canik Başarı University: 61 academics, 2220 students

Gediz University: 240 academics, 7965 students

Fatih University: 514 academics, 14,219 students

İpek University: 119 academics, 870 students

Melikşah University: 175 academics, 4500 students

²⁵<https://stockholmcf.org/6-986-scholars-purged-from-turkish-universities-in-wake-of-july-15-coup-attempt/>

²⁶<https://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/fetonun-kapatilan-zirve-universitesi-davasinda-karar,-2TQ-TqAbkyHS6rrNSnZ4w>

²⁷<https://www.thecable.ng/turkey-arrests-50-nigerian-students-failed-coup>

²⁸<https://www.thecable.ng/turkey-arrests-50-nigerian-students-failed-coup>

²⁹<https://freedomforturkishacademics.wordpress.com/2016/09/08/turkeys-erdogan-shuts-universities/>

Mevlana University: 175 academics, 4714 students
Murat Hudavendigâr University: 17 academics, 213 students
Orhangazi University: 131 academics, 2138 students
Selahaddin Eyyubi University: 80 academics, 1283 students
Suleyman Şah University: 98 academics, 2068 students
Şifa University: 271 academics, 2625 students
Turgut Özal University: 393 academics, 7738 students
International Antalya University: 128 academics, 2130 students
Zirve University: 327 academics, 8699 students

Total: 2,759 academics, 61,382 students

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of these conclusions, the AST and Huddled Masses recommend as follows:

We urge the Turkish government

1. To refrain from all actions and rhetoric contrary to the separation of powers.
2. To apply international law standards, including the European Convention on Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the UN Basic Principles on the Independence of the Judiciary and the UN Guidelines on Prosecutors.
3. To condemn torture and other ill-treatment in places of detention and take concrete steps to combat it and hold perpetrators accountable.
4. To end the misuse of terrorism charges against academics and students for whom there is no evidence of violent activities, plotting or logistic help to armed groups
5. To take all measures to protect academics under threat from violence, harassment or persecution.
6. To release immediately of all academics and students who have been detained and imprisoned on unlawful and illegal grounds.

7. To do immediate reinstatement of all academics and other personnel to their positions, and end of repression on academics and other education personnel in the country and abroad.
8. To do an immediate reversal of all legal, administrative, and practical measures, all policies and actions part of the assault on the education, both in Turkey and abroad.
9. To take any practical action to reverse the pressure on academics, ensure the protection of academic freedom, and ask for positive discrimination toward these political victims to save their academic from getting destroyed.
10. To take all measures to function the national human rights monitoring mechanisms, such as the Ombudsman Institution, Human Rights Department of the Ministry of Justice, Victim's Rights Department, Parliament's HRC, etc.
11. To return the arbitrarily deprived 15 universities to owners.
12. To drop all charges against academics and staff who worked at closed 15 universities.
13. To overturn the article 37 of the law 6755, which prohibits any investigation, criminal or civil appeals against the officials or de facto organs of the government for their possible involvement of crimes against humanity.
14. To cooperate with international institutions and to establish international and independent inquiry commission to investigate the coup attempt incident.

