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‘Academics for Peace’ in Turkey: A Case of Criminalizing Dissent and Critical Thought via Counter-Terrorism Policy

Abstract

On 11 January 2016, 1128 academics in Turkey and abroad signed a petition calling on Turkish authorities to cease state violence in mainly Kurdish populated areas of the country, which had been under curfew and an extended state of emergency. The petition received an immediate reaction from President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who accused the signatories of treason and terrorist propaganda. He subsequently demanded that public prosecutors launch an investigation. Criminalization of the petition has been exacerbated by disciplinary action by universities against many of the signatories. Many have suffered insults, arrest, detention or suspension as a result of the ensuing smear campaign. This massive crackdown on academic freedom has been masked by discourses of counter-terrorism, which have also been deployed to criminalize dissent more generally in Turkey as a part of a process of rapid ‘democratic retrenchment’ since 2013. This article is an attempt to put the criminalization of academics within the larger framework of human rights violations, increasing curtailments of academic freedom and rising authoritarianism in Turkey. It argues that the prosecution of the signatories of the petition is an extension of an established tradition of targeting academic freedom in times of political crisis in Turkey but is also a product of growing authoritarianism under the ruling party and President Erdoğan. It shows that counter-terrorism laws can be extended way beyond eliminating security threats by instrumentalizing them to suppress dissent in a declining democracy.

Key words: academics for peace, Turkey, academic freedom, Kurdish Question

Introduction

“It is the responsibility of intellectuals to speak the truth and to expose lies. This, at least, may seem enough of a truism to pass over without comment.”

Noam Chomsky, The Responsibility of Intellectuals, 1967

On 11 January 2016, 1128 academics from 89 universities in Turkey and all around the world signed a petition¹ calling on the Turkish authorities to cease state violence in the mainly Kurdish populated areas of the country which were under curfew and an extended state of emergency. The text criticized the Turkish state’s use of violence in the region and asked the government to prepare conditions for peace negotiations. Those negotiations broke down in June 2015 when both sides returned to violence after an almost six year, on and off ceasefire. The petition also criticized the Turkish state for contravening its own laws and violating international treaties. The conflict reached boiling point in the second half of 2015, when the Turkish military clashed with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan – PKK*) and its urban youth wing, *Tevgera Ciwanan Welatparêz Yên Şoreşger* (The Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement – YDG-H). The petition was opened for signatures around this time, while non-mainstream news agencies were reporting civilian casualties on a daily basis. Moreover, as documented by a recent United Nations Report prepared by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), serious human rights violations occurred during the curfews and entire residential areas were cut off from public reach and movement of lay people were restricted (OHCHR Report 2017, 2). The report estimates that the number of displaced people as a result of clashes and curfews were between 355,000 and half a million (ibid, 4).

As Sözeri (2016) points out neither the claims about the Turkish state’s conduct nor the demands for restitution laid out in the petition were particularly novel. It nevertheless caused uproar in Turkey, so much so that it marked something of a turning point, presaging the official crackdown that would soon follow. Right after the petition was released, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan accused the academics of treason at one of his public addresses and invited the judiciary to respond: “I call upon all our institutions: everyone who benefits from this state but is now an enemy of the state must be punished without further delay” (Shiermeier

2016). The judiciary, under the influence of the president, wasted no time in launching public prosecutions against many of the academics who had signed the petition. The signatories were accused, under Turkish counter-terrorism laws, of “terrorist organization propaganda”. Furthermore, the Council of Higher Education (*Yüksek Öğretim Kurumu-YÖK*) directed the universities to conduct disciplinary investigations which were followed in short order by police raids at academics’ homes and university offices resulting in dismissals, arrests, and detentions (Ugur 2016). The accusations did not let up, however, with signatories of the petition further condemned for insulting the Turkish state and engaging in terrorist acts (Altıparmak and Akdeniz 2017,13). As a reaction to this stigmatization and witch-hunt, around 1000 academics added their names to the petition in solidarity with the first group, increasing the total number of signatories to more than 2000.

This was surely not the first attack on freedom of speech nor was it the first crackdown on academic independence in Turkey. In the past, limitations on the right to publish or teach on ‘sensitive’ political issues have been widely reported and prison time has often served as punishment for academics challenging the state’s narrative on the Kurdish Questionⁱⁱ or the Armenian Genocide, which together constitute the ‘third rail’ in Turkish politics.ⁱⁱⁱ However, the ‘Academics for Peace’ petition marked a new era. Whereas violations of academic freedom in the past had typically been sporadic and unsystematic, the government’s approach to using counter-terrorism discourse as a weapon against dissent promised suppression of academic freedom on an unprecedented scale.

As Flader (2016) points out, the shocking wave of anticipatory obedience by the judiciary, higher education institutions and university rectors highlights how far authoritarianism in Turkey has reached over the last years. The failure of the peace process also paved the way towards less reconciliatory attitudes by the government against the opposition. Indeed as DeVotta (2015, 211) argues, civil wars and counter-terror practices might create an authoritarian shift if the conflict endures. Although terrorism and counter-terrorism has been a fundamental part of Turkey’s vocabulary since the 1980s (Barrinha 2011), it has been taking new shapes and forms under the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* – AKP) and this incident coincided with a new era in Turkey where the definition of the concept of ‘terrorism’ has been stretched so far that it can be employed against anyone who fails to toe the party line.

This article contributes to general discussions of how counter-terrorism laws can be utilized by states to suppress ideas and groups that contest official narratives. It shows that those in power not only utilize laws but also engender a discourse around counter-terrorism that blurs the boundaries between actual terrorism and civil disobedience; and by doing that they arbitrarily limit freedom of speech. The narrative created around these laws can be instrumentalized to criminalize certain group and individuals. This article focuses on this very point and asks how so-called counter-terrorism laws and the discourse born out of them have enabled state authorities, the judiciary and the police to suppress dissent and freedom of speech in Turkey. It argues that the prosecution of the signatories of the petition is a continuation of long-term violations of academic freedom in Turkey as well as a consequence of the growing authoritarianism under the ruling party and President Erdoğan. The article will first detail the key background events that paved the way for the petition, with a specific focus on growing authoritarianism and the return to heightened securitization prompted by the failure of the peace process. The following section will then focus on the situation of academic freedom in Turkey in general in order to demonstrate the violations of academic freedoms is not a recent phenomenon and then analyse the ‘Academics for Peace’ group, the petition and the developments in the aftermath of its press release. The article’s main focus is this specific petition, its background and its consequences. A final section will also be dedicated to the developments aftermath of the failed coup attempt in Turkey in July 2016, which engendered a massive purge in Turkish academia which surely affected the signatories of the petition.

Turkey’s Authoritarian Shift and the End of the Peace Process

Hegemonic Authoritarianism in Turkey

Turkey’s authoritarian shift forms part of a broader wave of ‘democratic retrenchment’ across the global since the 2000s. Weak democratic systems in the Balkans, Russia, Latin America and rising right-wing movements in most Western countries are visible general trends across the world (Levitsky and Way 2002). In this regard, since the end of the Cold War, scholars have tried to define these regimes by employing different concepts such as semi-democracy (Case 1993), virtual democracy (Norris & Jones 1998), illiberal democracy (Zakaria 1997) and soft authoritarianism (Means 1996; Winckler 1984). Each of these concepts point to the decay of democracy in one way or another. Despite holding elections regularly, such regimes neglect the basic tenants that we have come to associate with contemporary liberal democracies.

Instead, elections even become instruments to legitimize increasing authoritarianism (Schedler 2006, 6-19). In Turkey, the concentration of power in the hands of President Erdoğan as a 'dominant leader' through the instrumentalization of state apparatuses and the ruling AKP's hegemony over civil society and the media are the important pillars of Turkey's new authoritarianism. The AKP's hegemonic political project is increasingly being referred to as 'New Turkey'.

The AKP, founded in 2001, came to power in 2002 and rose on the back of a highly promising reform agenda. It increased its popularity not just in Turkey but also abroad by framing its demands and goals in line with those the European Union made of Turkey in its membership bid. Their actions were praised and they were depicted as the fresh political elite who could put Turkey on the path to rapid democratization. The AKP then quickly emerged as Turkey's dominant political party, winning landslide victories until the elections of June 2015. Despite a noticeable loss of support at the June 2015 poll, the party was able to reconsolidate its power following a snap election in November 2015. This election received much criticism from international and domestic observers who pointed to "irregularities in the campaign, including media bias and self-censorship, misuse of state resources to support Erdoğan's election bid, lack of transparency in campaign finances, and voter fraud" (See *Freedom House Turkey Country Report*).

Lately, the AKP's rule has received much criticism from the opposition, civil society organizations and non-mainstream media in Turkey as well as the international community. The AKP and its influential former leader (and current Turkish president) Erdoğan have transformed Turkey into a de facto presidential system in which the president assumes more and more control over the executive, legislative and judicial branches, a move that is both perturbing and polarizing (Öztürk 2014). As Yeşilada (2016, 19) very well summarizes, the positive environment of the early 2000s when the AKP came to power and promised certain reforms, has been replaced by "a grim picture of illiberal political developments that are characterized by President Erdoğan's power grabs, loss of judicial independence, and electoral manipulations to achieve the desired election outcome that favoured Erdoğan and the Justice and Development Party." The final objective appears to be a full 'executive presidency' in which all power is concentrated in the hands of the president. Authors such as Esen and Gümüşçü (2016) define the current situation as *competitive authoritarianism* by arguing that Turkey no longer satisfies even the minimal requirements of democracy. Akkoyunlu and Öktem (2016) also define Turkey as country where there is personalization of executive power,

weakening of democratic checks and balances, less free and fair electoral competition, imposition of stricter constraints on freedom of expression and civil liberties. They also underline that there is growing use of state's coercive capacity to suppress various forms of violent and non-violent dissent.

The AKP's leaders manipulated Turkey's weak post-2008 democratic system to advance an agenda that was in fact anti-democratic and authoritarian. During the last decade, dozens of activists, academics, politicians, journalists, and others have been detained simply for disagreeing with government policies, or for opposing Erdoğan's discourses on political, economic, and social matters. In this regard, the Economist Intelligence Unit's 2015 Democracy Index defined Turkey as a hybrid regime that combines democratic procedures and autocratic practices. In a similar fashion, the 2015 report of Freedom House ascertained that media freedom in Turkey deteriorated at an alarming rate in this year. The World Justice Project's 2016 Rule of Law Index ranks Turkey 99th out of 113 countries, which implies the absence of a significant judicial check on government and the presence of governmental interference in judicial processes (*Rule of Law Index*). The AKP government utilized its control of the judiciary to punish critical reporting and political opposition via the country's famous anti-terror law (Patton 2007, 339-34), which has been both disproportionate and ill-tailored (Dearden 2016). The term is stretched such that its reference point is no longer the law, the Turkish constitution, or international norms and regulations. More than 2000 legal cases were opened with the allegations of "insulting the President" against people who criticized Erdoğan on social media and elsewhere. Turkey has become an example of how democratically-elected governments take undemocratic paths to cling to power and how counter-terrorism policies go hand in hand with authoritarianism on the path to one-man rule. The AKP and its leader Erdoğan emerged as the two key elements in this context (Keyman and Gümüşcü 2014).

It is true that the AKP retains an autonomous party structure on paper. At the same time, it would be fair to say that Erdoğan and the party have become almost synonymous (Özbudun 2014, 157). As mentioned, during Erdoğan's term as president, he has openly declared his ambition to switch the political system from a parliamentary democracy to a presidential one. In Giorgio Agamben's terminology, Erdoğan could be thought of as having instrumentalized 'exceptional circumstances' to present himself in the public domain as an 'exceptional leader' – the only one who can steer Turkey past the rocky shoals on its present course (Agamben 2005, 40). Of course, many dimensions of the economic and foreign policy crises that Turkey faces at present are in fact, at least in part, of Erdoğan's own making, which makes his claims

to ‘exceptional’ leadership that much more ironic. After almost fifteen years in power, Erdoğan has established a network of control across the entire Turkish state of which he is the ‘central node’. Moreover, the continuation of the civil war in the southeast of the country combined with the nationalistic sentiments of the majority of the Turkish population and the lack of resistance from either the parliament or the judiciary have produced a toxic political environment in which extreme sentiments find fertile soil. In this regard, counter-terrorism discourse also emerges as a useful tool to suppress all dissent.

Turkey under Erdoğan presidency is by no means the only example of political instrumentalization of crisis in the pursuit of power. DeVotta (2015, 210-11) notes, for example, how Sri Lanka’s illiberal democratic regime transitioned to a soft-authoritarian one during the Sri Lankan civil war and the way in which counter-terrorism discourse against the Tamil Tigers was formative in that process. By suggesting that exceptionalism fosters democratic retrenchment, he also claims that “civil wars justify counter-terror practices, and the longer the conflict the more draconian these practices can become” (DeVotta 2015, 210-11). The decades-long war between the PKK and the Turkish state has created an atmosphere of insecurity, polarization and mistrust in Turkey. Erdoğan’s and the ruling party’s politics works by activating the fears of the population and thus relies heavily on societal consensus regarding the ‘threat’ emerging from violent Kurdish separatism. As Altıparmak and Akdeniz (2017, 104) note, since the collapse of the peace process, counter-terrorism has become the token excuse to limit freedom of speech and assembly. The concept of “terror” is so vague that academics, members of parliament, actors, artists, journalists and others can easily be targeted with accusations of making “terrorist propaganda”. The authors claim that Turkey, still, does not have the legal infrastructure that could be used to accommodate these definitions used by the state authorities that strongly violates human rights. Due to the many cases that have been sent to the European Court of Human Rights, Turkey had to make a lot of modifications in its laws which basically limited the ground to arbitrarily use these laws. However, in the time of crises, the state does not shy away from bending the law accordingly.^{iv}

In this regard, the case of ‘Academics for Peace’ may have disturbed the governing party’s agenda by openly criticizing its actions in national and international platforms. The punishment for this ‘impudence’, then, was justified within the framework of counter-terrorism and Turkish nationalism.

The End of the Peace process

The roots of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict can be traced back well before to the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the foundation of the Turkish Republic in 1923. As a result of nation-building efforts in the early republican era, a number of harsh measures were implemented to suppress any kind of dissent against the newly emerging and fragile authority of the state, with the aim of creating a unified nation under one flag from an ethnically, religiously and linguistically divided country. Therefore, the Turkish-Kurdish conflict can be understood as a constant resistance against the Turkish state's assimilation policies. These policies have resulted in the systematic suppression of Kurdish identity, and subsequently a demand for the recognition and restitution of this group's basic political, cultural and linguistic rights.

Over the last few decades the conflict turned violent, making it the country's primary political challenge, not to mention a high priority security problem that threatens the country's territorial integrity. There has been an armed conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdish armed group PKK since the early 1980s. For a long time, the Turkish state had a 'no negotiation with terrorists' approach and opted for a military solution. Especially in the 1990s, South-East Turkey was ruled under constant state of emergencies where extra-judicial killings, dissapearences and deportations became the norm. Kurdish politicians, journalists, activists and other human rights activists were criminalized throughout this whole period and often tried for "supporting terrorist propaganda". Overall, nearly 50,000 people were killed in this armed conflict and it is estimated that up to two million Kurds were displaced, lost their properties and suffered from the consequences of this low-intensity civil war (See Uluğ and Cohrs 2017, 4).

The AKP came to power in 2002 and its rise to power was a turning point in Turkey for many reasons. It started implementing a conservative agenda and, at the same time, 'taboo' topics such as Kurdish identity and peace negotiations were opened to discussion. The AKP gradually began implementing reforms to accommodate Kurdish identity in order to align itself with the membership ideals of the European Union. After 2009, the AKP first started with a reform process which was called the "Kurdish Initiative". A state TV channel broadcasting in Kurdish was opened and several departments at universities started offering curriculum in Kurdish. The AKP also ended the state of emergency as a gesture of good will to show that they were determined to find a peaceful solution to this problem. In the meantime, the AKP decided to

implement a policy of negotiation with the PKK. Between September 2008 and 2011, there had been several meetings in Oslo, between high-level representatives from the National Intelligence Agency (MIT) and top PKK leaders within the company of international mediators. These talks collapsed in 2011 however talks about talks continued until June 2015 with several ceasefires, visits to the imprisoned leader of the PKK by HDP (People's Democratic Party) representatives and various parliamentary commissions which prepared reports for potential roadmaps.

The peace process officially ended due to the lack of commitment from both sides on certain issues. For instance, the PKK has never completely withdrawn from Turkey as any lasting peace will require it to do, while the government has failed to implement the reforms that were demanded by the Kurdish side and were promised by the government. However, the impact of the June 2015 elections was the last nail in the coffin of the peace process. The AKP, in losing the absolute majority of votes in that poll, sought to burnish its nationalist credentials to appeal to that segment of Turkey's electorate that is most susceptible to nationalistic appeals in advance of rescheduled elections in November 2015. As the violence resumed, attacks on both sides were reported and several high-profile bombings in Ankara and Istanbul took place. A state of emergency was declared in certain parts of Turkey and this has led to gross human rights violations as there have been extensive civilian casualties.

Turkish security forces used heavy artillery, tanks and other armed vehicles while the PKK's youth wing, YDG-H, dug trenches (sometimes filled with explosives) and planted barricades in order to limit access by the Turkish security forces to their neighbourhoods (Human Rights Watch 2015). During what the state authorities called 'security operations', many Kurdish civilians – including women, children and elderly – were killed. Human Rights Watch reports that more than 100 civilian deaths were recorded while many people suffered multiple injuries. In December, they also reported that these numbers were likely to increase due to the heavy clashes (Human Rights Watch 2015). The Human Rights Foundation of Turkey published a press release on 9 January 2016 that reported that 58 round-the-clock, open-ended curfews in around 20 districts and 7 cities (covering more than 1 million residents) in southeastern Turkey had been officially confirmed. The Foundation's statement indicates that during these curfews, basic human rights have been violated and around 150 civilians including women, children and elderly were killed. OHCHR report revealed that 2000 people were killed in the context of security operations between July 2015 and December 2016. As the report suggests, this number

would include “close to 800 members of the security forces, approximately 1200 local residents, of which an unspecified number may have been involved in violent or non-violent actions against the state” (OHCHR Report 2017,2). The report also stated that they managed to document “numerous cases of excessive use of force, killings, enforced dissapearences, torture, destruction of housing and cultural heritage, incitement to hatred, prevention of access to emergency medical care, food, water and livelihoods, violence against women, and severe curtailment of the right to freedom of opinion and expression as well as political participation” (ibid). The report suggests that “it appears that the domestic protection of human rights in South-East Turkey has effectively been non-functioning since at least July 2015, as demonstrated by the reported lack of a single investigation into the alleged unlawful killings of hundreds of people over a period of 13 months between the late July 2015 and the end of August of 2016” (OHCHR Report 2017,3).

‘We won’t be a party to this crime!’

The Role of Public Intellectuals in Tumultuous Times

What happened to the signatories of the ‘Academics for Peace’ petition makes us question the role of public intellectuals in dark times. The petition was criticized by fellow academics for many reasons, including for its tone, its content, its wording and its supposed bias. Some academics also claimed that scholars should stay neutral in these cases. The question of ‘neutrality’ in times of conflict raises serious questions, however. Is a deliberate nonchalance in the face of massive human rights violations the same thing as staying ‘neutral’? Or, as Chomsky (1967) pointed out, is it the public intellectual’s duty to expose deceit and falsehood? Is it the duty of academics to speak truth to power?

Petitions, anti-war campaigns, open letters, protests and boycotts are among many other strategies that have been used by academics to criticize certain governments or states throughout history. For example, the *Manifesto of the 121* – an open letter penned by 121 intellectuals, academics, reporters and journalists (including Jean-Paul Sartre) in France, and published by the magazine *Vérité-Liberté* in 1960 – stands out for its historical importance. Sartre did not organize the petition, but his participation was crucial (Leak 2006). The *Manifesto* called on the French state and the French people to acknowledge that conflict was a legitimate struggle for independence by the Algerian people, and denounced the use of torture by the French military. It also called on the authorities to respect French conscientious

objectors to the conflict. After the petition, no retribution was brought on Sartre, however other signatories of the *Manifesto* were dismissed from their posts (Leak 2006, Schalk 1991). Moreover, as Schalk (1991, 106) points out:

Le Monde printed in its entirety a countermanifesto of October 1960 that condemned the work of ‘the professors of treason,’ accused of being a ‘fifth column’ that draws its inspiration from ‘foreign propaganda.’ This manifesto was signed by nearly three hundred intellectual supporters of Algerie francaise, including seven members of the French Academy. But at that time readers could only speculate as to the exact nature of ‘treason’ supposedly perpetrated by these ‘professors.’

Surely it is possible to find other examples of these sorts of open letter/manifestos/petitions. Chomsky’s ‘political interventions’ have become the stuff of legend (Giroux 2016, 179). He was at the forefront of opposition against the Vietnam War, writing numerous articles on the issue. The 1965 ‘teach-in’ on the Vietnam War at the University of Michigan was also a remarkable step towards showing dissent against war mongering at higher education institutions.^v Also, in early 1967, more than five thousand US scientists signed a petition asking the President to stop using certain types of weapons which were said to be inhumane (Krane 2011, 4).

Academics have long intervened in peace processes as well. For example, during the apartheid period in South Africa, a group of Stellenbosch University academics formed a group called the ‘Stellenbosch ’85 Discussion Group’, chaired by Professor Sampie Terreblanche. This was a group apart from the more classic leftist ‘anti-status quo’ group of academics, who often found themselves threatened and excluded from university campuses if they were against the apartheid regime and who often risked being sacked by the university administration or being detained by the police. The academics within the Stellenbosch group, in contrast, held ‘privileged’ positions in South African society. Yet they decided to criticize the apartheid regime inspite of the risks to their personal reputation and position. Some members of this group, such as Prof. Willie Breytanbach and Prof. Willie Esterhuyse, also participated in clandestine meetings with ANC representatives in the United Kingdom, which gradually paved the way for a peaceful reconciliation period in South Africa.^{vi} Around two dozen intellectuals who were mostly based at Stellenbosch University, even had a meeting with then-President P. W. Botha. The discussion group showed that the perceptions of the Afrikaner elite were

changing and was also a clear signal to the political elite that they were losing the support of the intellectuals (See Horowitz 1991 :79).

More recently, a group of Israeli academics published a petition in 2014 criticizing Israeli state policies in Gaza. The signatories declared their desire that it “be known that they utterly deplore the aggressive military strategy being deployed by the Israeli government.” They argued that state violence is creating more divisions between the two communities and the bloodshed is preventing a peaceful solution which is the only alternative to end this conflict. Similar to the ‘Academics for Peace’ petition in Turkey, they stated that “Israel must agree to an immediate cease-fire, and start negotiating in good faith for the end of the occupation and settlements, through a just peace agreement” (*Statement by Israeli academics July 2014*).

Turkish and Kurdish intellectuals also have written similar petitions, manifestos and open letters. The *Aydinlar Dilekcesi* manifesto stands out in this regard. After the 12 September 1980 coup, Turkey established a comprehensive martial law regime under the management of the country’s military-dominated National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Konseyi-MGK*) and high numbers of detentions, political restrictions, and torture were reported across the country. Furthermore, media and intellectual freedoms were radically restricted during the period of military rule. In response, in May 1984 a group of intellectuals presented a petition criticizing this state of affairs to both the presidency and the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (*Türkiye Büyük Millet Meclisi-TBMM*). Popularly known throughout the country as the ‘Intellectuals’ Petition’, it was in fact originally titled ‘Observations and Requests about the State of Democracy in Turkey’ (*Türkiye’de Demokratik Düzene İlişkin Gözlem ve İstemler*). It was signed by 1383 scholars, authors, actors, poets and artists. The petition stated the importance of freedom of thought and speech for Turkey’s democratic future. It highlighted the issue of torture in prison – describing this as a crime against humanity – and demanded a general amnesty to convicted of ‘thought crimes’. The reaction of the Turkish state bears repeating and has echoes of today’s situation. The Martial Law Command immediately prohibited further publication of the petition and opened a case against 56 of the most prominent of the signatories, including the author Aziz Nesin, the journalist Uğur Mumcu, the scholar Yalçın Küçük and Hikmet Çetin, a former politician. The first trial was held in August 1984 and all the suspects were acquitted in February 1987 (See Index on Censorship, 1984).

Another controversial political campaign has been the ‘Özür Diliyorum’ (I Apologize) campaign, launched as an online petition in 2008. The campaign’s principal objective is to

prompt a public discussion about the 1915 Armenian Genocide – as mentioned, a highly politically sensitive issue in Turkey – by calling for a collective national apology for the events and expressing regret and sorrow for the loss felt by the victims and the injustice caused. Four prominent public intellectuals – Ahmet İnsel, Baskın Oran, Cengiz Aktar and Ali Bayramoğlu – authored the campaign declaration, which read: “My conscience does not accept the insensitivity showed to and the denial of the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in 1915. I reject this injustice and for my share, I empathize with the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers. I apologize to them.” After a short period, the petition garnered more than 30,000 signatories online, prompting reactions from the key political players – including then-prime minister Erdoğan, who was critical – and widespread public discussion and debate. Most of the signatories received death threats. Furthermore, the Office of the Public Prosecutor launched an investigation into the crime of ‘public humiliation of the Turkish nation’ regarding the campaign, but it did not turn it into an official case.

The ‘Academics for Peace’ petition is no different to the examples provided above in terms of scope and intentions. However, it has arguably been the most impactful of all, although not as intended. Rather than drawing attention to the plight of civilian Kurds in southeastern Turkey, it has provoked a vicious reaction from the state and some segments of civil society. Moreover, state authorities crackdown has been facilitated by the petition itself, which provides a wholesale list of academics in numerous institutions in Turkey who disapprove of the government’s approach to the Kurdish Question after the failure of the peace process. The tremendous courage of these scholars has been met, therefore, with retribution and malicious intent.

Academic Freedom in Turkey

Academic freedom is under threat all around the world, something scholars have been bringing to the attention of the academe and the wider public for more than a decade. Nehring and Kerrigan (2016) observe that this phenomenon is not limited to authoritarian countries; even liberal democracies are becoming less and less secure for academic freedom and freedom of speech. Henry A. Giroux’s (2016) criticism towards neo-liberalism and its impact on higher education institutions is remarkable. His examination of current academic practices indicates, in his view, the emergence of new age of authoritarianism. Even in so-called liberal societies critical thinking is not welcome at institutions of higher education where academic indifference

towards injustice and violence is becoming the norm. Critical thinking, he contends, is increasingly ‘criminalized’ across the globe: “Academics who function as critical public intellectuals have always posed a threat to authoritarian states and corporate entities, just as the institutions in which they worked were viewed as a threat to authoritarian powers” (Giroux 2016, 118). Turkey is no exception here, and even when the trends of democratization were moving in a positive direction, academics faced intense pressure to eschew public dissemination of “dangerous thinking” (Giroux 2016). It is worth, therefore, detailing in brief the story of academic freedom in Turkey in general, in order to contextualize recent events surrounding the ‘Academics for Peace’ petition.

As mentioned, heavy limits on academic independence have been a feature of the Turkish political scene long before the rise of the AKP. University campuses were the site of the most contentious and often violent ideological confrontations between leftists and rightists during the period of ‘radicalization’ of Turkish politics in the late 1960s and 1970s. In response, the military regime established after the 12 September 1980 coup established a state authority – YÖK to ‘monitor’ universities and ensure institutionalized state control over the higher education institutions (Gocek 2016). While YÖK did not function as an apparatus of direct ‘thought control’ it nevertheless had something of a ‘chilling effect’ on academic conduct and publication. Moreover, in the wake of Turkey’s authoritarian turn, the existence of YÖK has provided the AKP with a ready-made state apparatus capable of clamping down hard on academic freedom. As Gocek (2016) states: “Since educational institutions are among the most significant places for research, their control becomes crucial in autocratic states. Rulers want to closely monitor access to knowledge and therefore to power.” Indeed, the space in which academics can conduct research and contribute to political discussions in Turkey has been radically constricted. The ‘Academics for Peace’ petition was simply the proverbial straw that broke the camel’s back in relation to academic freedom and the Kurdish Question.

The deteriorating situation of Turkish academic freedom after 2010 has not gone unheeded. The International Working Group on Academic Liberty and Freedom of Research in Turkey (Groupe international de travail – GIT: “*Liberté de recherche et d’enseignement en Turquie*”) was founded in 2011 in the wake of the arrest of Prof. Busra Ersanli on charges of ‘terrorist propaganda’. This initiative of Turkish-born scholars (often working abroad) and international partners was established to monitor and expose further attacks on academics in Turkey. By early 2012, the initiative had established chapters in Germany, Switzerland, France and North America. The group called for solidarity with Turkish academic colleagues, a petition signed

by hundreds of academics (*GIT Türkiye, Akademik Özgürlükler İçin Birleşme Çağrısı*). GIT also launched a series of reports on violations of academic freedom in Turkey, the first of which was published in 2012 (*GIT, Akademi Hakkı İhlalleri*).

The work of GIT indicates that the solidarity shown towards the ‘Academics for Peace’ drew on a base already established with networks such as the Academics Solidarity Platform and the Foundation University Workers’ Solidarity Network (GIT Report 2016:2). The report states that:

In the absence of academic freedom, one cannot speak of the autonomy of universities as institutions of higher education. Institutional autonomy alone is not sufficient to safeguard free thought and free research. A university may thrive, in a universal sense, only in the presence of both scientific and institutional autonomy (GIT Report 2016:7).

The report places contemporary events in historical context by detailing the general degradation of academic freedom in Turkey, especially in moments of historical political crisis (GIT Report 2016: 9). It further notes that:

After the year 2000, the ruling political powers established their own administrations at universities, step by step, and at every level. They never refrained from exerting pressure and applying censorship with regard to ‘sensitive topics’ which have existed since the founding of the republic. Moreover, they widened the scope of repression at universities by means of introducing ‘brand new sensitive issues’ (GIT Report 2016: 9).

Already in 2012, the GIT’s ‘Call to Unite for Academic Freedoms’ stated that academic research was being hindered by direct and indirect obstacles and that those academics lecturing on subjects that are considered taboo in Turkey faced particular difficulties. Underlining the urgent need for safeguarding freedom of expression and research, the call announced that the GIT Turkey will fight against oppression on academia. The GIT Report (2016) reveals that the sensitive topics which the academics are not allowed to touch upon in their academic work changes from one period to another not only depending on who the ruling party is but also on the changing dynamics of politics in Turkey. Many violation cases from all over Turkey are mentioned in GIT Reports which demonstrate that counter-terrorism narratives have been used to criminalize academics and delegitimize their academic work way before the petition was

publicly announced in January 2016. For instance, a PhD thesis on the Kurdish issue and the Kurdish language was derecognized by Marmara University in Istanbul with the university stating that the PhD thesis has been contradicting with the Turkish Constitution's articles that cannot be amended (Abbott 2012). The PhD candidate then defended her thesis in Lund University in Sweden. Another academic has won a large research grant to work on the Kurdish Question and civil society but his university did not let him pass the ethics committee because they found his topic controversial. Another academic asked an exam question to his students about the PKK leader Öcalan and his views and this was considered to be 'terrorist propaganda.' An investigation has been launched against him (*GIT, Akademide Hak Ihlalleri Dosyası*). These types of violations of academic freedoms also continued after the petition. One professor at Akdeniz University resigned in April 2016 because her student's thesis subject on the role of women in peacebuilding was deemed 'dangerous' by the university (*Diken* 29 April, 2016). These incidents show that the failure of the peace process has also paved the way for the criminalization of concepts such as peace, peacebuilding or negotiations.

The 'Academics for Peace' Petition Uproar: Criminalization, Targeting and Investigations into 'Terrorist Propaganda'

The 'Academics for Peace' group differed somewhat from previous civil society initiatives such as the GIT. Although there is an overlap among the members of these initiatives, the 'Academics for Peace' group's principal concern was not academic freedom *per se*, but rather the question of justice for the Kurds. The group came together in 2012 just before the so-called peace process has started between the PKK and the Turkish state. They were a loose network rather than a registered NGO and lacked any distinct hierarchy or organization. The members of this initiative wanted to emphasize that there is very little known about the dynamics of the Turkish-Kurdish conflict in Turkey and they wanted to prepare a road map for enhancing peace and reconciliation at the societal level. During the peace process, they also voluntarily contributed to the production of knowledge on these issues.^{vii}

Erdoğan's strong reaction to the petition alarmed YÖK and prosecutors immediately. In his talk, he stated that: "Despite all of these facts, this crowd, who calls themselves academics, accuses the state through a statement. Not only this, they also invite foreigners to monitor developments. This is the mentality of colonialism" (*Hurriyet Daily News* 12 January 2016). In an echo of reactions to the 1960 *Manifesto of the 121* in France, the president labelled the

signatories “ignorant” and “so-called intellectuals” and accused them of being a “fifth column” and of disseminating a “colonizers’ mentality”. “Hey, you so-called intellectuals! You are not enlightened persons, you are dark. You are nothing like intellectuals. You are ignorant and dark, not even knowing about the east or the southeast. We know these places just like we know our home addresses,” he said, reiterating his position that Turkey’s problem is “not a Kurdish one, but one of terror.” YÖK’s official response to the petition announced that: “The declaration issued by a group of academics that describes our state’s ongoing struggle against terror in the southeast as ‘massacre and slaughter’ has put our entire academic world under suspicion”. It followed this by stating: “This declaration cannot be associated with academic freedom. Providing the security of citizens is the primary responsibility of the state” (*Hurriyet Daily News* 12 January 2016).

Immediately following the YÖK statement, 30 academics were detained. Their houses were raided by anti-terror squads within the police department. Their belongings, including books, computers, mobile phones and other research materials were confiscated. Apart from the criminal investigations, universities were also forced to open disciplinary inquiries into the signatories. In January and February, around 100 academics learned that they were being investigated by their institutions. During the investigations, many academics were questioned for their political views and a majority of the universities who opened probes did not treat this as a matter of freedom of speech or academic freedom (*Human Rights Watch* 16 March 2016).

What was crucial about this ordeal was also the targeting and stigmatizing of academics as a collective. Erdogan’s reaction echoed in the mainstream media who duly published reports and op-eds criminalizing the academics and what they stand for. News channels kept talking about the petition for a long time, and broadcasts showed names, affiliations and photos of the signatories; some news programs even reviewed academics’ social media on live TV highlighting, for example, tweets that might be deemed anti-government or critical of President Erdoğan. A newspaper gave a full page with these academics’ names and affiliations. They had full disclosure, making them vulnerable. The propaganda surely had an impact on the public and how they perceived this petition. Some academics reported that they received threats from students, neighbours and even random strangers. Their office doors at universities were marked with red signs which stated ‘terrorist academics’ were not welcome at the universities. Many received emails or social media mentions and messages full of death threats and swear words. Some had to empty their offices at the university, leave their homes or even cities in order to protect themselves (Sozeri 2016). For instance, in Eskişehir, a mannequin was hanged over

a highway with a banner stating “Death penalty to the PKK Academics” (*Haberler* 24 April 2016). A cyber lynching was also put into force against the academics in social media outlets. While these were happening, the prosecutors were demanding information from signatories about the identity of the ‘mastermind’ of the petition (Flader 2016). The signatories were told during the interrogations that they are accused of taking orders from Bese Hozat, a PKK commander. Their argument was that the terminology used in the petition mirrored the ‘terrorist organization’s vocabulary’.

Moreover, a mafia leader who is known as a full-throated supporter of the AKP regime made a declaration on his blog page titled “The So-Called Intellectuals, The Bell Will Toll for You First.” In this post, he issued a horrific threat: “We will spill your blood in streams and we will shower in your blood” (*Hurriyet Daily News* 14 January 2016). Various politicians from the AKP also stated that the declaration itself has been drafted by the PKK and the academics have been taking orders from the PKK leadership. Their main criticism was that the petition has not criticized the PKK but solely directed its demands to the Turkish government. Indeed, many columnists picked up on this issue and claimed that the petition lacked academic rigour because it was ‘biased’ and it was only directed to the Turkish government without any criticism towards the PKK. The president and his supporters also claimed that the academics used ‘terrorist jargon’ similar to the discourses of the PKK.

In an attempt to delegitimize the petition even further, a counter-petition was prepared by pro-government academics calling themselves ‘Academics for Turkey’. Their petition refused to criticize military action in southeast Turkey and instead declared full support for state policy against the PKK (See Sozeri 2016). Various universities put both direct and indirect pressure on their staff to sign the petition, and many did so simply in order not to be stigmatized in their respective institutions.

Moreover, during the investigations many academics were subjected to bullying and mobbing. Some were forced to withdraw their signatures in order to prevent further criminalization and investigations. In other cases, signatory academics withdrew their signatures voluntarily in order to detach themselves from these discussions. Some have done so legally with a press release while others preferred to stay anonymous. Human Rights Watch interviewed signatory academics during investigations and revealed the injustices they were facing. For instance, an assistant professor of sociology was suspended from Düzce University a day after Erdoğan’s first speech. She learnt about her suspension from the university website without an official

notice. Moreover, police raided her home and office and took her computer and other belongings. She testified before the Düzce public prosecutor and a court imposed a travel ban, preventing her from going abroad and to continue her academic work. Another academic from Van Yüzüncü Yıl University was taken into custody and spent a night in jail. Although he has German citizenship, he was also subject to a court-ordered travel ban. The university also informed him that his contract would not be renewed. Other academics from the same institution were also given court-ordered travel bans while criminal investigations were ongoing (Human Rights Watch Report, 2016). Fifteen scholars from Kocaeli University and three from Uludağ University have been detained and their houses raided by the police. These examples were multiplied as the investigations continued.

Critics of the ‘Academics for Peace’ petition made two points. The first set of criticisms argued that the tone was unprofessional and harsh and that the petition only addressed criticisms towards the Turkish state while pointedly avoiding discussion of PKK activity and violations of rights. The second set emphasized the choice of wording. Use of the word ‘massacre’ – in the context of the apparent ‘deliberate and planned massacre’ by the Turkish state – was argued to be disproportionate. Many columnists and journalists joined the ‘Academics for Peace’ in making these criticisms. However, the petition still received tremendous support locally and internationally.^{viii} For instance, the ‘Academics for Peace’ initiative also received several prizes, including the Palm Prize for free speech, the Aachen Prize, The Middle East Association’s Academic Freedom Award.

The Pending Trial and Precariousness: Resisting Arrests, Deportation and Defamation

Counter-terrorism emergency measures have already become a part of the daily routine in Turkey (Barrinha 2011). Flader (2016) takes the Turkish state’s reactions to the petition one step further, however, describing them as an example of *Gleichschaltung*, the process – originally developed by the Nazis – of eliminating all opposition within the political, economic, and cultural institutions of the state and establishing control over all aspects of society. In an interview, signatory academic Dr. Murat Ozbek also underlined the similarities between the current purge in Turkey and the *Gleichschaltung* in Nazi Germany by focusing on the totalitarian direction that Turkey is taking by suppressing the opposition both in political circles and civil society (Evrensel, 7 February 2016).

Among the signatories, Esra Mungan, Muzaffer Kaya, Kıvanç Ersoy, and Meral Camcı were called in for questioning and were arrested on 14 March 2016, two months after the petition press release. They were accused of “making terrorist propaganda” under the Counter-Terrorism Law (Article 7/2) (Altıparmak and Akdeniz 2017, 15). The obvious reason behind their detention and arrest was that they publicly read the petition one more time even though it had been criminalized. At the time of the arrests, Camcı was abroad but she returned and joined her colleagues in jail in order to show solidarity. After these academics were arrested, President Erdoğan publicly endorsed an extension of the legal definition of a terrorist:

It might be the terrorist who pulls the trigger and detonates the bomb, but it is these supporters and accomplices who allow that attack to achieve its goal. The fact their title is politician, academic, writer, journalist or head of a civil society group doesn't change the fact that individual is a terrorist (*Nature*, 16 March 2016).

After five weeks of imprisonment and solitary confinement, the three scholars were brought before the court. The accusations included taking orders from the PKK leaders, legitimizing the PKK, accusing the Turkish state for committing massacres and preparing ground for inviting United Nations observers to the Turkish territory among others. Initially charged under counter terrorism laws, the prosecutor inexplicably changed tack and sought to frame the prosecution under the infamous Article 301 of Turkey's legal code that prohibits ‘insulting Turkey and Turkisness’. The judge adjourned the case to 27 September and the trial was then delayed through to the end of December 2016 and then to March 2017, and then again to 18 July 2017 in order for the prosecutors to obtain the necessary permission from the Ministry of Justice to proceed with a prosecution under Article 301.

Events have also shown that foreigners are as vulnerable as local Turks to prosecution. Chris Stephenson, a British computer scientist at Bilgi University who protested against the arrests of the four academics mentioned above, was himself detained in March 2016. He elected to leave Turkey while awaiting a deportation order. He was escorted to his plane in the presence of a police officer. He had been detained after police found leaflets publicizing Kurdish New Year celebrations on 21 March (*Newroz*) in his possession. This publicity material was also considered ‘terrorist propaganda’. He was then told he would be able to return to Turkey but would have in that case to face trial.^{ix} The well-planned strategy behind the arrest signalled to the foreign and domestic audience alike that: 1) foreign nationals would not be exempted from

prosecution simply on account of their citizenship status; 2) anyone who publicly supports the Kurds or voices criticism of the Turkish state's or government's actions towards them is vulnerable to arrest and prosecution, and; 3) diplomatic tensions can be avoided when foreigners are implicated because Turkey is able to fall back on the 'counter-terrorism' justification. Therefore, showing dissent as a foreign national risks deportation, detention, harassment or loss of employment, on top of the stigmatization dished out by the mainstream media. The signal to all Westerners living in Turkey was clear.

The criminalization of academics through counter-terrorism discourse is the handiwork of five principal state institutions and actors: the president, the AKP government, mainstream media outlets (newspapers, TV channels), the judiciary and the police, and YÖK and the universities. Social media has also been deployed widely by pro-AKP trolls. The aim of this defamation campaign against academics is collective character assassination. By insulting an entire profession as 'dissidents', delegitimizing their demands, criminalizing intellectual dissent by cultivating a hostile anti-intellectual environment and stigmatizing anyone who would oppose government policies on the Kurdish issue the state seeks to bring academics to heel.^x

The whole debate on the petition also drew attention away from the plight of Kurdish civilians in the region, making the academics and *their* freedoms the issue. At times, therefore, the discussion about freedom of speech and academic autonomy overshadowed the original purpose of the petition, which was to stop state violence in the region. Similarly, the international solidarity campaigns cast light on the fundamental rights of academics leaving the Kurdish issue largely tangential to the main discussion. Many solidarity declarations asked the Turkish government to immediately stop persecuting academics yet failed to mention the human rights abuses going on against the Kurdish population in Turkey.

The outcome of the debate showed the longstanding vulnerability and precarious existence of academics in Turkey. The absence of job security and the ease with which they can be dismissed from universities because of their political views has always been at issue. Moreover, the debate exposed in no uncertain terms the lack of capacity universities have to defend academic freedom generally and their staff's freedom of speech in particular. Oppression of academics became more visible than ever before. Moreover, the 'subcontracting' of monitoring and surveillance of academic conduct to the public – including, tragically, students themselves – takes matters to a new level. Before the petition, there had been isolated cases of students reporting lecturers who criticized the government or taught on controversial issues. However,

under the new dispensation students who come forward are amply rewarded for demonstrating their allegiance to the AKP and President Erdogan. Sadly, student snitches and informants now join university rectors, heads of departments and other bureaucrats as enforcers of state policy against academic freedom. A June 2016 incident at Bilgi University in which a student recorded his professor criticizing President Erdogan and passed the recordings to the mainstream media stands as a case in point. Because of this duplicity, the professor was dismissed from the university (Diken, 18 June 2016).

The course of events once more proves the hegemonic influence of President Erdogan in almost every field – the judiciary, security services, universities, media, and parliament. It is also clear that orthodox understandings of terrorism are still very strong in Turkey and that the peace process never really succeeded in breaking the Turkish reflex of seeing the Kurds as the ‘enemy within’. While the ease with which it is possible to gin up nationalist fervour through media manipulation makes this an obvious strategy for the government, the entire process overlooks just how counter-productive these hyper-nationalist strategies have proven in the past, only serving to make the conflict more toxic and likely more protracted (Barrinha 2011:164). Indeed, given that the AKP launched the peace process precisely because it realized that the policies of the past would no longer work, the return to type speaks volumes about the government’s political desperation.

The Failed Coup Attempt and the Academic Purge that Followed

The 15 July 2016 coup attempt in Turkey was undoubtedly one of the most significant events in the country’s recent history. According to testimonies and popular news, a group of flag officers of Turkey’s army attempted an overthrow of Erdoğan and the AKP government (Adams 2016). AKP politicians and the mainstream media blame the Gülen Movement (GM)^{xi} for plotting this coup attempt. However, the jury is still out on whether the putschists were drawn only from Gülenist cliques in the military or whether the revolt in the ranks was more widespread.

Turkey, of course, has suffered long periods of military tutelage and a variety of different types of military intervention in politics. This particular coup attempt, however, was distinctive. Five days after the coup attempt, the AKP government declared a state of emergency for three months and President Erdoğan announced it to the public as a positive step and as an opportunity to clean up pro-Gülenist people from the public sector (Jones and Kandemir 2016). The state of emergency was later prolonged for another six months. Although, on paper, the

state of emergency seems to be related to the putsch, it is fair to argue that President Erdoğan has been using his emergency powers to overhaul most of the opposition groups and potential social and political targets. The need to protect the Turkish nation and state in these exceptional circumstances gives a patina of legitimation to these moves. On the one hand, according to figures released by the Turkish media, the putsch involved 8,651 officers or 1.5 per cent of armed forces' personnel (Pitel 2016). On the other hand, in the first two weeks of the state of emergency, multiple universities and hundreds of civil society associations, media centres and companies were shut down. Additionally, thousands of teachers in their probation period were let go, thousands of passports were annulled and hundreds of people – including journalists, scholars, judges, bureaucrats, and state officials – were suspended under investigation and/or arrested, including many Alevis, leftists, and Kemalists who did not have any relations with the Gülen movement. The government made these moves on the grounds that the accused had aided and abetted the coup attempt. Moreover, members of the HDP, including the party's co-leaders and elected mayors, which is considered to be a pro-minority left-wing party in Turkey, have been arrested and put in jail dashing hopes for a renewal of the peace process. These arrests showed very clearly that the purge was intended to go much beyond the Gülenist circles.

Following the failed coup, more than more than a hundred thousand civil servants were expelled from public service, others were detained, and arrested. Several universities were closed down and thousands of academics have been dismissed (T24,2 December 2016). Expulsion from public service results in being banned from taking up office in public institutions or corporations, the confiscation of passports, and, if deemed necessary, the confiscation of property. Expulsion from a university deprives the academic of the right to submit an associate professorship application, which in Turkey can be obtained without institutional affiliation. In addition to those dismissed before the coup, more than 300 signatories of the 'Academics for Peace' petition were expelled from public service through state of emergency decrees between September 2016 and February 2017.^{xii} Others who are not suspended have to live under heavy pressures and mobbing at many universities all around Turkey. Some are constantly pressured to withdraw their signatures. As Altıparmak and Akdeniz (2017,71) accounts, there is no available information on what kind of methods has been used to prepare the emergency decrees to suspend these academics. Nobody has access to the information on proofs which criminalized these academics and others in order to be mentioned in these decrees. As the authors argue, the only reason why these academics have been dismissed was because they signed the petition. This situation surely against the European

Court of Human Rights' Article 10 on the freedom of speech. The emergency decrees not only violate freedom of speech but also the right to fair trial and protection of privacy (Altıparmak and Akdeniz 2017, 73).

As elected opposition politicians are arrested, academics are suspended and banned from public service, there is massive surveillance of social media accounts and the political climate in Turkey becomes all the more totalitarian. In the post-putsch period, the 'undesirables' of the newly emerging regime are being silenced in order for a 'New Turkey' – in which there is no room for concepts such as democracy, peace or freedom of speech – to be born.

Concluding Remarks: Contesting Oppression and Creating Venues of Resistance as Academics

The 'Academics for Peace' petition was published in an open letter format in January 2016, with the aim of making a call for peace and asking the Turkish state to return to the negotiating table with the Kurdish armed movement, the PKK. The initiative was a loose one with no hierarchical structure. The petition was distributed through social media and signed by academics who thought they could make a change despite the fact that it is very unlikely with a petition. The reaction from the president, state institutions, YÖK and the university rectors and heads of departments was not proportionate and it aimed at criminalizing the signatory academics for being critical of the state's official policies. Counter-terrorism law has been used in conjunction with the politics of fear, in order to stigmatize this whole group as 'terrorist sympathizers', discourage others to show dissent and to instruct authorities to take measures against those who dare to speak out. The reactions to the petition also managed to scare away the 'people in the middle' who were neither in line with state's actions in the southeast region of Turkey but who dared not sign a document saying as much. They are buried in silence.

As mentioned above, after almost a year the prosecution of these signatory academics continues and there are still pending charges against them for 'terrorist propaganda' and 'insulting Turkey'. Most of the signatories have not given up on their demands and have created various avenues of resistance in order to demonstrate that their cause was a just one. While the court cases are pending, universities also try to make their job harder by not allowing them to attend international conferences, sabbaticals or other visits. Some have lost their passports during the recent purge and are subject to travel bans. Some academics are also taken out of conference programs because they are signatories (*Bianet*, 7 April 2016). In the meantime, individual applications to institutions such as Scholars at Risk or the Scholar Rescue Fund skyrocketed.

Those who have been dismissed from their universities find it hard to find another job as other institutions hesitate to employ signatory academics. Their criminalisation continues by the main stream media and other state institutions. They are forced to live a “civil death” in Turkey by being deprived from their basic rights. The unfair treatment and mobbing also caused one academic^{xiii} to commit suicide which was exemplary in terms of showing the psychological damage that this process is giving to the signatories. Some academics also started a hunger strike demanding the lifting of the state of emergency and returning to their academic posts among others.

They are finding ‘solidarity academics’ where they teach for free or they find ‘people without campus’ initiatives in order to pursue their academic ideals by underlining that they don’t need an institution for intellectual activities. Some academics in Eskişehir even founded a musical band and sing songs for peace. Some prominent academics such as Baskın Oran, have opened court cases against President Erdoğan for slander (*Qantara*, 29 June 2016). It can be said that the ‘Academics for Peace’ initiative is a social movement in the making in Turkey.

Surely, the oppression, lack of employment and sense of insecurity drive many academics to look for alternatives abroad. Especially after the putsch, there has been a brain drain of academics from Turkey. Countries such as France, Germany and Czechia have declared their support for the academics who are oppressed by the ruling regime. Not only persecuted academics, but also some who have never been openly critical, are leaving. Time will show whether this is temporary or permanent. To our dismay, many intellectuals are also surrendering their civic courage and intellectual capacities to the dictates of the regime which is becoming authoritarian. This is precisely the outcome Giroux (2016, 156) predicted for US academia under the impact of neo-liberalism. As long as the culture of fear flourishes in Turkey, it seems as if the hope for improvements in academic freedom, freedom of speech and room for critique fades day by day.

Disclaimer: Two of this article’s authors are signatories of the petition. However, in no way do the authors represent ‘Academics for Peace’ as a group and the authors wish to underline that this article solely reflects their personal assessments and viewpoints. None of the statements made or opinions expressed in the article can be attributed to the signatories, collectively or individually, of the ‘Academics for Peace’ petition.

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ⁱ The text was initially written in an open letter format rather than a petition. The signatories included prominent non-Turkish scholars such as Noam Chomsky, Judith Butler, Slavoj Žižek, Immanuel Wallerstein, Etienne Balibar and David Harvey. The full text is available at: <http://bianet.org/english/human-rights/170978-academics-we-will-not-be-a-party-to-this-crime>.

ⁱⁱ Prof. Ismail Besicki is one of the remarkable examples. He served 17 years in prison for his writings on the Kurds. The imprisonment of Prof. Busra Ersanli in 2011 is also a case in point.

ⁱⁱⁱ "For example, when the the German Parliament passed the Armenian Genocide resolution anonymously on June 2, 2016, university presidents came under pressure to issue public statements supporting Turkish foreign policy" (Gocek 2016).

^{iv} For a detailed account of analysis on the petition from a human rights perspective see Altıparmak and Akdeniz (2017, 101-139).

^v For more info see: <http://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/antivietnamwar/>

^{vi} First author's personal contact with Prof. Willie Esterhuyse and Prof. Willie Breytenbach, October 2016, Stellenbosch, South Africa.

^{vii} See their website: <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/1>

^{viii} A complete list of solidarity messages can be found here: <http://internationalsolidarity4academic.tumblr.com/page/2>

^{ix} YÖK has cancelled Dr. Stephenson's work permit in March 2017. He worked in Turkey for 18 years. In the time of writing this article, he is preparing for appeal. Other foreign academics who were working in Turkey and who were signatories to the petition have also lost their work permits.

^x It also bears noting that these types of smear campaign in Turkey frequently happen and in rare cases result in political murders. The cases of Hrant Dink, an Armenian journalist in Turkey, and Tahir Elci, a Kurdish lawyer and human rights activist, are examples of how far stigmatization can go. For more information on the case of Hrant Dink see Freely (2007) and for the case of Tahir Elci see Darici (2016).

^{xi} The Gülen Movement is a political-religious network organised under the ideas of Fethullah Gülen. Even though the Movement has been trying to show itself is an inter-religious and dialogue based civil society, it has two different faces that are indirectly connected each other. While the civil face is mostly based on philanthropy and cultural dialogue activates, the political face is aiming to reach power via controlling the bureaucratic mechanisms in Turkey that has reach the pick point during the AKP period.

^{xii} One should make a distinction between the academics who were suspended by the emergency decrees because of their alleged connections to the GM and the others who were the signatories of the decision. Also, some of the suspended academics had no connections to the movement but they were employees of higher education institutions which were allegedly linked to the GM. Although all groups are affected by the authoritarian tendencies in Turkey and they had to endure unfair detentions and suspensions, the main reason behind their dismissals are different. The signatories are targeted by the government and the president, and consequently by other state apparatuses due to their stance on human rights issues in Turkey. Their political stance on the Kurdish Question and how to tackle with the creeping authoritarianism in Turkey also clearly distinct from the GM and its supporters. The GM and its media apparatuses have also instrumentalized the counter-terrorism rhetoric until they broke up their alliance with the AKP government and their attitude has been systematically criticized by most of the signatories of the petition.

^{xiii} Mehmet Fatih Traş was a research assistant at Cukurova University. He committed suicide in February 2017 as a result of psychological trauma after being dismissed from his job.