

TURKEY

*Two dozen schools were bombed or set on fire and 28 teachers abducted in 2010-2012, mostly in the south-east, where Kurdish insurgents were active. Hundreds of university students were arrested in protests that were suppressed with excessive use of force.*¹⁶⁵⁵

CONTEXT

During 2009-2012, the long-running insurgency led by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) continued in south-eastern Turkey. Armed clashes between the PKK and the Turkish military escalated in 2011 but in 2013 there was a ceasefire in the context of a peace process.

The government restricted the right to protest and constraints on academic freedom continued. There was a deepening polarization between the religious conservative government and the secularist Republican People's Party.¹⁶⁵⁶ Police violence against demonstrators continued and protesters, including students, were beaten at protests. Academics were arrested in the context of investigations into coup plots against the government and serious violations of due process occurred during the controversial trials that followed. There were also arrests of academics in association with the Kurdish issue.

On 30 September 2013, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan announced a package of legal reforms, two of them relevant to education for Kurdish students and teachers.¹⁶⁵⁷ Instruction would be allowed in minority languages, including Kurdish, in private schools but not in the state sector.¹⁶⁵⁸ An oath of national allegiance, to which many Kurds objected due to its Turkish ethnic bias, would no longer be obligatory in primary schools.¹⁶⁵⁹ In addition, the ban on headscarves in the civil service, including for

teachers in schools and universities, a contentious issue between secularists and advocates of religious freedom, would be lifted.¹⁶⁶⁰

Net primary enrolment was 96 per cent, net secondary enrolment was 85 per cent, and gross tertiary enrolment was 61 per cent (2011). Adult literacy was 91 per cent (2009).¹⁶⁶¹

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

Media reports suggest that there were at least two dozen attacks on schools from 2009 to 2012,¹⁶⁶² mainly in south-eastern Turkey. In one incident, attackers shouted pro-PKK slogans but in many cases the perpetrators were not identified. Kurdish militants were assumed to target schools because they believed they were being used as tools of assimilation. The majority of attacks were fire-bombings.¹⁶⁶³ For instance, it was reported that on 9 October 2012, a student and two teachers were injured when masked men threw Molotov cocktails at a high school in Diyarbakir.¹⁶⁶⁴ During a two-week spate of attacks in October 2012, suspected PKK activists set at least 20 schools on fire¹⁶⁶⁵ including a kindergarten.¹⁶⁶⁶

A car bomb suspected to have been detonated by the PKK exploded outside a secondary school in Ankara in September 2011, killing three people; the schoolyard was used to treat the injured.¹⁶⁶⁷

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

According to a compilation of media reports, 28 teachers were abducted in 2011-2012,¹⁶⁶⁸ including 12 in one week.¹⁶⁶⁹ Most were kidnapped by PKK members; many were released shortly afterwards. In one incident, armed militants broke into a teachers' staff room and kidnapped six of the 19 teachers

present but released them under pressure from local people.¹⁶⁷⁰

In one incident in December 2011, a group of PKK supporters reportedly threw Molotov cocktails and stones at a housing unit for dozens of teachers, yelling at them to leave the area and threatening to burn them.¹⁶⁷¹

Media and trade union reports suggest that more than 40 teacher trade unionists in the teachers' union Eğitim Sen were arrested or detained as state authorities suppressed union activism including on the right to education in Kurdish.¹⁶⁷² Twenty-seven teacher trade unionists arrested in May 2009 were charged with providing intellectual support to illegal organizations.¹⁶⁷³ In October 2011, 25 teacher trade unionists were sentenced to six years and five months' imprisonment under anti-terrorism laws. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, the evidence against them included the possession of books that were freely available in bookshops and the holding of trade union meetings.¹⁶⁷⁴

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Police beat and used excessive force against students during two demonstrations against government higher education and other policies, one held in central Istanbul in early December 2010¹⁶⁷⁵ and the other at Middle East Technical University on 18 December 2012. At the second protest, the police allegedly fired 2,000 tear gas canisters, pepper spray and water cannon at the 300 gathered students, causing injury, according to the International Human Rights Network of Academics and Scholarly Societies (IHRNASS).¹⁶⁷⁶

The research group GIT Turkey reported in June 2012 that there had been an increase in academics'

rights violations in recent years and noted that those who suffered most were academics working on subjects deemed sensitive by the government, particularly Kurdish and minority issues.¹⁶⁷⁷

Kemal Gürüz, a leading republican secularist and a former president of both the Turkish Higher Education Council (YÖK) and the Turkish science-funding agency TÜBİTAK, was one of many people accused of plotting to overthrow the elected government in a case that was opened after a cache of grenades and other explosives was found in the home of a retired non-commissioned Turkish army officer. The IHRNASS reported that there was no evidence supporting the claims in relation to Gürüz, who believed he was jailed because of his stance on secularism. As head of YÖK, he implemented a ban on wearing headscarves in universities which Prime Minister Erdogan's party strongly opposed.¹⁶⁷⁸ He was sentenced to 13 years and nine months in jail. In September 2013, he was released pending an appeal.¹⁶⁷⁹

ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN 2013

A bomb exploded at a school in Cizre in January injuring three students, but the perpetrator was unknown.¹⁶⁸⁰ In September and October, police used rubber bullets, tear gas and water cannon against Middle East Technical University students protesting against a road planned through their campus.¹⁶⁸¹

The acquittal of sociologist Pinar Selek on terrorism charges was overturned in 2013 and she was given a life sentence. An advocate for the rights of socially disadvantaged children and women who has researched Kurdish groups, she had been repeatedly arrested and tried on allegations of participating in a 1998 explosion at a spice market. Court investigations found that the explosion resulted from an accidental gas leak rather than a bomb and,

in the 14 years following the incident, Selek was acquitted three times of terrorism charges due to lack of admissible evidence.¹⁶⁸² She was also allegedly tortured to elicit the names of her interview participants in contravention of the ethics rules governing research, and in contravention of domestic and international law.¹⁶⁸³

ENDNOTES TURKEY

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