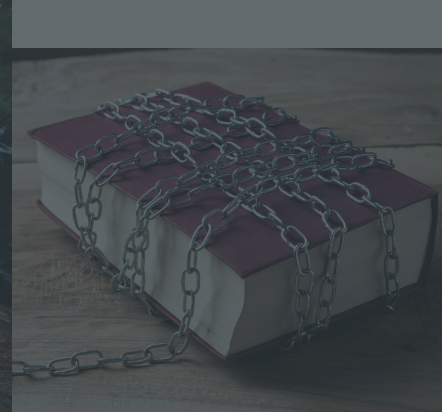




An Advocates of
Silenced Turkey
Special Report
March, 2019



TURKEY'S ASSAULT ON BOOKS

WHO WE ARE

When the Turkish President declared in an infamous speech that “old Turkey no longer exists. This Turkey is new Turkey”, the story of Turkish authoritarianism had once and for all taken on a new character. Since the July of 2016, the Turkish government has improperly imprisoned 130,214 homemakers, teachers, NGO workers, academics, judges, prosecutors and journalists. Once upon a time, the Republic of Turkey was lauded by insiders and outsiders for constituting a powerful model for democratization. In New Turkey, however, silence against the regime’s draconian laws, mass imprisonment, and frequent violations of universal human rights has become the sole norm.

In a regime which ranks as the worst upholder of the rule-of-law in Eastern Europe & Central Asia, 187 media outlets have been shut down and 308 journalists, including Idil Eser, Ahmet Altan, Hidayet Karaca, Aslı Erdoğan, Şahin Alpay, Selahattin Demirtaş, and Andrew Brunson are political prisoners of the state.

Dissent in New Turkey is absent.

Human rights in New Turkey are absent.

Respect for human dignity in New Turkey is absent.

We are a group of lawyers, judges, academics, journalists, and hundreds of activists who cherish democratic ideals and universal human rights.

We are prisoners of conscience wanted by the Erdogan’s regime, relatives of political prisoners, and victims who have lost their jobs, property, and family members to the current administration which has been described as a Mafia State.

We are the Advocates of Silenced Turkey.

We, the Advocates, have made it our mission to champion the rights of Silenced Turkey until universal human rights and democratic governance are established and sustained as the utmost priorities of the Republic of Turkey.

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INTRODUCTION

The course of recent political events has become an object of countless studies to measure Turkey's steady tilt toward authoritarianism in all facets and layers of political conduct. According to the common view upheld by international organizations and media outlets, Turkey is no longer a democracy it once was. **The breakdown of rule of law and the collapse of central pillars of democracy have become crystal clear in the aftermath of a failed coup attempt in 2016. One of the less noticed or under-studied theme was the government's policies on culture. The culture emerged as a key source of impassioned debate or a political war as the government's critical stance on Western-oriented art institutions generated fresh controversy in the past few months.** This report wants to shed light on another notorious aspect of the post-coup purge and crackdown. The government not only launched a new cultural war to reshape the secular nature of the political system, but also went on a full-fledged crusade to eradicate certain cultural institutions affiliated with leftist, secular, Kurdish groups. With the government designating faith-based Gulen Movement as a "terrorist organization", anyone and anything associated with the group has become targets of political persecution and legal investigation. And it is the movement that emerged as the main target of the post-coup repression. The staggering numbers of trials and mass imprisonment are a testimony to the degree of the clampdown against the movement. When it comes to the cultural facet of the crackdown, an unpleasant reality comes to the surface. The government, in similar to practices of totalitarian regimes during the 1930s and 1940s, began to eliminate books associated with the Gulen movement.



Public trash bins, forests, and streets in neighborhoods filled with mountains of books written or edited by Fethullah Gulen, a U.S.-based Islamic scholar blamed by the Turkish government for the botched coup in 2016. Possession of a Gulen-authored book is regarded enough to land someone in jail.

However absurd it may sound, people are acutely aware of that possibility. **Not only Gulen sympathizers, but also academics and scholars who were studying the Movement and his leader immediately disposed of such books. In one well-known incident, a historian in Tunceli University was imprisoned after police found a Gulen book at his university office.¹ The academic, who himself is a critic of Gulen and a professed atheist, faces charges of membership to the movement and would receive jail term if convicted.**

Although the main target was Gulen and his movement, no group or community was spared by the government in its crackdown on cultural and intellectual products. It was part of a broader policy to squelch any form of criticism and free thinking. In this respect, academia, schools, publishing houses, and media outlets have all been affected by the profound impact of the post-coup crackdown.

¹ Ateist' Doç. Dr. Candan Badem, Odasında Gülen'in Kitabı Bulununca Gözaltına Alındı, Haberler.com, Aug. 3, 2016, (Access to website: Feb. 18, 2019) <https://www.haberler.com/ateist-doc-dr-candan-badem-odasinda-gulen-in-8671206-haberi/>

The profusion of numbers speaks for themselves. More than 160 media outlets have been shut down while more than 1,150 schools have either been seized or closed down in the aftermath of the 2016 coup. **This report seeks to avoid being drowned in details of the post-coup clampdown on civil society, media, and mechanisms of free expression. Instead of offering a general panorama, this study aims to focus on how institutions of culture and books have been systematically targeted by the government.** To this aim, this report will offer riveting accounts of people burning their beloved books or tearing them into pieces with the fear of discovery by their neighbors or law enforcement officials. The trauma experienced by people still lingers today. The war on books will be remembered as a dark chapter in contemporary history, and this study seeks to leave a historical record for future generations.

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2016 COUP:



**160 MEDIA OUTLETS
HAVE BEEN SHUT DOWN**



**1,150 SCHOOLS HAVE
EITHER BEEN SEIZED
OR CLOSED DOWN**



This study aims to focus on how institutions of culture and books have been systematically targeted by the government.

1 - FIRST THEY CAME FOR BOOKS

In the frenzy of post-coup social atmosphere, D.A., who spoke on condition of anonymity for this report, remembers how he disposed of his books. A librarian at a university during the time of the coup, he had, in his disposal, a large collection of books at his home given his affection with and life-long devotion to books of all sorts. He studied literature at college and amassed vast amounts of books in literature, Western and national, history, sociology and religious studies. His books were more than 2,000 and occupied a considerable space at his home. D.A., who read and watched the film of Fahrenheit 451, **never conceived that one day he would be forced to dispose of his books in Turkey. Familiar with totalitarian regimes' notorious mass burnings of books in the 20th century, he was taken aback by the level of the crackdown in the aftermath of the 2016 coup.**

D.A. was fighting back his tears when he set out to select and categorize his books from his bookshelves to dispose of the “dangerous ones.” He was affiliated with Gulen Movement and saw **no future or meaning in keeping Gulen books at his home. The public was swept with an anti-Gulen frenzy and the social hysteria would, at any moment, translate into violence by communal mobs formed at neighborhoods.** In such an atmosphere of fear, he was racing against time to get rid of Gulen's books as soon as possible, and with as much discretion as needed. It was a hinge moment in the social history of the country as the menace of pogrom loomed large as a real possibility against certain elements of society, mostly Gulen people, amid calls from the president to punish them. D.A. meticulously cut the books into pieces, slew their jackets and covers, and placed them into several boxes or packages. He then carefully took them into the trunk of his car as the darkness blanketed the street where he lived. He chose midnight to avoid suspicion and attention from the uninvited gaze of attentive neighbors.

And he went to a completely different neighborhood to unload his trunk every time. In some other nights, he simply joined crowds filling streets as part of so-called “Democracy Watch” rallies organized by the government in support for the civilian government. He disguised himself as a government supporter and disposed of some of the small packages, whenever it was possible. The nation-wide demonstrations lasted nearly a month before being called off by the president who no longer saw a need to keep loyal masses alert on the streets. Recollecting those moments, D.A. vividly relives the anguish and pain he underwent previously. His case is not an isolated one. Countless similar stories pervaded through Turkey’s media.



D.A., who heard stories from his grandparents about the difficulties they endured during the 1930s and 1940s when religious institutions and orders came under political pressure in the early decades of the republic. **Certain books and publications were blacklisted and people who possessed them hid them from authorities.** D.A. makes a distinction between crackdown of that era and today’s policies on books. **“If authorities themselves destroyed them,”** he noted, **“I would not have been that sorry.”**

“But, when I myself did all of this, disposing of books and cutting them into pieces, it really struck my heart,” he added with agony.

Apart from the two stories above, there are thousands of more cases demonstrating the depth of the government’s pursuit of “blacklisted” books. This report will offer a brief sketch of them through a few more examples.

WOMEN DETAINED IN ANTALYA

Police detained a woman over allegations of burning Gulen's books. Antalya Chief Public Prosecutor launched a probe into R.Y. after police began to follow the woman. **Police officers captured the woman while she was trying to burn some of the books at a place close to her home.** The police discovered some of the books affiliated with the movement and brought the woman into a police station. **She faces² charges of terrorism propaganda and membership to a terrorist organization.**



BOOKS FOUND IN A VILLAGE IN YOZGAT

In the central province of Yozgat, military police — gendarmerie — **found 560 Gulen-authored books near a water fountain at a village.**³ The discovery took place after villagers called the gendarmerie units. In cooperation with the gendarmerie, police officers also joined the operation to recover the books. Gendarmerie conducted a “crime-scene” investigation and found the books in a number of boxes. Officials believe that the books belong to people with ties to the movement.

² *Kitap yakmak isteyen ev hanımını gözaltına aldılar....*, Samanyolu Haber June 8, 2018. <http://www.shaber3.com/kitap-yakmak-isteyen-ev-hanimini-gozaltina-aldilar-haberi/1307344/>

³ *Gülen'in kitaplarından kurtulmak isteyen isteyene*, Hurriyet, July 20, 2016. <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/gulenin-kitaplarindan-kurtulmak-isteyen-isteyene-40156153>

AUTHORITIES ARREST TEACHERS FOR BURNING BOOKS IN MUGLA

In the western province of Mugla, residents in Akcaova neighborhood of Mentese district informed gendarmerie forces after they detected smoke and flames at a college formerly run by a non-governmental organization linked to the Gulen Movement. **Gendarmerie forces found four school officials and former teachers burning some documents in the garden of the school.**⁴ Among those burned, the military police discovered Gulen books. Four people were detained by the gendarmerie. Two of them were teachers and two were staff members. They will stand trial after medical examination.

Acting upon a tip off, police found boxes of books in a forest. The books were brought to the police station for further examination.

BOOKS FOUND IN NORTHERN CYPRUS

Municipality workers and personnel arrived at a trash site in Mehmetcik village in Iskele in Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (KKTC) after the outbreak of a small fire reported by locals. When teams discovered Gulen books, they informed Mayor Cemil Saricizmeli about the incident. The mayor then called the police. **Police officers found 150 Gulen's books, some of which were totally or partially burned, and two hard disks, one USB.** The burned books and damaged equipment are expected to be sent to Turkey for further forensic examination.⁵

In another story, authorities discovered hundreds of Gulen books thrown into the waters of Ataturk Dam in Eastern Anatolia. When a villager informed gendarmerie forces, authorities initiated a probe to find out who threw the books into the dam. ⁶

⁴ *Gülen'in kitaplarından kurtulmak isteyen isteyene*, Hurriyet, July 20, 2016.

<http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/gulenin-kitaplarindan-kurtulmak-isteyen-isteyene-40156153>

⁵ *Yakılan Feto kitapları Türkiye'ye gönderiliyor*; Kaynak: *Yakılan Feto kitapları Türkiye'ye gönderiliyor*, Detay Kibris, 07.20.2016, <http://www.detaykibris.com/yakilan-feto-kitaplari-turkiyeye-gonderiliyor-128262h.htm>

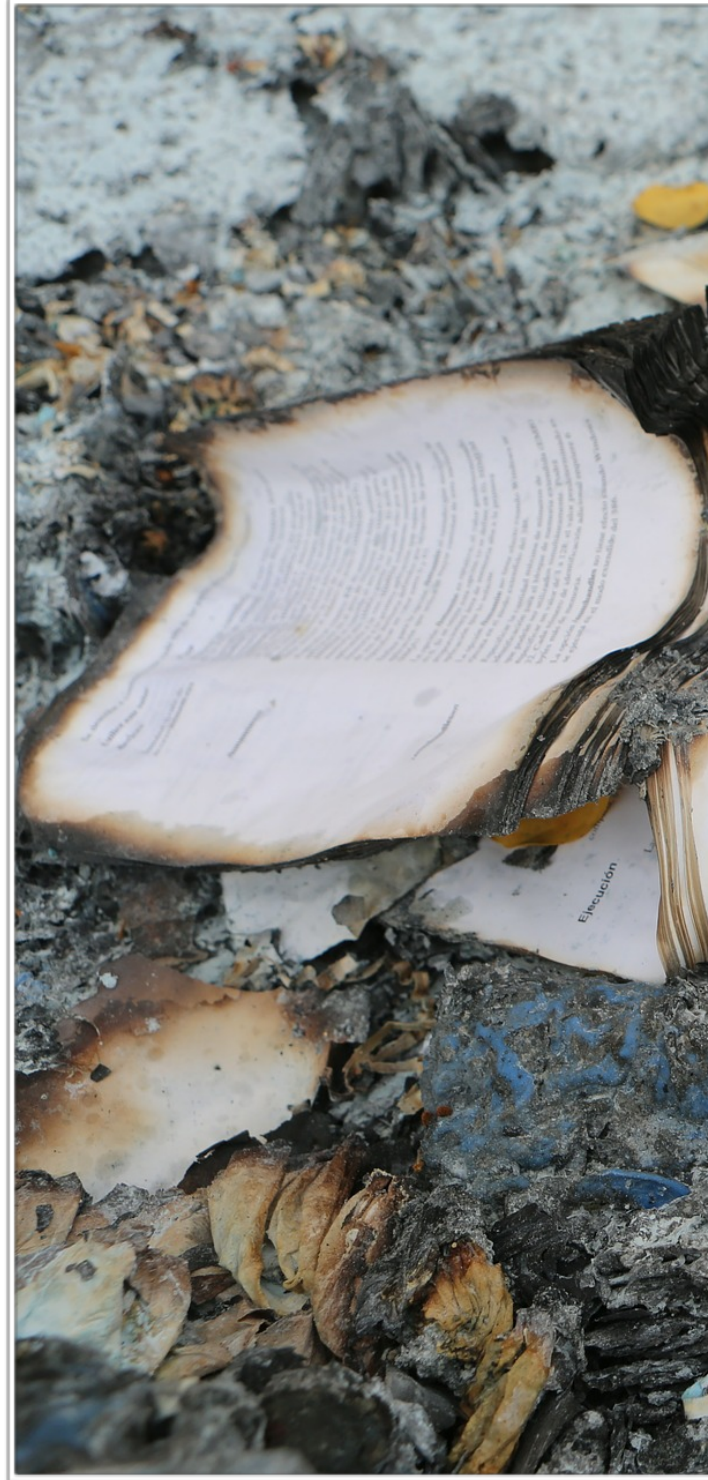
⁶ *Atatürk Barajı'na atılmış FETÖ kitapları bulundu*, mynethaber, Aug. 15, 2016.

<https://www.mynet.com/ataturk-barajina-atilmis-feto-kitaplari-bulundu-110102588358>

MAN DETAINED FOR BURNING BOOKS IN BURSA

In Bursa's Kemalpasa neighborhood, **police detained 53-year old N.T. for attempting to burn dozens of books related to Gulen in an empty field in August 2016.** N.T., a retired worker, decided to dispose of the books given by the defunct Zaman newspaper to its readers. But his quest crumbled when neighbors called the municipality to report a small fire in an empty field. When the municipality workers realized that the burned books were authored by Gulen, they called the police. N.T. was released after police interrogation on charges of membership to Gulen Movement.⁷ The man denied any affiliation with the movement and claimed that he received those books only because of his subscription to the newspaper over a decade ago.

A similar incident took place in a community college in Sandikli, in the western province of Afyon, a short while after the coup. A local newspaper, close to the government, laid out accusations against the rector of the college for failing to remove Gulen-authored books from the college's library before the coup. When the college administration, in a display of panic, tried to get rid of books, it sparked an investigation.⁸



⁷ *FETO Kitaplarını Yakarken Yakalandı, Yildirim, August 23, 2016.*
<http://www.yildirimgazetesi.com/gundem/feto-kitaplarini-yakarken-yakalandi-h31925.html>

⁸ *Yakılan FETO Kitapları, Afyon Zafer Net, November 7, 2016.*
<https://www.afyonzafer.net/afyonkarahisar/yakilan-feto-kitaplari-h33545.html>

There are hundreds of examples of this mind-numbing book hunt in various cities and towns across Turkey. Siirt, an eastern province, was one of the sites where certain citizens, out of fear of authorities, hastily threw hundreds of books into a massive waste site where the city's trash had been dumped. When workers discovered books, as was the case in several other incidents, they notified the police who then launched a probe into the incident. ⁹

AUTHORITIES BAN PUBLISHERS, MEDIA OUTLETS

Books aside, the government's clampdown has taken various forms since the failed coup. The crushing of media outlets, whether affiliated with the Gulen Movement or not, was a well-known case. **Nearly 180 media outlets had been shut down with the first emergency decree by the government five days after the coup attempt on July 20, 2016**, the day when Turkey's authorities declared a state of emergency for three months. The emergency rule, in fact, lasted two years. Later, some of 20 media outlets were re-opened. The official rationale for these closures presented by the government was Gulen affiliation, which, according to critics, did not stand up to close scrutiny. As listed by the government, **three news agencies, 16 television channels, 23 radio stations, 45 newspapers, 15 magazines, 29 publishing houses were shut down over alleged ties to the Gulen Movement.**¹⁰



⁹ Siirt'te FETÖ'nün kitapları çöpten çıktı, *Haberiniz.com*, August 9, 2016.
<http://www.haberiniz.com.tr/teror-adliye/siirt-te-feto-nun-kitaplari-copten-cikti-324475h.html>

¹⁰ Kapatılan FETÖ yayınları - Tam liste! *Star*, November 15, 2016.
<https://www.star.com.tr/egitim/kapatilan-feto-yayinlari--tam-liste-haber-1141040/>

With an infamous decree, the government dismissed tens of thousands of public workers over alleged ties to the Gulen Movement. The September decree in 2016 also contained a less noticed element. Books published by publishers with some form of ties to the Gulen Movement were banned. These books, which were already on the shelves of public and university libraries, were removed.



A report appeared on the pro-government Sabah daily¹¹ noted that 135,000 books out of nearly 2 million books in 1,130 public libraries were discovered to have links to Gulen-related publishing houses and were removed from those libraries across the country.

The same report added that 30,000 books, which were authored by Gulen, were to be burned, while the remaining 100,000 books would be sent to recycling. Additionally, the Education Ministry, removed textbooks published by presumably Gulen-affiliated publishers from school curriculums.¹² According to a report appeared on Gazete Duvar, an internet news portal, the Ministry of Education sent an instruction to schools across Turkey, detailing its ban on 29 publishing houses, 15 magazines, and 45 newspapers. The ministry ordered school administrators to remove all books published by Gulen-affiliated publishing houses from school libraries and send them to recycling.



135,000

**BOOKS WERE REMOVED
FROM LIBRARIES**

30,000

**BOOKS WERE
TO BE BURNED**

100,000

**BOOKS WOULD BE
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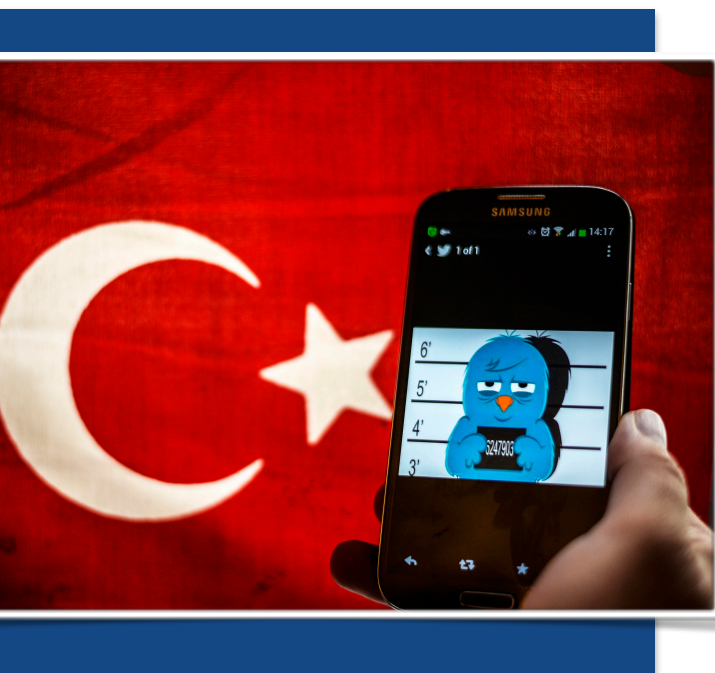
¹¹ FETÖ elebaşısının kitapları toplatıldı, Sabah, September 1, 2016.
<https://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/09/01/feto-elebasisinin-kitaplari-toplatildi>

¹² MEB 29 yayınevine ait tüm kitapları yasakladı, Gazete Duvar, August 14, 2016.
<https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2016/08/14/meb-29-yayinevine-ait-tum-kitaplari-yasakladi/>

“All printed and technological materials related to Fethullah Gulen should be sorted out, should be scrapped and destroyed according to the relevant provisions of the Ministry of Education Regulation on School Libraries and Movable Goods,” the instruction noted.¹³

Shortly after the 2016 coup, **a court in Istanbul’s Bakirkoy district issued a ban on 672 books authored or edited by Fethullah Gulen.** The authorities grounded their subsequent bans on this court ruling, which prohibited publishing or circulation of these books on any platform or library.

A report entitled “Publishing Freedom Report” was released by Turkish Publishers Association in 2017. It offers a riveting account of how the authorities extended the scope of its ban on publishers and publishing houses. In addition to Gulen-affiliated publishers, left-leaning Evrensel Press had been banned as well.¹⁴



The report contains flawed decisions and examples of baffling treatment of illiterate people for possession of blacklisted books. It also covers a far-reaching crackdown on social media users. **According to the report, 1,656 citizens were imprisoned pending trial over their posts on Twitter.** Turkey, the report noted, **was the number one country for jailing people over their tweets.** It also led others in terms of shutting down Twitter accounts. Turkey blocked access to Twitter accounts more than any other country in the world.

¹³ Ibid. *Gazete Duvar*, August 14, 2016.

<https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2016/08/14/meb-29-yayinevine-ait-tum-kitaplari-yasakladi/>

¹⁴ KHK'lar ile 30 Yayınevi Kapatıldı, *Bianet*, June 6, 2017.

<https://m.bianet.org/bianet/medya/187174-khk-lar-ile-30-yayinevi-kapatildi>

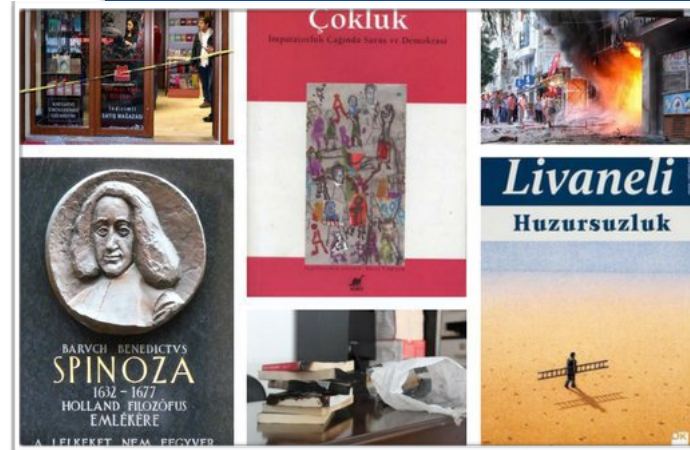
Separately, Turkey also banned access to Wikipedia, a global behemoth of online encyclopedia, which is edited by volunteers around the world.

The report revealed that publication and circulation of some books were prohibited by authorities but the publishers had not been informed of such decisions in advance. **The authorities seized 160 books published by Ekin Press, while 2,200 books of Belge Publishing House were confiscated over the lack of proper stamps.**

As part of the crackdown, authorities decided to pull 72 books of Aram Press, one book of Tekin Press and one book draft by Kirmizi Kedi (Red Cat) Press off the shelves.

Law enforcement moved to stop distribution of the special coup edition by Leman, a cartoon magazine, even before its publication and seized the existing materials. When Leman shared the draft version of its edition on social media, it sparked social uproar, igniting a chain of reaction from government supporters. **Hundreds of people gathered in front of Leman's headquarters, threatening to ransack it. According to its staff members, there were threatening phone calls for days.**¹⁵ Istanbul Fourth Civil Court of Peace issued a ruling to ban distribution of the special coup edition.

The clampdown also targeted writers, journalists, and other members of the press corps and publishing industry in various forms. Zulfu Livaneli, a famous novelist, faced a similar ban. **Authorities did not allow ads of his latest novel “Unrest” to be displayed on subways, metro stations and other public spaces, citing the state of emergency rules.**¹⁶



¹⁵ Turkish Publishers Association Report http://turkayaybir.org.tr/wp-content/files_mf/1495522936dusunceifaderapor_web.pdf

¹⁶ Ibid, Bianet. <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/medya/187174-khk-lar-ile-30-yayinevi-kapatildi>

Halime and Ramazan Akdag, two farmers, had been detained in the western province of Izmir over possession of blacklisted books and magazines. The report underlined that the couple was in fact illiterate. Yet, this did not spare them from a legal probe. After 15 days of detention, they were finally released.

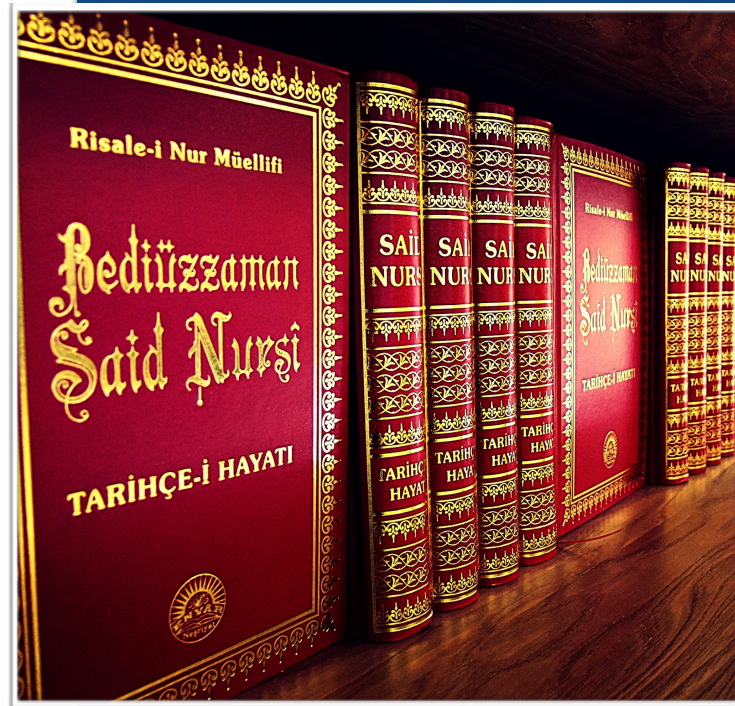
A critical book by Hamide Yigit, published by Tekin Press, also became an object of legal investigation.¹⁷ The book's theme was about Islamic State and how some officials, along with some NGOs in Turkey supported the militant group. It stirred up strong reaction from the Istanbul-based Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (IHH), which sued Tekin Press over the allegation of smearing and discrediting the image of IHH.

The controversial policies were not limited to the aforementioned cases. In an indictment prepared against Nevin Erdemir, the former head of now-defunct Free Journalists Association, famous French writer Albert Camus and 17th-century philosopher Spinoza were named as suspects. They were added to the list as "organization members." In another indictment about Gezi protests in Ankara, several books written by Servet Tanili, Nazim Hikmet and Louis Althusser, all deceased, were shown as elements of criminal conduct. In another incident, the title of a Ph.D. thesis written by Arif Kosar about Antonio Negri's theory of Multitude had become a subject of criminal investigation.

Apart from the official bans and legal probes enumerated above, **there were physical assaults against publishers and bookstores in various cities of Turkey.** Some publishers suffered arson attempts, while some bookstores came under attack by government supporters. **Some unknown assailants set the warehouse of Avesta Press in Diyarbakir's Sur district ablaze in an arson attempt.** Hundreds of people tried to ransack and ravage Gulen-affiliated NT bookstores around Turkey after the 2016 coup. **Many of NT bookstores were destroyed and burned. Red Cat Press was another publishing house that was targeted.** In a demoralizing and bleak development, **imprisoned suspects who stood trial over charges of attacking and burning Gul Bookstore in the central province of Kirsehir in 2015 were released by the court.** Currently, there is no one behind bars in the case.

¹⁷ Tekin Yayinevi, September 6, 2018.
<https://twitter.com/TekinYayinevi/status/1037621641424134145>

The government, in another disquieting move, sparked a renewed controversy over the publication of Risale-i Nur, an extensive collection of works by Said Nursi who had been prosecuted for his religious worldview and opposition to the radical projects of the early republican regime to sideline, even suppress, the religion in public domain. Said Nursi spent decades in jail, but this did little to curb the dissemination of his views among his disciples across the country. Subsequent governments in Ankara banned his books, which were clandestinely published and spread by Nursi's students.

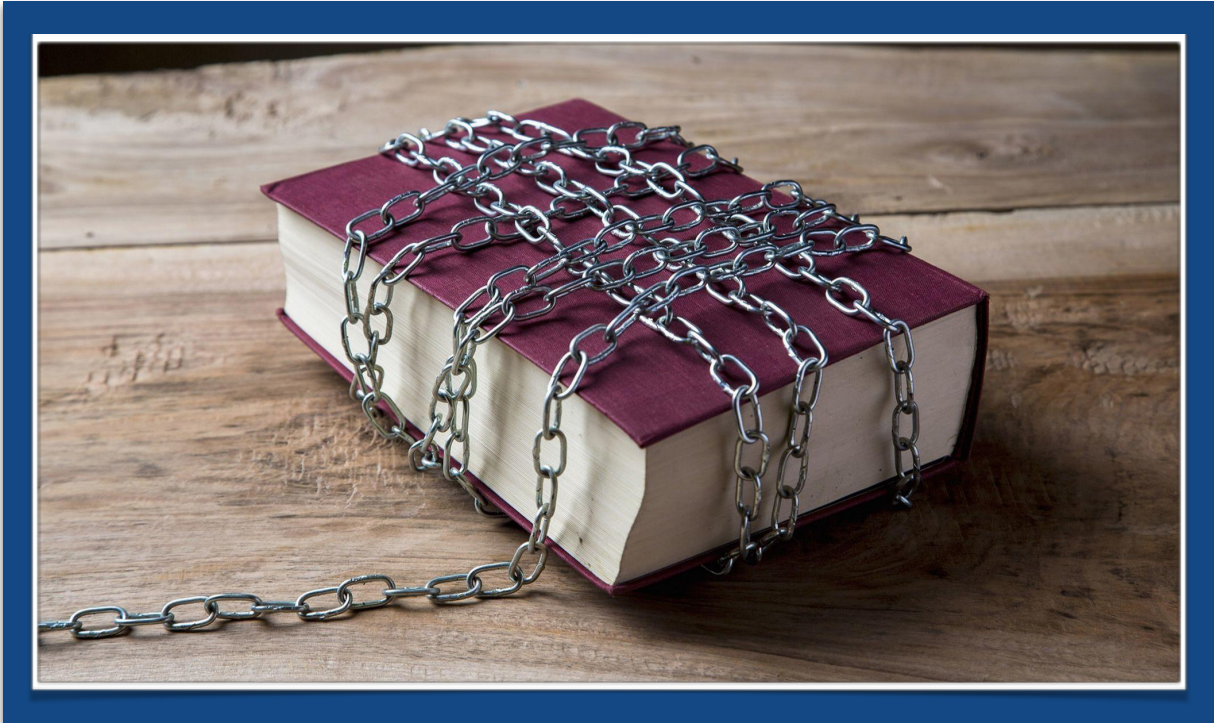


The authorities' pursuit to eradicate Nursi's views and books eventually failed. The publication of his books were finally allowed in limited form, if not endorsed. His views were no longer regarded as illegal or dangerous to the regime. But **the publication of Risale-i Nur has become a matter of new controversy when the ruling AKP moved to monopolize the publication of these books.¹⁸ It banned publication of books by private publishers and granted limited license for state-run publishers.** Not surprisingly, the decision elicited a strong reaction from the followers of Said Nursi.

Leader of the main opposition party, Republican People's Party (CHP), Kemal Kilicdaroglu entered the political fray, issuing a swift rebuke against the restrictive policies of the government. His support for Nursi collection is of vital importance given that it was the founders of CHP who aggressively and relentlessly pursued Nursi in the early decades of the republic.

¹⁸ *Risale-i Nur nasıl yasaklanıyor*, Gazete2023, July 31, 2014.
<http://www.gazete2023.com/dusunce-analiz/risale-i-nur-nasil-yasaklaniyor-h19135.html>

The CHP's current stance amounts to a reconciliatory move to rehabilitate the image of Nursi among the secular segments of society. The CHP Chairman, two weeks before the coup, proudly announced that it was his party that opposed the latest ban on the Nur Collection.¹⁹ The debate still ensues given the government's lasting ban.



PRISONERS FACE LIMITATIONS ON ACCESS TO BOOKS

According to the report by the Turkish Publishers Association, **additional restrictions had been imposed on more than 200,000 inmates across Turkey's prisons.** More than 50,000 people, including generals, diplomats, judges, prosecutors, teachers, and ordinary civilians from all walks of life, have been imprisoned over coup-related and terrorism charges in the aftermath of the coup.

¹⁹ AKP, Said-i Nursi'nin kitaplarını yasakladı, o yasağa biz direndik," *Yeni Asya*, July 3, 2016.
http://www.yeniasya.com.tr/politika/akp-said-i-nursi-nin-kitaplarini-yasakladi-o-yasaga-biz-direndik_402469

The prison conditions have been a source of great concern for human rights organizations as well as the United Nations. One of the restrictions inmates face is access to books. Authorities introduced limits on how many books an inmate can possess. Prisoners would have 15 books at most, a practice that was put into effect in all prisons across Turkey after the coup. Sometimes it would take two months before the exchange of books once they are read.

Certain books—some of them affiliated with Gulen and some are in the Kurdish language—were blocked. Although there is no ban on Kurdish books, some prison administrations, with their own initiative, preferred to block access to them. **Prisons also do not allow book donations from outside, and block attempts of family members or relatives sending books to their beloved ones.**

In Antalya, a prison administration blocked one lawyer's access to books sent from relatives outside the prison. The administration grounded its decision on a previous ruling by the government, which said those who are tried over terrorism charges can only have access to textbooks, but not to books sent from outside.

GOVERNMENT'S WAR ON ART

The relationship between the concept of art and the AKP rule has been problematic since the party first came to power in 2002. Successful it may have been in a number of fields such as the economy and internal affairs for some time, the AKP government is widely believed to have failed in its policies regarding culture and art. Many commentators and experts from different corners of the intellectual spectrum observe that the end result cannot simply be measured in terms of policy failures. The dismal state of art in Turkey can only be adequately explained by something else, that is, the AKP's view of the art itself. The AKP, a comment on Bianet contended,²⁰ did not envision an enduring and encompassing concept of art from a wider perspective. It took up a position harmful to art and its existence in Turkey.

²⁰ AKP'nin Sanata Düşmanlığı, Huseyin Sengul, Bianet, October 1, 2015.
<https://m.bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/167946-akp-nin-sanata-dusmanligi>

The AKP frequently engaged in cultural wars²¹ with its secular and leftist opponents. It systematically took on theatre and other Western art forms and tried to socially ostracize artists performing in such forms. Since Gezi Park protests, the government cut funding from many theatres and opera houses, equivocated in renewing annual contracts of stage players and producers. The Bianet commentary offers analysis from another angle. It documents how the AKP rule performed in grand restoration projects. **According to a consensus among academics and observers, the government's record in the restoration of historic places such as mosques, museums, churches, and other monuments is extremely poor.** Part of this bleak picture, the Bianet commentary came to believe, was driven by the sheer quest for profit and commercial motives. The patronage system that allows pliant companies to handle the renovation projects pay inadequate attention to the technical, sometimes expensive, details of the work. They exhibit little commitment to preserving the original structure of the building. Sumela Monastery in the Black Sea province of Trabzon is one of the prime examples. Other places in Istanbul such as Rumeli Castle in Bosphorus suffered the same perfunctory attention to the restoration project. **What all of these cases reveal is a broader pattern rooted in the warped and ideologically-driven view of the AKP toward art and culture. The government situates the art in the broader continuum of a cultural war to define the soul and character of Turkey in the world's politics.** Essentially, the ideological contest between secular Kemalists, whose policies perpetuated Turkey's place in the Western world, and Islamists, who clamor to recreate the grandeur of the past, shapes the struggle over art policies. However, the AKP's failures in major projects and its lack of care goes beyond its ideological animus toward the former secular establishment. The dismantling of major architectural sites and theatres cannot be explained only with that. The dismal picture is more about structural incompetence and cursory approach than a mere ideological animosity toward art. The AKP government has little interest in assigning projects to experts. This shambolic policy implementation fuels fears of critics about further damage to the historic sites.

²¹ Can Bahadır Yuce, *Mozart ve İslamcılık*, Kronos News, January 13, 2019.
<https://kronos17.news/tr/mozart-ve-islamcilik/>

In another detailed piece, Bianet documented how some restoration projects went awry.²² **A 2,000-year-old castle in Istanbul's Sile district underwent a restoration. But what emerged afterwards was beyond recognition, with architects and project managers overseeing the arduous task simply paying poor attention to the original shape of the castle.** The fundamental difference between the old version and the restored one generated a fresh controversy. **It became a source of mockery in social media with people outpouring their disdain over the dismal handling of the restoration project.** A mosque (formerly a church) in Iznik (Nicaea) from Ottoman times suffered another disaster. The mosque had been used as a museum until 2011. After that date, authorities opened it for public prayers, but they installed a glass door to the old structure of the mosque, spurring widespread condemnation and criticism.²³ Mesneviyhane Mosque, Atik Valide Kulliyeh (an Ottoman era multicomplex education place with a medical facility), Suheyl Bey Mosque, built by the legendary Mimar Sinan (Architect Sinan of the Magnificent Suleiman era), Urfa Castle, Ishak Pasha Palace in the eastern province of Van, Battal Gazi Kulliyeh, and some ancient Roman artifacts and structures **have all suffered from abysmal handling of renovation projects.**



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²² Tartışmalı 10 Restorasyon, Bianet, August 29, 2015, <http://bianet.org/biamag/sanat/167174-tartismali-10-restorasyon>

²³ Ibid, Bianet, August 29, 2015.

CONCLUSION

The dramatic story of persecution of people over possession of certain kinds of books illustrates the depth of tragedy that took place in Turkey. **Thousands of people, in hurry, disposed of countless books for the fear of legal probe over possession of some blacklisted books. The practice was as old as the republic itself.** Throughout various periods, certain books were banned by authorities. The censorship mechanism was a defining characteristic of the early republican regime as a scrupulously modified press law granted far-reaching powers to authorities to establish a firm grip on media and publishing houses. Opposition to the new regime was rendered impossible. And critical media outlets were not allowed to flourish on the ground of national security matters. **The history of freedom of expression is equally abundant with examples of trampling freedoms, muzzling dissent, and squelching critical thinking and criticism. The 1931 media law was a marker of a restrictive regime in place.** What followed later was a notorious cycle of progress and setbacks regarding the long history of the struggle to expand the scope of free speech and press freedom. During the inchoate years of the multiparty era, Turkey experienced, though momentarily and briefly, a period of media freedom before the single-party Democrat Party government eventually crumbled into corruption and decay in its later days. During the 1970s, the law enforcement and the Turkish authorities laboriously sought out left-wing books to contain the spread of Communism throughout Turkey. The Cold War mindset shaped the thinking of the Turkish leaders when Turkey faced an existential threat and menace from the Soviet Union across its northeastern border and the Black Sea. The expression of left-wing ideas and the popular tide of socialism on campuses were regarded as threatening challenges to Ankara.

The religious-themed books were seen within this context for a larger period of time throughout the republican history. Yet, transition to democracy and popular elections after military interventions brought some relief and lifting of bans.

Today, a new cycle of bans firmly took hold, suffocating the world of publishing with never-ending crackdowns and persecutions. The burning of Gulen-authored books,²⁴ the arrests of hundreds of people over possession of those books, the renewed ban against Kurdish magazines and newspapers, and police raids against leftist publishers mark a new dark era for Turkey's cultural and literary landscape.

²⁴ Related Twitter news about burnings, raids, probes over Gulen-affiliated books.
<https://twitter.com/search?f=tweets&q=Fet%C3%B6%20Kitaplar%C4%B1%20yak%C4%B1ld%C4%B1&src=typd>

