**CRIMINALISATION AND DISMISSAL OF ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND ACADEMIC STAFF IN TURKEY**

On 15 July 2016, a state of emergency was declared across the country due to the attempted coup in Turkey, and the government was given the power to issue decrees with the force of law, bypassing parliament[[1]](#footnote-1).

The Erdogan government, claiming that a military coup had been staged against it, issued many decrees with the force of law during this state of emergency, and academic institutions, research institutes, colleges, universities and academic staff were the most adversely affected by these decrees.

The state's practices in relation to academic institutions, both in terms of closing universities and dismissing tens of thousands of academics, have caused great fear and intimidation in terms of academic freedom, the right to science and research, the right to material and intellectual development, and the right to freedom of expression. As a result of all this intense pressure, Turkey is currently ranked in the bottom 10% of all countries in the Academic Freedom Index (AFi) 2021[[2]](#footnote-2).

Academic institutions and academics have been linked to terrorist organisations, criminalised and purged by terminating their jobs on the grounds of the "state's right to purge/lustration". Moreover, this pressure and intimidation on Turkish academics has been applied to academics whose field of work has nothing to do with politics and state administration, but who are in opposition to the government. The passports of academics have been cancelled and they have been banned from leaving Turkey, making it impossible for them to work in other countries[[3]](#footnote-3). Academics, who are constantly under the threat of terrorism investigations, detentions and disciplinary proceedings, are losing their academic productivity and are looking for opportunities to work in other universities abroad as soon as possible[[4]](#footnote-4).

Under the pretext of fighting terrorist organisations, the political power has closed down 15 universities that it considers to be in opposition to it and dismissed a total of 7236 academic staff (2017 figures). All of these 15 universities, whose assets have been confiscated and nationalised, were founded by individuals, businessmen and foundations opposed to the political power[[5]](#footnote-5). The number of academics dismissed from the 15 universities established as Foundation Universities and closed down is 2808 people, the number of academics dismissed while working in State Universities is 4481 people[[6]](#footnote-6). The number of academic staff dismissed at Universities It is a complete irony[[7]](#footnote-7) that the justification for these dismissals is hidden in the claim that the state has the right to "purification and cleansing of criminals", which refers to the processes of purging military intelligence personnel from the state in the eastern bloc countries after the collapse of Communism[[8]](#footnote-8).

Some statistical data on academic staff dismissed and dismissed on the grounds of being in contact with terrorist organisations are as follows:

Department of Internal Medicine 640 Internal Medicine 110

Department of Surgical Medical Sciences 313 Child Health and Diseases 79

Department of Basic Medical Sciences 186 Cardiology 71

Political Science and Public Administration 102 Science Education 54

Clinical Sciences 101 Radiology 47

Department of Business Administration 100 Ophthalmology 45

Department of Mechanical Engineering 97 Physiology 42

Department of Basic Islamic Sciences 90 Ear, Nose, Throat Diseases 38

Department of Mathematics 82 Political and Social Sciences 36

Department of Primary Education 80 General Surgery 33

Department of Educational Sciences 76 Primary Mathematics Education 31

Department of History 73 Department of Turkish Education 31

Turkish Language and Literature 70 Management and Organisation 31

Department of Public Law 60 Chest Diseases 29

Mathematics and Science Education 59 Curriculum and Instruction 29

Department of Civil Engineering 58 Neurology 29

Department of Economics 55 Social Studies Education 28

Department of Chemistry 55 Anaesthesiology and Reanimation 28

Department of Computer Engineering 48 Medical Biochemistry 27

Electrical and Electronics Engineering 45 New Turkish Language 26

Above are the fields of work and occupations of academic staff who have been dismissed and dismissed from their jobs in the academy on the grounds of the state's right to purification[[9]](#footnote-9).

For example, 79 academic staff were dismissed from paediatrics, 45 from ophthalmology, 60 from public law, 55 from chemistry and 73 from history.

How can an ophthalmologist, a paediatrician, an anaesthetist, a historian or a public lawyer be criminalised in this way and dismissed from their jobs on the basis of the state's right to purity? What relationship can these professionals have with terrorist organisations and support for terrorism? The personal and family information of suspected political opponents was previously collected by the state intelligence services and their private lives were monitored, and such a determination was made and these academics were dismissed.

The right of the state to purge/lustration is a concept used in the former Eastern Bloc countries as a process of purging communism in order to remove from state institutions former military and intelligence officers who had committed crimes and violated human rights and freedoms. There is no just and legal basis for criminalising academic staff, dismissing them from their jobs, depriving them of their right to material and moral development, their freedom of expression, their right to work and their freedom to work on the grounds that they are political opponents.

In addition, the right of these academics to work in other countries outside Turkey is hindered and they are prevented from accepting job offers from abroad. In other words, Turkey has become an open-air prison for academic staff who have been dismissed from their posts.

Academics, who cannot work in their own fields and have to support their families and children, work in non-specialised fields such as driving, transport, carpentry, etc. and often lose their lives in these jobs, which they learned later[[10]](#footnote-10).

There have been dozens of suicides among academic staff condemned in this way to social genocide and starvation. Many have had to undergo psychological treatment and take anti-depressants[[11]](#footnote-11).

According to the Academic Freedom Index 2023, Turkey ranks among the bottom 10 countries in the world in terms of academic freedom, far behind countries such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan and the United Arab Emirates. Since 2016, Turkey has been dragged into this situation as a result of dismissals from the Turkish academic community and universities[[12]](#footnote-12).

When analysing the years of service, age, gender and titles of the academic staff dismissed in Turkey, it is clear that the political power does not discriminate in this regard and will dismiss a 25-year-old university researcher and a professor or a disabled academic and a 60-year-old professor in the same way. The titles and degrees of the academic staff dismissed and their share in the total number of academic staff dismissed are as follows [[13]](#footnote-13):

Professor : 15 % Docent : 18

Assistant Professor : 29% Research Assistant : 22

Lecturer : 11% Instructor : 3

Expert : 2

It is impossible to explain why these academics are being subjected to terrorism investigations. How can the "right of the state to purge" be explained in terms of purges and dismissals? What illegal activities could these people have carried out with regard to human dignity, human rights and freedoms or the security of the state? It is impossible to give a rational answer to all these questions.

As a result of the coup attempt of 15 July 2016, the practice of rectors being elected by the academic staff of universities was also ended and university rectors were appointed directly by the political power and the President of the Republic[[14]](#footnote-14). In this way, the democratic participation and voice of the academics in the university was ended and they were forced to obey the political rectors appointed by the political power[[15]](#footnote-15).

State and political pressure has destroyed the possibility of creating a free and democratic academy. Under these conditions, the academic world, which has been deprived of freedom of expression, lives under the threat of terrorist investigations at any time and has been given tenure and titles in universities and academic promotion opportunities according to whether they oppose the political power or not, is experiencing a great crisis.

Muammer Burtacgiray

HrD e.V-Berlin

Human Rights Defender e.V

<https://humanrights-ev.com/tr/home-tr/>

1. <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2018/07/17/july-8th-emergency-decree-701-removing-206-academics-and-52-administrators>

   <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2018/02/16/new-emergency-decrees-khk-695-and-696> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2023/740231/EPRS_STU(2023)740231_EN.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.academicsatrisk.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Academic-Freedom-in-Turkey-web.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A Report on Academic Freedoms in Turkey in the Period of the State of Emergency, Page 21. <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Opinion/Submissions/Academics/INSAN_HAKLARI_OKULU3.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://academicsolidarity.com/tr/category/tum-kategoriler/raporlar-yeni/> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/318289>

   (A Study on the Academics Dismissed from Turkish Universities, s. 13 Table 4) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://pdf.trdizin.gov.tr/pdf/QS9iL21MeFpUQTRmWmN5N0NYdHU5RmJwZEFsVWtTUUNsRVVCTjdCZ1R5Qkl0UjBobnptcWc3NFJlS2FGZ1VEL1B2SUl3YVdpR2VmTmRKWTZ2ZkNaQ2xKUGUzdjY0RmsyNE9NZ08zeDl3R05IQTJiWmFyZkVLanZhZFVjVXhtWTZkZ1Q0dUlOakV3Z2xKTHNwTjFqWVVWVGlPZFZDNWYrejZQTkZta0J5NXFFUGtDSG1va1ZJcExzcEhOMHo3WHQ0QVAwTmlOWGNnYUZlOFNqSWJpamw0dHB5UzdJL3lYMStIcWc5elp4aGdPTWpyeGo1RlVMQktpanl4UTJ2VWFhUUdXUnFDelZuQ1YwT1RnPT0> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://kristinagogic.com/en/lustration-is-still-going-on-in-eastern-germany/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/318289>

   (A Study on the Academics Dismissed from Turkish Universities, s. 24 Table 12) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://gazeteaydin.com/haber/7010714/oldukten-sonra-goreve-iade-edildi> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://boldmedya.com/2023/03/05/uc-cocuk-annesi-khkli-akademisyen-fehmiye-celenk-kendini-asti/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://twitter.com/ipek_hukuk/status/1752643947040485469> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/318289> [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://mesana.org/advocacy/committee-on-academic-freedom/2021/01/20/ongoing-erosion-of-the-autonomy-of-turkish-public-universities-due-to-erdogans-unilateral-appointments-of-university-presidents> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A Report on Academic Freedoms in Turkey in the Period of the State of Emergency, Page 21.

    <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Issues/Opinion/Submissions/Academics/INSAN_HAKLARI_OKULU3.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)