

ACADEMIC  
RIGHTS VIOLATIONS  
IN THE FIELD  
OF KURDISH  
STUDIES AT  
TURKISH UNIVERSITIES

# Academic Rights Violations in The Field Of Kurdish Studies at Turkish Universities

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This report is based on the results of a research study on monitoring and reporting of rights violations related to freedom of expression and academic freedoms in the field of Kurdish Studies at Turkish universities conducted by Ismail Beşikci Foundation (IBV) with the support of the Etkiniz EU Programme. Kurdish Studies is an interdisciplinary academic field dedicated mainly to the study of the history, culture, social structure and politics of Kurds in all areas where they live. This field includes human and social science disciplines such as literature, sociology, history, anthropology, political science, cinema, cultural studies, psychology, education. On the other hand, although it is called Kurdish Studies, it is not possible to consider this area independently of studies on ethnic and religious communities such as Armenian, Assyrian, Yezidi, Alevi Studies; it is also not possible to address this area without associating it with Turkish, Arab and Persian Studies. Therefore, Kurdish Studies are closely related to studies conducted on many other ethnic and religious groups with which Kurds interact.

Dr İsmail Beşikçi, who gave his name to ismail Beşikçi Foundation, is the first academic in Turkey to criticize the Turkish Thesis on History and The Theory of Sun-Language, which has an important place in the construction of the official ideology of the state, in the context of Kurds.

Beşikçi, who was expelled from the university where he worked in 1970 for his critical academic studies, spent 17 years and 2 months of his life in prisons from the early 1970s to the end of the 1990s due to his published books, articles and defenses in the courts. In this respect, Beşikçi is also a historical actor in terms of the struggle for freedom of expression and academic freedom carried out in the world.

Academic studies conducted on the Kurds in Turkish universities by using the term “Kurds” flourished in the 1990s, years after Beşikci launched this academic struggle, and rose relatively and partially, especially in the 2000s and 2010s. Kurdish Studies took a major hit, especially after 2015, and suffered a significant setback. This report, based on a 2020 study under severely repressive political and social conditions, is the first report on rights violations in the field of Kurdish Studies conducted in Turkish universities and has symbolic value in this respect.

The research proposal on which this report is based, the general framework of the research and the methods to be followed were first developed by Dr Derya Bayır in 2019. The implementation of the research project was carried out in spring 2020 by IBV Administrative Coordinator Ayşe Tepe Dogan, IBV Board Member Tofan Sünbül and independent researcher Dr Güllistan Yarkın. As the project team conducting this research, we would like to thank all the academics who participated in the survey and agreed to meet with us. Without their support and contribution, this report would not have been produced.

As the researcher and the author of the report, I would like to thank the İBV Board of Directors, the Etkiniz EU Programme for their support to this report and Derya Bayır, who developed the research proposal and supported the project, one of the founders of the İBV İbrahim Gürbüz for his support, the İBV employees Şükran Şahin and Şilan Seyhan for their valuable contributions.

I hope that this report will contribute to the freedom of expression and academic freedom in Kurdish Studies.

May 30, 2023

**Güllistan Yarkın**

# ADMINISTRATOR'S SUMMARY

This report consists of the study of the expression and academic freedoms protected in the international conventions and documents to which Turkey is a party, and the monitoring of violations related to the right to information and education in the field of Kurdish studies. In the light of the articles in the conventions and documents mentioned in the introduction of the report, it is stated how the general course of Kurdish studies in Turkey and the writing of the report follow. Analysis of 20 in-depth interviews conducted in this section was added to the report with data. Nine of the interviewees signed the declaration “We will not be party to this crime!” and four were dismissed from their positions under the State of Emergency (SOE), which was announced on July 21, 2016 and ended on July 19, 2018, 1 of them resigned from their positions during the same period, and 3 signament academics continued their duties at the university. The data of the prepared surveys were put into the charts and evaluated under the relevant topics. In the continuation of the report, the pressures and violations experienced by Dr İsmail Beşikci were addressed, who first expressed and studied the concept of Kurds that had been regarded as a political taboo since the establishment of the Republic until the early 2000s, and for whom our Foundation was named. Afterwards, the thesis in the CoHE database was examined according to the years and the thesis written on Kurds were determined and evaluated on the political atmosphere and developments of those years. The scarcity of theses concerning Kurds between 1990 and 2000 is directly proportional to the pressure and conflict that existed in those years and the taboo state of these issues in universities. By the 2000s, studies on the Kurds increased rapidly with EU harmonisation packages and some democratic reforms. Increasing

Kurdish studies are also understood from the year-by-year examination of the theses in the CoHE's database, and the identified theses are included chronologically in the table. The report drew a general framework for the introduction of Kurdish into universities as a department for the first time and the adventure of Kurdish departments in universities since 2010, with positive steps taken after the post-2000 process known as "dialogue talks" by the public. Then, it was determined that between 2000 and 2010, the number of theses with the word Kurdish in the title increased to 43 and the number of theses in this field continued to increase in the following years. Therefore, the 2000s also mean the years of significant transformations in the field of the Kurds in terms of the Republic of Turkey and university history. The first theses in Kurdish began to be written in the post-2009 period, and the first thesis in Kurdish was defended and officially accepted at Mardin Artuklu University in 2012. However, the report explains topics and concepts such as "Northern Kurdistan", "colony", and "anti-colonial", which remain taboo and are still encountered with various sanctions when subjected into studies. Most academics working in the field of Kurdish studies are trying to weigh or predict which ideas and concepts will cross the red lines of the state and therefore can be punished, and which ideas and concepts are "reasonable" and "acceptable" when conducting their academic studies or sharing their ideas with their students in classes. In the survey conducted with 58 academics, two questions were asked for a better understanding of this issue: (a) "Do you think you are self-censoring in your courses?" 37 people out of 58 answered Yes to this question, so the self-censor in the courses is 63.79%. (b) "Do you think you have self-censored in your academic studies on the subjects of the Kurds and Kurdistan (theses, articles, books, etc.)?" 41 out of 58 people answered Yes to this question, and stated that they applied self-censor in academic publications. The report shows that one of the main problems that arises in the field of Kurdish studies regarding academic freedom and freedom of expression is self-censor, which is quite common. The report also discussed the educational experience in the Kurdish Language and Literature department and other departments at Mardin Artuklu University, which was opened with a great assertion in Kurdish studies and presented to the public as an important step and met a lot of media attention. In addition, the attitude of university rectors towards Kurdish studies was evaluated on the information obtained through interviews and media screening. Mardin Artuklu University is the institution that opens and lectures in Kurdish for the first time in the field of higher education. Within the scope of the Institute of Living Languages established at the university, Kurdish higher education was started in practice. In addition to this, Mardin Artuklu University (MAU) has an important place in the field of Kurdish Studies conducted in Turkish universities in terms of university autonomy and current political conjuncture on academics, as revealed both in the interviews within

the framework of this study and in media screening, in terms of showing partial “liberating” or quite “repressive” roles played by the state, CoHE and rectors. Under the direction of Serdar Bedii Omay, the first rector of Mardin Artuklu University, academics in different departments and academics in the Department of Kurdish Language and Literature in particular taught and researched in a more free environment, but the replacement of the rector with Ahmet Ağırakça reversed the existing situation and caused pressures to increase throughout the university and again in Kurdish language and literature, resulting in the restriction of academic freedom, freedom of expression and expulsions. The positive and negative effects of these two rectors on the university were expressed in interviews with academics who have worked or are working in different departments of MAU. As a result of the changing political atmosphere – the termination of the dialogue process and the proclamation of the SOE – the way the problem of freedom of expression, which is encountered intensively in most universities in Turkey, is experienced in the case of academics conducting Kurdish studies, is stated by supporting them with excerpts from the interviews with them. In the conclusion chapter of the report, a general evaluation and the recommendations of Ismail Beşikci Foundation, the steps to be taken and the legal regulations that should be implemented are included. One of the most important proposals is: For Kurdish to find a place and develop in academic life depends on making legal and actual arrangements for the use of Kurdish through all educational life, including preschool. First of all, it is essential to ensure the right to “education in the mother tongue” and this must be guaranteed by including it in all legislation, especially the Constitution. Supportive steps should be taken to protect and improve Kurdish and other languages that have been deprived of the possibilities of modern education for many years. It is also necessary to take priority steps immediately for Kirmancki/Zazaki, which is on UNESCO’s list of “dying languages”.

This monitoring report focuses on Kurdish Studies, which have been the target of political pressures in universities over the years since the founding of the Republic of Turkey. Further specifically, the report is carried out by linking the rights violations experienced by academics who conduct academic research in the field of Kurdish Studies, who have recently worked on staff or contract at a university within Turkey, and who are currently working at universities, by associating them with international legal conventions protecting the expression and academic freedoms of which Turkey is a party.

In-depth interviewing, archival screening and survey techniques were used in the preparation of the report. During the research, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 academics conducting their studies in the field of Kurdish Studies, media screening was carried out on rights violations, CoHE (Council of Higher Education) database was scanned to reveal the general situation of Kurdish Studies, and an online survey of 58 academics was conducted. Through these research techniques, various rights violations in the field of freedom of expression and academic freedoms were accessed, most of which were not the subject of criminal complaints and were not reflected in case files, courts or even the media. In-depth discussions focused mainly on the experiences of academics who still work at universities in Kurdish cities or who have worked at them in the past, as well as the rights violations they have experienced. The survey reached out to academics who have worked in the past or are currently conducting studies at a university in Turkey in the field of Kurdish Studies regardless of the field. Some of the academics surveyed lived in Turkey, while others had to settle in different countries. Among the in-

depth interviews, only one academic resided outside Turkey. Media screening used mainstream<sup>1</sup> newspapers such as *Cumhuriyet*, *Sabah*, *Hurriyet*, as well as databases of some critical publications such as *Evrensel* and *Bianet*, and some local newspapers and internet portals in cities where universities are located.

During the study, due to the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic and the implementation of curfew restrictions, all interviews and surveys were conducted online. Some of the interviewees were reached through personal connections and some through corporate connections of Ismail Beşikci Foundation. There was no major difficulty in reaching the interviewees and involving them in this study. The survey was conducted in May-June 2020. Academics were reached through platforms such as the e-mail announcement group and Kurdish Studies Network, which belong to Ismail Beşikci Foundation.

The in-depth interviews were held in April and May (2020). In that process, academics who were currently working at Mardin Artuklu University (8 people), Van Yüzüncü Yıl University (3), Bingöl University (2), Muş Alparslan University (2) Dicle University (1), Munzur University (1), Sırnak University (1) and two foundation universities (2) in Izmir and Istanbul, or who have worked at those universities in the past were interviewed. The interviewees were selected mainly from universities in the Kurdish cities. The reasons for this are that since 2009, Kurdish language and literature/culture and Zaza language and literature departments have been opened in these universities, many academics working in the departments of these universities covering social sciences are working in the field of Kurdish Studies and to make the rights violations in these universities visible.

Of the 20 academics we interviewed, 10 consisted of academics who were working or had worked in the departments of Kurdish Language and Literature/Culture and Zaza Language and Literature, while the remaining academics were those working in departments such as Political Science, Sociology, History, Architecture, Anthropology, International Relations and conducting their studies mainly in Turkish and English. Academics were not asked about their ethnic affiliation when determining the interviewees; however, according to the picture that emerged after the interviews, 19 of the interviewees were Kurdish and 1 was Turkish; 14 are male and 6 are female academics. Nine of the interviewees signed the declaration “We will not be party to this crime!” which was shared with the press on January 16, 2016 and will be discussed in the report. During the interviews, 4 of the 9 academics who signed the declaration were dismissed from their positions under decrees of law during the State of Emergency (SOE) period announced on July 21, 2016 and terminated on July 19, 2018, 1 of them resigned from their positions in the same

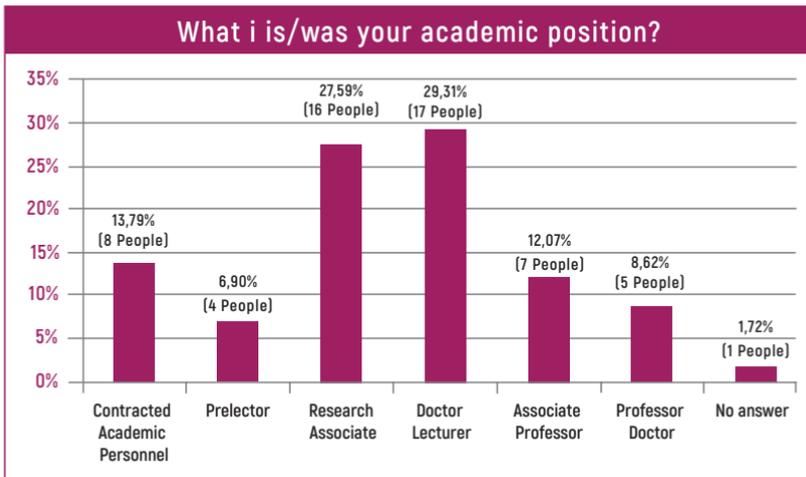
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<sup>1</sup> The master's and doctoral thesis advocated in Turkish universities are mandatorily delivered to the Higher Education Council.

period, the contract of 1 signatory working at the foundation university was not extended, and 3 signatories are still in their positions at the university. Three of the 11 interviewees who did not sign this declaration were expelled with the Decree-law for their dissenting views during the same period, while 2 resigned from their positions due to mobbing within the universities. Five academics, who had not signed a statement from the interviewees, continued their duties at universities. As a result, 13 academics from the interviewees were expelled from the university for various reasons through pressures and rights violations, while 7 continued their duties at universities.

The survey, conducted within the framework of the research, did not focus on a specific region or university, as in the interviews. Fifty-eight people attended the survey. Of the 58 surveyed, 32 were men and 26 were women. Thirty of the respondents stated their mother tongue as Kurdish, 21 as Turkish, 3 as Kirmancki-Zaza, 3 as Kurdish-Turkish and 1 as Croatian-German.

The survey respondents were asked about their academic positions and 57 people from 58 answered.



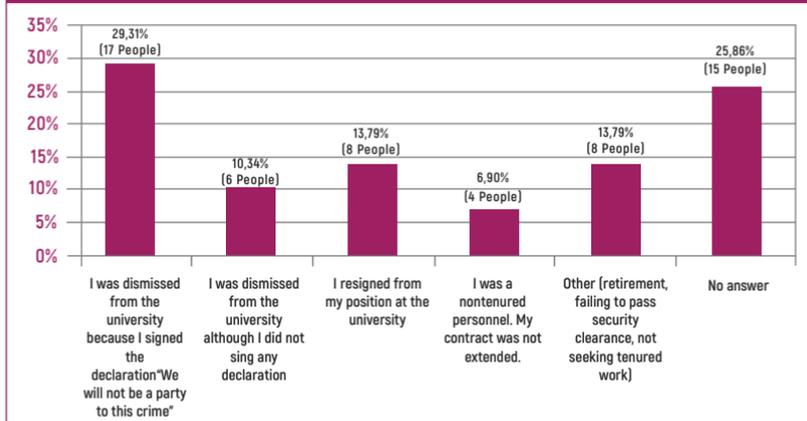
The distribution of survey respondents according to academic disciplines is as follows.

### What is/was your academic discipline you studied in a university in Turkey?

Kurdish Language and Literature / Living Languages	15,52%	9
Sociology	13,79%	8
Anthropology	5,17%	3
History	5,17%	3
Political Science	13,79%	8
International Relations	10,34%	6
Architecture	3,45%	2
Economy/Business Administration	8,62%	5
Philosophy	3,45%	2
Linguistics	3,45%	2
Psychology	8,62%	5
Other (Fine arts, Turkish Language and Lit., medicine, Cinema, Educational Sciences)	8,62%	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,00%</b>	<b>58</b>

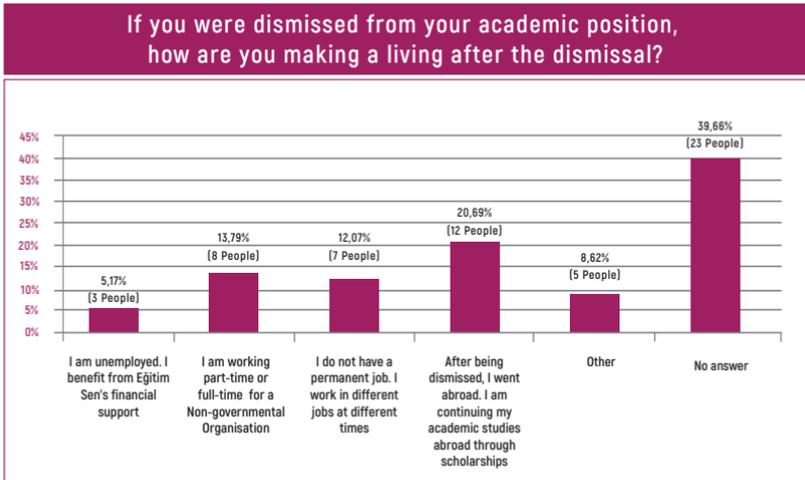
Of the 58 respondents, 43 were not working at a university at the time the survey was conducted. In the survey, academics were asked why they did not work at a university within Turkey. The answers are as follows.

### What is the reason that you do not work at a university in Turkey?



This question was answered by 43 people out of 58. Although the total number of academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies is not known clearly, as both the survey and the interviews showed, many academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies have been suspended from the university in the post-2016 period due to their critical views, especially on the grounds that they signed the text “We will not be party to this crime!”. Therefore, although it is expected to be carried out later in the report, the most important violation of rights to be mentioned in the “Introduction” section of the report is that a significant number of academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies were suspended from Turkish universities after the termination of the dialogue process between the PKK and the State in 2015 and during the SOE period, which remained in force between 2016 and 2018.

The survey also posed a question about how the expelled academics were managing their lives economically. This question was answered not only by academics expelled with the Decree-law, but also by academics who resigned from the university or retired. The results are as follows:



For this question, five people who chose the answer “other” stated that they started working in the private sector, retired, conducted post-doctoral studies, taught online for a university outside Turkey and worked abroad. As can be seen from these answers, a significant number of participants continue their studies outside the academic field. Especially academics who had the opportunity to go outside Turkey continue their academic studies through scholarships.

This report consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, the articles of the International Conventions that guarantee freedom of expression and their contents are

discussed, to which the Republic of Turkey is a party. In the second chapter, Kurdish Studies carried out in Turkish universities are discussed within the framework of a historical monitoring and developments in this field from the 1960s to the present were monitored by using the CoHE database. The third chapter discusses how the basic restrictions on freedom of expression and academic freedom in the field of Kurdish Studies are implemented as censorship/self-censorship, and how freely expressed critical thoughts are punished by political power and university administrations. In the fourth chapter, rights violations at Mardin Artuklu University, which is of great importance in terms of Turkish university history and Kurdish Studies carried out in universities, where the first Kurdish department was founded and where many studies were carried out in the field of Kurdish Studies, and how the interventions of political power and CoHE in university autonomy took place. In the fifth chapter, the termination of the “dialogue process” between the PKK and the State of the Republic of Turkey in August 2015 and how the SOE regime, which was in force between 2016 and 2018, generally affected freedom of expression and rights violations in Kurdish Studies.

Throughout the report, the principles and recommendations expressed in UNESCO’s 1997 *Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff* on the rights of academics working in higher education institutions, which are a source of reference in the field of academic freedoms worldwide, will be used.

## **1. ARTICLES GUARANTEEING FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS TO WHICH THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY IS A PARTY**

The development of interstate law and interstate control mechanism has been one of the most important agendas of the world's states in the new world system established under the US hegemony after the First and Second World War, which caused great destruction on the European continent. Many international conventions have been produced in order to re-establish interstate law, prevent human rights violations within countries, prevent genocides and guarantee human rights due to the great destruction left over from world wars that resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. Human rights such as the right to life, the right not to be tortured, not to be racially discriminated, freedom of expression, academic freedoms, and the right to access education are some of the rights guaranteed by international conventions. The states that sign these conventions commit in front of other states in the international arena that these rights will be guaranteed and that there will be no human rights violations within their borders.

The Republic of Turkey has also been a party to many international conventions that significantly affect its domestic law and guarantee human rights and has signed these agreements with a commitment to fulfil the articles in these conventions. On the other hand, despite being a party to these conventions, human rights violations have continued intensively in many different areas within the borders of the Republic of Turkey. The right to freedom of expression and academic freedom in Turkish univer-

sities where this report focuses are also important areas where rights violations continue to be intense, although they are guaranteed by international conventions.

One of the most important international conventions that guarantee freedom of expression and which the Republic of Turkey is a party to is *the European Convention on Human Rights*. This convention was signed in Rome on 4 November 1950 and entered into force on 3 September 1953. The Republic of Turkey signed this convention on November 4, 1950. The convention was published in the Official Gazette no. 8662 on March 19, 1954 with the Approval Law No. 6366 of March 10, 1954. The supervisory body of the European Convention on Human Rights is the European Court of Human Rights.<sup>2</sup> Over the past 50 years, the convention has been reinterpreted and developed through the work of the European Court of Human Rights, the European Commission on Human Rights and the Council of Europe. In addition to additional protocols extending the scope of the convention, the Council of Europe has adopted recommendations and resolutions for member states, proposed standards of conduct and imposed sanctions on states that do not comply with the provisions of the convention. Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights also protects academic freedoms and the right to information/information in relation to freedom of expression.<sup>3</sup>

### Article 10:

#### Freedom of expression

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers. This Article shall not prevent States from requiring the licensing of broadcasting, television or cinema enterprises.

2. The exercise of these freedoms, since it carries with it duties and responsibilities, may be subject to such formalities, conditions, restrictions or penalties as are prescribed by law and are necessary in a democratic society, in the interests of national security, territorial integrity or public safety, for the prevention of disorder or crime, for the protection of health or morals, for the protection of the reputation or rights of others, for preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, or for maintaining the authority and impartiality of the judiciary.<sup>4</sup>

Another convention to which the Republic of Turkey is a party is the *Internation-*

2 <https://humanrightscenter.bilgi.edu.tr/content/49-avrupa-insan-haklar-sozlesmesi/>

3 Dominika Bychawska-Siniarska (2018) *Handbook for Implementers of Protection of Freedom of Expression under the European Convention on Human Rights*, Council of Europe Publication

4 Dominika Bychawska-Siniarska (2018) *Handbook for Implementers protecting freedom of expression under the European Convention on Human Rights*, Council of Europe Publication

*al Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*, which is adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. This convention was first adopted in 1966, opened for signature and entered into force in 1976. Turkey approved this convention in 2003 with the signature of the president, prime minister and ministers of that time, and the contract came into force in December of the same year.<sup>5</sup> When the convention was signed, its article 27, which concerns the freedom of worship of different religious groups, was signed by stating that this article would be applied within the framework of the Lausanne Agreement and by placing reservations on it.<sup>6</sup> The article of this international convention on freedom of expression is as follows:

### Article 19:

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.
3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary;
  - (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
  - (b) For the protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.

Protecting the right to education and academic freedoms, securing that academics, researchers and students can do their work freely in autonomous higher education institutions and universities without being subjected to political or other pressures, is regulated in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> articles of the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*. This convention was adopted in the United Nations General Assembly in 1966, opened for signature and entered into force in 1976. The Republic of Turkey approved this convention in 2003 and it was published in the Official Gazette. The relevant clauses of the contract are as follows:<sup>7</sup>

### Article 13.

#### Right to Education

1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to

5 <https://humanrightscenter.bilgi.edu.tr/tr/content/117-medeni-ve-siyasi-haklara-iliskin-uluslarar-as-sozlesme/>

6 <file:///C:/3%20ETK%C4%B0N%C4%B0Z%20AB%20PROJES%C4%B0/S%C3%B6zle%C5%9Fmeler/MedeniVeSiyasiHaklarIliskinSozlesme.pdf>

7 <https://humanrightscenter.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2015/08/03/EkonomikSosyalKulturelHaklar-Sozlesmesi.pdf>

education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

**2.** The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right:

(a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all;

(b) Secondary education in its different forms, including technical and vocational secondary education, shall be made generally available and accessible to all by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;

(c) Higher education shall be made equally accessible to all, on the basis of capacity, by every appropriate means, and in particular by the progressive introduction of free education;

(d) Fundamental education shall be encouraged or intensified as far as possible for those persons who have not received or completed the whole period of their primary education;

(e) The development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued, an adequate fellowship system shall be established, and the material conditions of teaching staff shall be continuously improved.

**3.** The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to have respect for the liberty of parents and, when applicable, legal guardians to choose for their children schools, other than those established by the public authorities, which conform to such minimum educational standards as may be laid down or approved by the State and to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions.

**4.** No part of this article shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principles set forth in paragraph I of this article and to the requirement that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.

### **Article 15:**

#### **Right to Take Part in Cultural Life**

**1.** The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone:

a) To take part in cultural life;

b) To enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications;

c) To benefit from the protection of the moral and material interests resulting from any scientific, literary or artistic production of which he is the author.

2. The steps to be taken by the States Parties to the present Covenant to achieve the full realization of this right shall include those necessary for the conservation, the development and the diffusion of science and culture.

3. The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to respect the freedom indispensable for scientific research and creative activity.

4. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the benefits to be derived from the encouragement and development of international contacts and co-operation in the scientific and cultural fields.

In this context, the interpretations brought into the articles of contract by the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are important. While these interpretations of the Committee are of general nature, they guide the states parties to the Convention to bring effectiveness and work to the Convention and to fulfil their obligations arising from the Convention. Articles 38, 39 and 40 of the Committee's 1999 "General Interpretation 13" titled Academic Freedom and Institutional Autonomy discusses academic freedoms and the autonomy of academic structures in the context of the relevant articles of the convention.<sup>8</sup>

"..... in the Committee's experience, staff and students in higher education are especially vulnerable to political and other pressures which undermine academic freedom. Therefore, the ideas expressed below are specifically on higher education institutions. The Committee wishes to emphasize, however, that staff and students throughout the education sector are entitled to academic freedom and many of the following observations have general application

Members of the academic community, individually or collectively, are free to pursue, develop and transmit knowledge and ideas, through research, teaching, study, discussion, documentation, production, creation or writing. Academic freedom includes the liberty of individuals to express freely opinions about the institution or system in which they work, to fulfil their functions without discrimination or fear of repression by the State or any other actor, to participate in professional or representative academic bodies, and to enjoy all the internationally recognized human rights applicable to other individuals in the same jurisdiction. ...

The enjoyment of academic freedom requires the autonomy of institutions of higher education. Autonomy is that degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision-making by institutions of higher education in relation to their academic

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Education/Training/Compilation/Pages/d>

For Turkish, see [https://insanhaklarimerkezi.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2016/05/05/BMde\\_Insan\\_Haklari\\_Yorumlari\\_1981\\_2006.pdf](https://insanhaklarimerkezi.bilgi.edu.tr/media/uploads/2016/05/05/BMde_Insan_Haklari_Yorumlari_1981_2006.pdf) p. 228.

work, standards, management and related activities. ....”

In addition, academic and artistic freedoms and “respect for academic freedoms” are specially protected in Article 13 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* of 2000, the basic document of the European Union, in which Turkey is a candidate. Although Turkey is not yet a party to this document, it constitutes a standard for Turkey.<sup>9</sup>

### **Article 11:**

#### **Freedom of expression and information**

1. Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

2. The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.<sup>10</sup>

### **Article 13:**

#### **Freedom of the arts and sciences**

The arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected.

In addition to the basic conventions mentioned above, the 1997 UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel on the rights of academics working in higher education institutions is among the basic international texts that protect academic freedoms and the right to education.<sup>11</sup> This recommendation; The basic principles to be followed in higher education provide a broad perspective on the autonomy of higher education institutions, the rights, duties and responsibilities of higher education institutions, the rights and freedoms of higher education academic staff and the assignments and responsibilities of higher education academic staff, and the evaluation, recruitment and dismissal of academic staff and draw a general framework for these issues. According to this recommendation, higher education is aimed at the development of people and the advancement of society, and the right to education, studies and research can only develop in an environment where there is full academic freedom. In addition, the autonomy of higher education institutions and the clear statement of findings, hypotheses and opinions are central to higher education. Such an academic environment provides strong guarantees for the accuracy and objectivity of scientific activity and research.

This monitoring report will show the rights violations suffered by academics

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/tr/avrupa-birligi-temel-haklar-bildirgesi-708>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.avrupa.info.tr/tr/avrupa-birligi-temel-haklar-bildirgesi-708>

<sup>11</sup> UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff <http://80.251.40.59/politics.ankara.edu.tr/altipar/Yayinlar/Yuksekk%20Ogretim%20Tavsiye.pdf>

conducting or have conducted research in the field of Kurdish Studies at universities in Turkey, both in light of the articles in the international conventions mentioned above and in light of UNESCO's recommendation of 1997.

## 2. KURDISH STUDIES IN TURKEY'S UNIVERSITY

### 2.1. The Concept of “Kurds” Under Pressure from 1923 to the 1990s, Kurdish Studies and Dr Ismail Beşikci

Until the 1990s, it was almost impossible to conduct research, thesis or lecture in any field using the concepts of “Kurd” and “Kurdish” in the universities of the Republic of Turkey. In the context of this topic, freedom of expression was under great pressure and it was impossible to see such an area as “Kurdish Studies” in universities. Universities and academics conducted academic studies mainly to institutionalize and disseminate the official ideology that denied the history of the ancient peoples of Anatolia, the existence and history of the Kurds. The official Turkish History Thesis, which denied the history of non-Turkish ethnic groups, was disseminated by anthropologists and historians such as Afet Inan, especially in the 1930s. In this process, official ideology was institutionalized with significant contribution of universities.<sup>12</sup> Critical academics such as Ismail Beşikci and Fikret Baskaya, who rejected the official Turkish History Thesis of the Republic of Turkey based on denial, for many years either could not find any academic positions in universities or were expelled from the university for expressing their views.

Ismail Beşikci, a sociologist, was the first academic to carry out studies on Kurds by going outside the official ideology in Turkish universities

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<sup>12</sup> Beşikci, I. (1991). *Turkish History Thesis Sun Language Theory and the Kurdish Question*. Istanbul: Yurt Publications.

Çağaptay, S. (2004). Race, Assimilation and Kemalism: Turkish Nationalism and the Minorities in the 1930s. *Middle Eastern Studies*, 40(3), 86–101.



İSMAİL BEŞİKÇİ



UNESCO'YA MEKTUP

İSMAİL BEŞİKÇİ



TÜRK TARİH TEZİ  
"GÜNEŞ-DİL TEORİSİ"  
VE  
KÜRD SORUNU

*Bilim Yöntemi Türkiye'deki Uygulama-II*

icv  
İSMAİL  
BEŞİKÇİ  
VAKFI

2. BASKI

İSMAİL BEŞİKÇİ



DEVLETLERARASI SÖMÜRGE  
KÜRDİSTAN

icv  
İSMAİL  
BEŞİKÇİ  
VAKFI

POLİS MEMURU  
KURT

and crossing the red lines of the state in this field. Between 1964 and 1970, Ismail Beşikci worked as a teaching assistant in the Department of Sociology of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences of Erzurum Atatürk University. Then, in 1970, he was dismissed from his position at the university at the request of rector Kemal Bıykoğlu.<sup>13</sup> During this period, Beşikci's ideas and participation in the Eastern Rallies organized by the Workers' Party of Turkey were effective in his dismissal from his position. Beşikci participated in these rallies as an observer and discussed Kurds and Kurdish in his lectures and published articles during this period when the existence of the Kurds were denied, the word *Kurd* was considered a crime and completely ignored by academics working at the university. He was then charged and punished for his publications and course contents.

An administrative investigation was launched against Ismail Beşikci by the university rectorate in 1968 and he was dismissed by the Rector's Office of Erzurum Atatürk University in 1970. In an interview about the administrative investigation against him and his dismissal, Dr. Beşikci stated:

Administrative investigations opened against me. You're attending rallies. What did you attend for? Why did you attend? What's the point of that for you? [...] What's your idea? Questions like that. Meanwhile, from time to time, concepts such as "Eastern Question", "Kurds", "Kurdish" are mentioned in my classes, and students take notes. Especially in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, students take notes. The MHP supporting students file complaint against me for these concepts such as "Kurd", "Kurdish", "Eastern Question", "Workers' Party". On top of that, administrative investigations were opened against me. So you say Kurdish, what do you mean? Do Kurds exist? Is there such a language as Kurdish? How are you making this up? At the time, Orhan Türkdoğan was also an assistant, but a senior assistant. He reported me. The administrative investigation was opened on that [...] I mean, provoking students, pouring poison into students' minds, and so on [...] After those administrative investigations I was dismissed from my position [...] Yes, by the university rector's office [...] It was Kemal Bıykoğlu at the time[...]<sup>14</sup>

As can be seen in this excerpt, Beşikci's use of concepts such as Kurds and Kurdish in his lectures and his attendance in Eastern Rallies were considered a crime by the university administration. Turkish nationalist students also play an active

13 Malmisanij (2011) How Did You Come Up with the Kurds, Ismail Beşikci? Vate Publishing House

14 Malmisanij (2011) How Did You Come Up with the Kurds, Ismail Beşikci? Vate Publishing House, ps.21-30.

2.

İSTANBUL

1993/680 Savcılık Dosyası No: 1993/212

Örnek : 29

-GİYABİ-

Tutuklama kararını veren mahkeme : İSTANBUL 2. HAKİMİYE  
 Esas veya sorgu numarası : 1993/212  
 C. Başsavcılığı Hz. numarası : 1993/680 Savcılık Dosyası No: 1993/212

### TUTUKLAMA MÜZEKKERESİ

**Samimî :**

Adi ve soyadı : İSMAIL BEŞİKÇİ  
 Baba adı : İsmail  
 Ana adı : ZAHİDE  
 Doğum yeri : İNKILAP  
 Doğum tarihi : 1939  
 Nüfus kayıtlı olduğu yer : Çarşamba, Jankilik Mahallesi, Ankara  
 İkametgâh ve işyeri adresi : Ankara Etlik Ağaçlı Bulvarı  
 Mercimek Sok. No: 19/16

Samimî şekli : .....

Samimî isnad olunan fiil : 3713 sayılı yasanın 6/1 maddesi

ne mahalefet

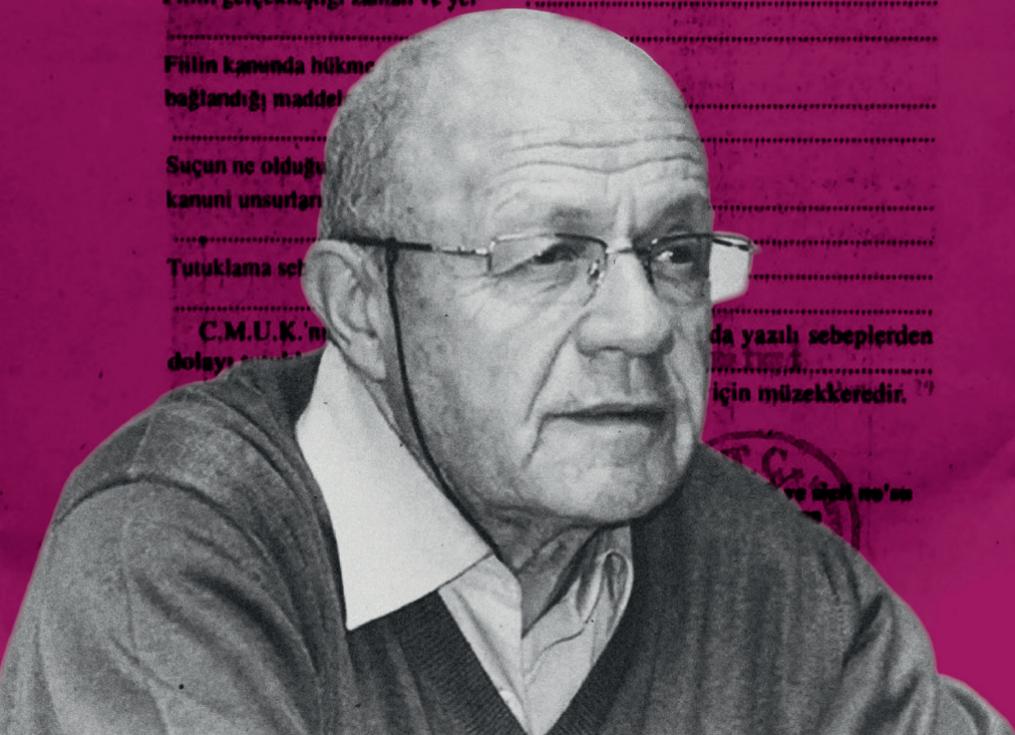
Fiilin gerçekleştiği zaman ve yer : .....

Fiilin yanında hükme bağlandığı maddeler : .....

Suçun ne olduğu kanuni unsurları : .....

Tutuklama sebebi : .....

C.M.U.K.'nin 10. maddesiyle yazılı sebeplerden dolayı tutuklanmıştır. İçin müzekkeredir.



role in this impeachment process and report their teacher to the university administration. After being dismissed from his position at Erzurum Atatürk University by the rectorate, İsmail Beşikçi won the research assistant exam conducted by the Department of Sociology of Faculty of Political Sciences of Ankara University, and started working at Ankara University in 1971. After he started working at this university, the military coup of March 12, 1971 took place. After the military coup, he was arrested while in the faculty and sent to Diyarbakır Martial Law Prison at the request of the Diyarbakır Martial Law Command and to Diyarbakır Suriçi Prison, two years after the Military Supreme Court upheld the conviction. In the same interview, Dr. Beşikçi stated that the people who reported him to the Diyarbakır Martial Law Command were the rector, deans, professors and students of Erzurum Atatürk University:

As a result of those administrative investigation files, I was detained in the Faculty of Political Sciences and taken to Diyarbakır... Those who reported to martial law commands were the rector himself... dean of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, and dean of the Faculty of Medicine. The rector and deans report me. Besides, there are other professors on that whistleblower petition. There are also students supportive of MHP. I mean, those taking general sociology class. There were about 60 of them, saying like, “Beşikçi is a diversionist, he is talking about someone called the Kurds, he is a traitor [...]” That’s what they report.<sup>15</sup>

As can be seen, all circles in the university, from the rector to the students, acted with the aim of punishing Beşikçi for his views. The long-term prison time of Beşikçi, who was arrested for the first time in 1971, began like that. In the period from 1971, when he first entered the prison, to 1999, when he was released from prison for the last time, he was in prison for a total of 17 years and 2 months for his work criticizing the official Turkish Thesis of History of the state, for example, books such as *The Forced Relocation of the Kurds*, *A Letter to UNESCO*, and *Kurdistan, an Interstate Colony*, and the written and oral defenses he delivered to the courts.<sup>16</sup>

From the 1970s to the 1990s, when İsmail Beşikçi was in prisons, that is, until the Kurdish struggle for rights be strengthened, the Kurdish concept could not make its way to the Turkish universities and no examples such as Beşikçi emerged. As

<sup>15</sup> Malmisanij (2011) *Where did you get these Kurds, İsmail Beşikçi?* Vate Yaynevi, s. 31.

<sup>16</sup> İsmail Beşikçi in our interview time in prison 17 years and 2 months (interview with İsmail Beşikçi, 23 August 2020).

shown below, Kurdish Studies in Turkey were under severe pressure until the 1990s and even especially in the 2000s, and working in this field resulted in unemployment, being reported, administrative investigations, dismissal and imprisonment.

Ismail Beşikci did not go to prison after his last release from prison in 1999, despite many lawsuits against him for his ideas and writings. He associates this with the removal of articles TCK 141 and 142.<sup>17</sup> As shown below, it is possible to observe the positive effects of international conventions signed in the 2000s on the strengthening of Kurdish Studies and freedom of expression in Turkey in general, especially in the period up to 2016, with both the struggle for rights of the Kurds rising in the 90s and the laws revised by Turkey within the framework of the harmonisation with the EU.

## 2.2. Entry of Kurdish Studies into Turkish Universities in the 1990s and Partial Rise in the 2000s

Until the 1990s, it was very difficult to carry out academic studies using the word “Kurd” in universities in Turkey due to the conditions mentioned above. For many years, Kurdish Studies were conducted by independent researchers under intense pressure in areas outside the university. Due to armed conflicts between the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) and the State of the Republic of Turkey in the 1990s, the Kurds were Turkey’s primary agenda. In the 1990s, due to the great influence of the Kurdish struggle for rights, the ban on Kurdish publications was lifted by the state, and after this ban was lifted, Kurdish intellectuals and journalists began publishing many Kurdish magazines, newspapers and books, as they did between 1960 and 1980.

Social, political, and legal developments in the 1990s affected Turkish universities, even to a limited extent. Especially in the 2000s, the field of Kurdish Studies emerged under different disciplines such as sociology, history, and political science. Both the political and social mobilization of the Kurds and Turkey’s policies in the EU accession process had a positive effect on the opening of a certain area for Kurdish Studies in Turkish universities, albeit limited. In 2001, for example, in parallel with the EU harmonisation process, the 13<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> amendments to the 1982 Constitution significantly suppressed freedom of expression. A partial revision of the articles was carried out.<sup>18</sup> In the 2000s, the Kurdish Question became a subject that could no longer be ignored and denied in Turkish universities, and was intrigued by

<sup>17</sup> Malmisanij (2011) *Where did you get these Kurds, Ismail Beşikci?* Vate Yayinevi

<sup>18</sup> See: Sultan Çamak, Constitutional Court and European Court of Human Rights Limiting Freedom of Expression According to Their Decisions, Inonu University Faculty of Law Journal, Special Issue, Volume:2 Years: 2015

some academics and students.

It is possible to observe the entry of Kurdish Studies into Turkish universities from the CoHE's theses database.<sup>19</sup> According to the theses database provided by the CoHE, the first thesis with the word "Kurdish" in its title is an English thesis and was defended at a university in the USA. This master's thesis was defended by Adem Hakan Özoğlu in 1993 and delivered to the CoHE.<sup>20</sup> The original title of the thesis was "Kurdish National Discourse: The pkk and the Seyh Said Revolt". The Turkish translation of the name of the thesis was not included in the database, and although "PKK" was written in capital letters in the original thesis, "pkk" was recorded in small letters in the CoHE's database. This master's thesis is also the first one in the CoHE's database with the word PKK in it. The university where the thesis was delivered was recorded as "The Ohio State University/Overseas Institute". According to the CoHE's database, in the 1990s, the number of theses with the word Kurd-Kurdish in the title was 9.

#### First Theses with the Word "Kurdish" in the CoHE Database-1990s<sup>21</sup>

Thesis Author	Year	Thesis Title	Program and University
ADEM HAKAN ÖZOĞLU	1993	Kurdish national discourse: The PKK and the Seyh Said Revolt [Gotara neteweyî ya kurdan: PKK û Serhildana Şêx Seid]	M.S. - Ohio State University
COURTNEY ÖYMEN (LUKITSCH)	1994	The PKK and the 'Kurdish Question' as factors in Turkish-German relations 1984-1994 [PKK ü 'Pirsa Kurd' wekî faktorên di nav têkiliyên tirk-alman de]	M.S.- Ihsan Doğramacı Bilkent University
GÜZİDE YÜLEK	1994	Kurds in northern Iraq and United Nations Security Council's resolutions	M.S. - Istanbul University
OYA GİRİT	1994	Kurdish movement during the Period of National Struggle	M.S.- Marmara University
FATİH ÜNAL	1995	The emergence of the Kurdish issue (Period of II. Constitutional Monarchy)	M.S.- Istanbul University

<sup>19</sup> All the theses written have not been transferred to the online database, but the CoHE database tezlere dair general course at a significant level Shows.

<sup>20</sup> CoHE is the authorized institution that gives diploma equivalence for thesis and diplomas defended from abroad. For this reason, those who want to obtain diploma equivalence are required to deliver their thesis to CoHE.

<sup>21</sup> All information in this table is as it is located at the base of the melt has been transferred.

EROL KURUBAŞ	1996	The International dimension of the Kurdish question in Turkey (1918-1960)	M.S.- Ankara University
MEHMET ERTÜRK	1996	Activities of Armenian-Kurdish terrorist organizations against Turkey	M.S.- Inonu University
SUNAY DELİLBAŞI	1998	Theories related to the ethnic origins of Kurds	M.S.- Marmara University
VELİ FATİH GÜVEN	1999	Kurdish movements in Turkey (1923-1995)	Ph.D.-Hacettepe University

The fact that the word Kurd was only able find its way into the titles of the theses in Turkish universities in the 1990s and the small number of theses written in the 1990s is another indication that the State of Turkey and university administrations are heavily violating freedom of expression and academic freedoms in the field of Kurdish Studies, and that it is suppressed to discuss such an important and vital issue within the university. Despite the violations, these theses show that there was a positive development in the field of Kurdish Studies in the 1990s, albeit very poorly.

Between 2000 and 2010, the number of theses with the word Kurdish in the CoHE's database increased to 43 and the number of theses in this field continued to increase in the following years. Therefore, the 2000s also mean the years of significant transformations in the field Kurdish Studies in terms of the history of the Republic of Turkey and the history of the university. As stated in the first chapter of the report, Turkey signed the Convention on Civil and Political Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2003, guaranteeing the protection of their academic freedom and the ability of academics, researchers and students to freely carry out their studies in autonomous higher education institutions and universities without political or any other pressure. Signing international conventions that guarantee freedom of expression and have an impact on the opening of space for Kurdish Studies was a result of the fact that the European Union granted Turkey the status of candidate for full membership December 1999, and that the AKP government, which came to power in 2002, implemented fundamental reforms related to human rights and civil-military relations in general.

Therefore, armed conflicts between the PKK and the state, the intensive mobilization of Kurds in the legal political field, EU harmonisation laws and international conventions to which the Republic of Turkey is a party are important factors affect-

ing Kurdish Studies. As this monitoring report shows, academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies have been heavily influenced by the general political conjuncture and the Kurdish policy of the state. Current policies of political power are the primary determinants of rights violations in the field of Kurdish Studies. Since these political developments directly affect rights violations in the field of Kurdish Studies and are the main determinants, it is important to address these developments in this report, albeit briefly.

Especially in the 2000s, the closure of political Islamist parties in the previous period by Kemalist institutions and the judiciary, which advocated the founding official ideology of the state, deeply influenced and transformed the policies and discourses of the AKP government. Thus, in the early 2000s, the AKP realized that human rights and democracy discourses were needed in its fight against Kemalists who shut down political Islamist parties.<sup>22</sup> In parallel with the seven EU harmonisation packages also supported by the CHP, the AKP government began implementing fundamental reforms that generally include human rights and civil-military relations. Since Kemalist ideology also has a project and perspective of westernisation and modernisation, the Kemalists tolerated the reforms implemented by the AKP with the discourse of integration into the EU.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, in the 2000s, when AKP power was on the rise and many changes were implemented in the EU harmonisation process, Kurdish Studies at Turkish universities also made progress.

In addition to the EU harmonisation process, and especially in parallel with the state's objectives of achieving a lasting non-conflict/ceasefire/peace during periods of cessation of armed conflict between the state and the PKK, and the state's aim of disarming and disestablishing the PKK through the dialogue process, which began in secret in 2008,<sup>24</sup> created hope in many environments between 2013 and 2015, and ended in July 2015, had a significant impact on reforms in Kurdish language and Kurdish higher education. Immediately after the remarkable success of the Democratic Society Party (DTP), which was supported by the Kurds in the local elections in March 2009, the AKP government enacted 'Kurdish Initiative' policies. In those elections, the DTP won municipalities in 8 provinces and 51 districts (Bianet, 30 March 2009). While the DTP significantly increased its voting power and legitimacy,

<sup>22</sup> See in this topic: Dagi, İ. D. (2006). The Justice and Development Party: Identity, Politics, and Discourse of Human Rights in the Search for Security and Legitimacy. In H. Yavuz (Ed.), *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Parti* (pp. 88-106). Salt Lake City: Utah University Press.

Doğan, E. (2005). The Historical and Discursive Roots of the Justice and Development Party's EU Stance. *Turkish Studies*, 6 (3), 421-437.

<sup>23</sup> Somer, M. & Liaras, E. G. (2010). Turkey's New Kurdish Opening: Religious Versus Secular Values. *Middle East Policy*, XVII(2), 152-165.

<sup>24</sup> Karasu, M. (2013, April 24). PKK announces for the first time... What happened in Oslo? <http://www.aksam.com.tr/siyaset/pkk-ilk-kez-acikladiosloda-what-happened/news-199057>

the AKP carried out many cultural reforms in 2009. Some of these reforms include the opening of a state-sponsored Kurdish TV channel (TRT6), reducing restrictions on the use of Kurdish in prisons, opening Kurdish language and literature departments<sup>25</sup> at some universities, and legalizing the ability to spread political propaganda in non-Turkish languages in 2010.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.2.1. First Kurdish Departments and Kurdish Theses in 2010s

Within the framework of the political developments mentioned above, since 2009, Kurdish Language, Literature and Culture departments and Living Languages institutes have been opened at Mardin Artuklu University, Muş Alparslan University, Bingöl University, Dicle University and Van Yüzüncü Yıl University. In addition, Zaza Language and Literature departments were opened at Bingöl University and Munzur University. The first Kurdish theses were again written in the post-2009 period, and the first Kurdish thesis was defended and officially accepted at Mardin Artuklu University in 2012.

#### First Thesis Written in Kurdish in THE CoHE Database<sup>27</sup>

Niviskara/ê Tezê	Sal	Sernavê Tezê	Bername û Zaningeh
RAMAZAN PERTEV	2012	Mîrsadu'l-Etfal [Shahrahê Kûdekan] Fehenga menzûm a Kurdî-Farîsî [Vekolin-Tekst] Mîrsadu'l-Etfal [Shahrahê Kûdekan] Kurdish-Persian manzum dictionary [Review-Text]	M.S. Mardin Artuklu University / Institute of Living Languages / Department of Kurdish Language and Culture
ZÛLKÛF ERGÛN	2012	Dî peydabûna edebiyata Kurdî ya li Cizîra Botan de karîgeriya bajarvaniyê The impact of urbanisation on the emergence of Kurdish literature in Cizîra Botan	M.S. Mardin Artuklu University / Institute of Living Languages / Department of Kurdish Language and Culture
EBUBEKÎR GÖREN	2013	Dî romanên Erebe Şemo'de fîklorê Kurdî Kurdish folklore in the novels of Kurdî Erebê Şemo	M.S. Mardin Artuklu University / Institute of Living Languages / Department of Kurdish Language and Culture

<sup>25</sup> Committee of Wise People, Southeast Report, (2013). [http://file.yeniturkiye.org/Files/Pdf/20130626195417\\_akil-insanlar-heyeti-guneydogu-raporu.pdf](http://file.yeniturkiye.org/Files/Pdf/20130626195417_akil-insanlar-heyeti-guneydogu-raporu.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Somer, M. & Liaras, E. G. (2010). Turkey's New Kurdish Opening: Religious Versus Secular Values. *Middle East Policy*, XVII(2), 152-165.

<sup>27</sup> All information in this table is in the CoHE database as it receives has been transferred.

RAMAZAN ÇEÇEN	2013	Di edebiyata kurdî de folklor û roman li dor texeyyulên berê rêçên îroyin Folklore and novels in Kurdish literature; today's traces around the imagines of the past	M.S. Mardin Artuklu University / Institute of Living Languages / Department of Kurdish Language and Culture
KENAN SUBAŞI	2014	Ji bo zarokan di fêrkirina Kurdî de rola mamikan: Vekolîn - senifandin The role of riddles in teaching Kurdish to children: Review - classification	M.S. Mardin Artuklu University / Institute of Living Languages / Department of Kurdish Language and Culture

Starting in 2009, Kurdish departments were opened in major Kurdish cities, opening the way for Kurdish language education and academic publications. Prior to 2009, academics were forbidden to teach Kurdish in lessons, but this ban was lifted with the opening of Kurdish education departments. Albeit limited to the fields of literature and language, the introduction of Kurdish into some universities as a higher education language and the start of writing theses in Kurdish are very important for Turkish university history, academic freedoms and Kurdish Studies. On the other hand, as shown below, the start of Kurdish higher education and the conduct of Kurdish Studies in universities does not mean that academics working in this field are not subjected to pressure in their classes of publications in Kurdish, Turkish or English.

### 3. RESTRICTION ON FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE FIELD OF KURDISH STUDIES: EITHER CENSORSHIP AND SELF-CENSORSHIP OR PUNISHMENT

According to UNESCO's 1997 *Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff*:

Higher-education teaching personnel are entitled to the maintaining of academic freedom, that is to say, the right, without constriction by prescribed doctrine, to freedom of teaching and discussion, freedom in carrying out research and disseminating and publishing the results thereof, freedom to express freely their opinion about the institution or system in which they work, freedom from institutional censorship and freedom to participate in professional or representative academic bodies. All higher-education teaching personnel should have the right to fulfil their functions without discrimination of any kind and without fear of repression by the state or any other source. Higher-education teaching personnel can effectively do justice to this principle if the environment in which they operate is conducive, which requires a democratic atmosphere; hence the challenge for all of developing a democratic society.<sup>28</sup>

As this decision shows, according to internationally recommended higher education standards, academic staff have the right to maintain their academic freedom, and academics should have the right to act without fear of pressure from the state or any other source while maintaining

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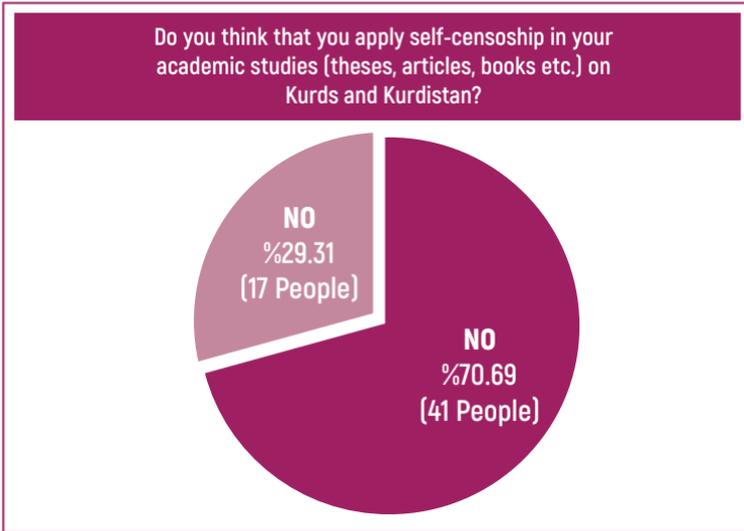
<sup>28</sup> UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff <http://80.251.40.59/politics.ankara.edu.tr/altipar/Yayinlar/Yuksekk%20Ogretim%20Tavsiye.pdf>

their academic freedom. For this, a democratic working environment is required. Therefore, being able to conduct academic studies freely in a democratic environment without pressure is the most fundamental rights of academics. With these criteria, when we look at the experience of academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies in Turkish universities, it is seen that the political power and university administrations in Turkey are far from meeting these standards. While there are exceptions, public and university administrations in Turkey have tried to control and intimidate academics working in this field in different political conjunctures in different ways throughout the history of the Republic. Academics tried to carry out their studies in this oppressive environment or were expelled from the university.

According to the interviews we conducted in this report, academics' rights of academic freedom and freedom of expression have been significantly violated by various policies of intimidation. This oppression takes place primarily as censorship and self-censorship. Both according to the interviews and the survey, censorship and self-censorship are the two most important themes in terms of freedom of expression and academic freedoms in the field of Kurdish Studies at Turkish Universities. Although Kurdish Studies began to be accepted in Turkish universities since the 1990s and Kurdish departments began to open since 2009, censorship and self-censorship continued in theses and academic publications. Some interviewees stated that thesis advisors advise them not to use some concepts in the title of their thesis and, if possible, in the thesis, for different reasons, or that they self-censor with different reservations about certain issues.

According to the interviewees, self-censorship is an individual practice carried out by teachers or thesis-writing students with their personal intuition, while censorship is especially demanded by thesis advisors. Censorship and self-censorship predominantly show itself in the concepts selected in historical, geographical, cultural, linguistic, etc. issues related to the Kurds. In addition, this censorship and self-censorship are evident in the criticism of the policies implemented by the State in Kurdistan and in the analysis of the conflict with the PKK. Most academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies are trying to weigh or predict which ideas and concepts will cross the red lines of the state and therefore can be punished, and which ideas and concepts are "reasonable" and "acceptable" when conducting their academic studies or sharing their ideas with their students in courses.

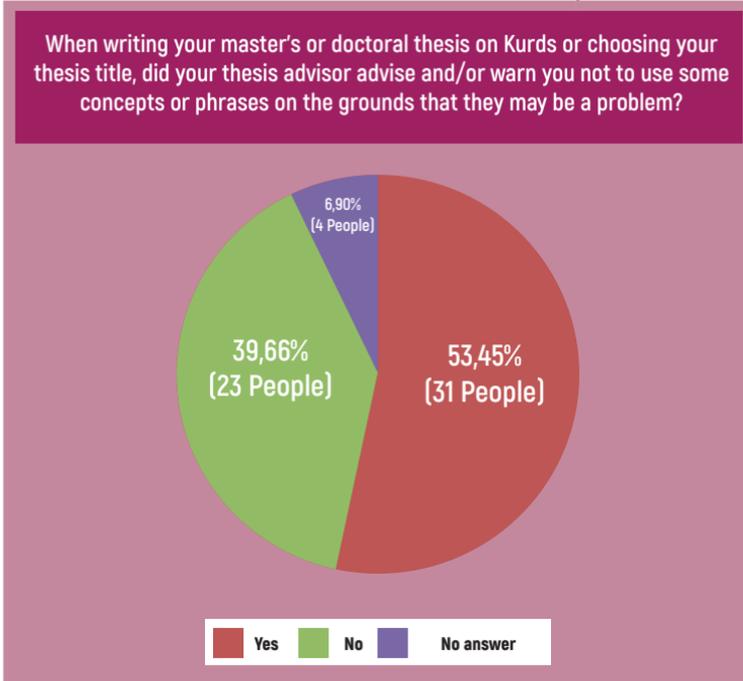
In our survey, we asked the academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies whether they were self-censoring both in their theses, books and academic articles on Kurdish and Kurdistan, as well as in their courses in general. Both questions were answered by 58 respondents.



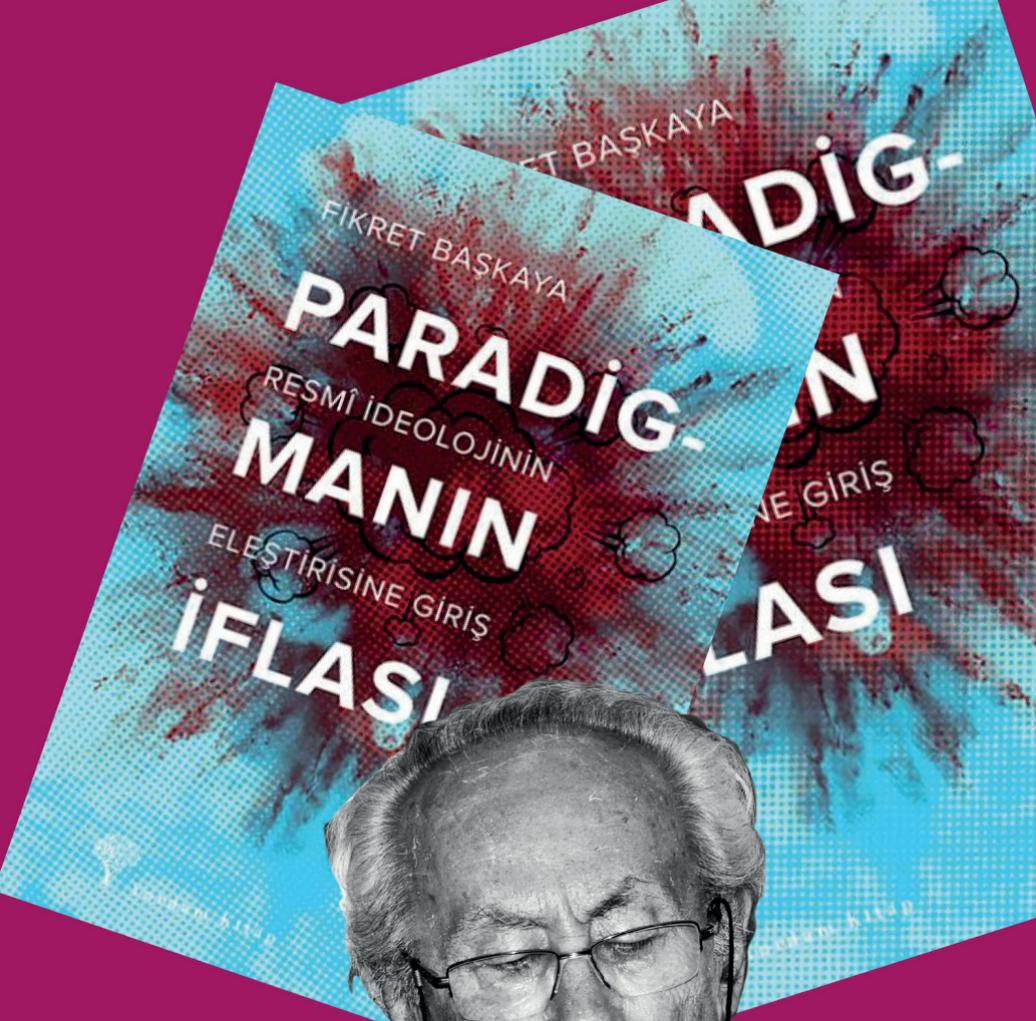
As can be seen in the table, the fact that 41 people out of 58 people have stated that they applied self-censorship in their academic publications shows that self-censorship is one of the main problems that arise in the field of Kurdish Studies regarding academic freedom and freedom of expression. In the following chapters, it is shown that in which subjects and themes censorship and self-censorship are applied intensively. Also, in addition to publications, we aimed to reveal the extent of self-censorship in the courses through the survey, and asked the participants the following question:



As seen above, 37 people out of 58 answered Yes to this question. The prevalence of self-censorship seen in these answers is striking. Immediately after these two questions about censorship and self-censorship, we asked the participants a question about whether they requested censorship on the grounds that thesis consultants could “make trouble” for their thesis. This question was answered by 54 people from 58 participants.



As can be seen here, 53.45% of the respondents in parallel with the interviewees said that the thesis advisor intervened in the concepts in his thesis through advice or warning on the grounds that they could be a problem. The fact that 31 people from 58 people answered “Yes” to this question also shows that a significant number of the theses written are completed and defended in an atmosphere of reservations and anxiety. This atmosphere of anxiety also reveals that the pressure of political power and university administrations on academic staff is intense. As can be seen in the excerpts to be made from the interviews below, the issue of censorship and self-censorship in Kurdish Studies is not only unique to the post-SOE period, but also a general problem that is immanent to all periods.



### 3.1. Two Concepts That Remain Banned for Many Years: “Kurd” and “Kurdistan”

The use of the concept of “Kurd”, which the official ideology of the state denied and forbid for many years, by independent researchers or academics working at the university, stopped being considered a punishable crime only in the 1990s. Therefore, as can be seen in İsmail Beşikçi’s experience, until the 1990s, the concept of Kurds came before us as a concept that was subjected to censorship and self-censorship in universities and was blocked and suppressed violating the freedom of expression. On the other hand, even though the concept of Kurds entered universities, the punishment of academics who crossed the red lines of the state by criticizing the official Turkish Thesis of History and the official ideology continued in the 1990s, as can be seen from Fikret Başkaya’s experience. Fikret Basya was expelled from the Department of Economics of Abant İzzet Baysal University for his 1991 book *The Collapse of the Paradigm, An Introduction to The Critique of Official Ideology*, in which he criticized Kemalism, the official ideology and the state’s Kurdish policy, and was sued 15 days after his book was published. In 1993, after a lengthy trial, Başkaya was given a 20-month prison sentence and also a fine. He was in Ulucanlar and Haymana prisons for 15 months due to this book (interview with Fikret Basya, September 1, 2020).

It was revealed during the interviews that the concept of Kurds, which is no longer a taboo word that is undesirable to be used in Turkish universities today, is still subjected to censor within the framework of official ideology in universities and departments where Turkish nationalist academics prevail. For example, in 2009, an interviewee defending his master’s thesis expressed how a Turkish nationalist juror reacted to the concept of Kurds he used in his thesis by saying:

Of course, based on the annuals, archive documents, sources of that period, I wrote about the elements living in the region based on Kemal Karpat’s book *Ottoman Population*. That many Kurds, that many Armenians, that many Ezidis. A teacher said, “What Kurd? You can’t write Kurd!” And I said, “What am I supposed to write?” He said, “You have to write Turk.” I said, “So should I falsify the document? He said, “I’m a juror now, you can’t answer against me. Whatever is necessary will be written!” “I said okay, should I falsify the document?” He said, “Whatever the dominant element is, it will be written.” I said, “Okay, the dominant element may be Turks, but there are different ethnic and religious groups living there. I am writing these from the annuals, the government’s official records. Why is that so hard to accept?” Honestly, he was so provocative, and I got angry. The other two teachers tried to appease me.

The incident took place in 2009 at a public university and with the thesis jury on a history thesis. Therefore, even in 2009, it is seen that the concept of Kurds was tried to be censored at the university and the concept of Kurds could not be tolerated even in a history thesis. Here, it is a thesis juror demanding censorship. The thesis advisor protects his student against the juror who makes such a request and the interviewee defends his thesis without making any changes.

The concept of “Kurdistan”, unlike concept of Kurds, was heavily oppressed, banned, regarded as evidence of a crime and subjected to censorship and self-censorship in Turkish universities until 2009. Censorship and self-censorship of the concept of “Kurdistan”, as clearly revealed in the CoHE’s database, continued intensively until 2009. The most important feature of 2009 is the implementation of the AKP government’s policies for the state to take some democratic steps in Kurdish policies, also called the “Democratic Opening Process”. It also means a period in which the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq became more effective and had many political and economic relations with Turkey. The concept of Kurdistan, which is in the phrase of the Kurdistan Regional Government, has significantly shaken the taboo position of the concept of Kurdistan.

The first theses with the concept of Kurdistan in the title are as follows. The thesis titles and translations in the table were quoted as in the CoHE’s database.

First Theses with the Word “Kurdistan” in the Title in the CoHE’s Database<sup>29</sup>

Thesis Author	Year	Thesis Subject	Program and University
ZUHAL AY HAMDAN	2019	The governmental policies and military methods against the Workers Party of Kurdistan (PKK) in the 1990s	M.S.- Middle East Technical University
BAŞAK DENİZ ÖZDEMİR	2012	Transformation process of Northern Iraq to Kurdistan regional government after the Gulf War	M.S. - Yeditepe University
MİNHCAN ÇELİK	2012	Turning enemies into friends: The change in Turkey’s relations with Kurdistan Regional Government between 2007-2011	M.S. - Fatih University
İBRAHİM SADEDDİN BİRGEĞÖLÜ	2013	Sovereignty and identity in the modern Middle East: The pursuit of a sovereign ‘Kurdistan’ in Iraq and Turkey (No Turkish translation provided.)	LM.S.-University of London- London School of Economics-Foreign Institute
HAYAM NORİ AWAD	2015	Isolation and identification of pathogenic bacteria from drinking and used water samples in the city of Duhok, Kurdistan Region-Iraq	M.S.- Kahramanmaraş Sütçü İmam University
UĞUR BAYRAKTAR	2015	Yurtluk-Ocaklıks: Land, politics of notables and society in Ottoman Kurdistan, 1820-1890	Ph.D.- Boğaziçi University

According to the CoHE’s database, there are a total of 42 theses with the word “Kurdistan” in the title.<sup>30</sup> As can be seen in the table above, all the theses with the word “Kurdistan” in the title consist of the theses written on the Kurdistan Regional Government of Iraq or the Kurdistan region of the Ottoman period. It is possible to say that the AKP government’s approach to romanticise the Ottoman period and the political and economic relations between the Kurdistan Regional Government and Turkey had an indirect positive effect on taboos in Turkish universities and the state’s denialist stance restricting freedom of expression for the word Kurdistan.

Prior to 2009, the word Kurdistan was heavily censored and self-censorship because it was a banned word in universities. Regarding the pre-2009 period, one of the interviewees expressed his experiences with the following words after he shared with his thesis advisor the thesis proposal, which was called Kurdistan in 2007. This interviewer, who started working as an academic in 2011, is expelled from his position as a doctor lecturer in the 2016-2018 SOE period. He believes the reason for his expulsion was due to the university rector’s open objection to his policies at

<sup>29</sup> All information in this table is as it is located at the base of ri has been transferred.

<sup>30</sup> Data on April 1, 2020.

university meetings and his critical views, which he generally expressed within the university. In 2007, after using the word “Kurdistan” in his doctoral thesis proposal presented at the university, the interviewer expressed the dialogues between him and his thesis advisor as follows:

I wrote a thesis[...] and took it to [my thesis advisor], we read it together. He looked; his eyes almost fall on the table. He looked and said “What the hell is this?”, I said “A thesis proposal”, He answered “What kind of thesis proposal is this?!” I said “I just wrote it”, and he said, “What does it say here?” It was draft an in on third of every sentence starting with “[...] This thesis is aims to reveal the violent policy of destruction in Kurdistan” there were words like Kurdistan, destruction, violence, and reconstruction. He looked at it and said: “You wrote it like this but if we accept it as it is, they would shut down the institute.” I said, “Yes, if they will shut it, let them shut” [...] He looked at me and said, “I’ll kill you! You want to get us in trouble? And at what cost? I have a load of house credit, car credit. I swear I’ll kill you. Son, look, they’ll shut the institute and lock us all up.” I said, “So what the hell?” He said “Soften it up!” But I know one thing for sure, he [my thesis advisor] didn’t have a problem with the theses there, he knew it was true. After that, all ‘Kurdistan’s became ‘where the Kurds live’ [...] 2.5 hours later we entered the proposal jury. Luckily for me, he [my thesis advisor] stood beside me very firmly, [...] there was a teacher then, he was a very fatherly man. A historian. And also stood really firmly.

As this quote shows, in 2007, the word “Kurdistan” was censored by a thesis advisor who supported the discussion of this issue and could personally accept the use of this concept. Here, the reason for the thesis advisor’s request for censorship arises as the anxiety of dismissal, economic concerns, anxiety about going to prison and the closure of the institute. Today, due to such concerns, censorship or self-censorship practices are widely held in the field of Kurdish Studies carried out in Turkish universities. The most important factors hindering academic freedom and freedom of expression in universities have emerged as policies of punishment restricting freedom of expression imposed by the state for many years.

Although the concept of Kurdistan has been accepted by CoHE since 2009, publications and papers using this concept can be rejected by university administrations, editorial boards of academic journals or committees organizing conferences at different times. For example, an interviewee said that at a history conference in 2012 he had been asked to remove the word Kurdistan from the title of his declaration. The interviewee refuses it. After the argument, the interviewee withdraws his dec-

laration and decides no to attend the conference. Therefore, the prevention of the use of the concept of Kurdistan continues in different fields with different methods, although CoHE has accepted the use of this concept in its own system.

### 3.2 Some Topics and Concepts that are Suppressed Today:

It was expressed by interviewees that there were some concepts that emerged during the research and were not included in the CoHE database and could not be used by some academics in the field of Kurdish Studies although they wanted to use them. These concepts were found to be “Northern Kurdistan”, “colony” or “anti-colonial” in the context of Kurdish Studies.

Regarding the concept of colony, an interviewee who wrote his thesis in Kurdish shared an anecdote about the concept of “anti-colonial”, which was in the title of the thesis proposal:

[...] A doctor on this board came up with a suggestion: “Don’t get me wrong, I don’t mind at all, but don’t use anti-colonial.” I said, “Why?” “Now we, the three of us, three doctors, agree, but tomorrow and the day after tomorrow, two professors will attend your defence. We’re going to pick two of these from the outside, because we’re from the inside, but we’re going to pick the other one from the outside. One day your advisor might chance, someone else may come in, your counsellor may not agree to it, you have already written your thesis, the you have to you rewrite everything, you will have to take such a burden. That’s what we’d be upset about. I’m not going to say anything about content to but remove it from the title to avoid encountering this kind of problem. You are a writer, you will certainly make it a book soon enough, and when you do, you will write it again.” It made perfect sense to me. I faced such self-censorship. He didn’t say anything about the content, just a suggestion about the title. He said “Those who see this title will be afraid. They won’t understand that you’re working in language and literature.” I removed “anti-colonial” from the title.

Here, what is said is that the recommendation of removing the word “anti-colonial” was made with good intentions and for “protection”. It is very important that these concepts and the like, which can be easily used in the world’s academic literature and are not subject to any censorship or self-censorship, are censored and self-censored in Turkish universities. Another interviewee shared an opinion on the concept of Northern Kurdistan. This interviewee is one of the academics who was dismissed from his position with Decree-law in the post-2016 period. He explained the reason

for his dismissal as his dissenting views within the university.

Now let's say I write something in my thesis and naturally say *Bakurê Kurdistan*. That is, the North of Kurdistan. For example, if you say Kurdistan, it's something that's kind of acceptable now, but when you say Northern Kurdistan, it's still not something that's acceptable to many.

An academic stated that unfounded rumours about him being “a PKK supporter” were first circulated within the university during the SOE period and then he was forced to resign by the rector. He stated the following about the practice of censorship and self-censorship:

I'd like to point out on a lot of different things in the book, be I've applied a lot of censorship and self-censorship. For example, in that study, I could not convey what was reflected in the collective memory. The region has its own political memory, for example, the village has been evacuated, but unfortunately you cannot address the reasons for this. Unfortunately, and painfully enough, you have to call it a “period of terror”, but you still have to do it, because I really wanted that work to come out. Although I didn't use that phrase in the book, I used concepts like “certain events” and “conflicts in the region”.

Academics who want to discuss the PKK, which has been in armed conflict with the State for many years, face linguistic barriers first. The university, just like the government, expects academics to use the word “terror” and condemn terrorism when describing the organization. Therefore, the analysis of armed conflicts between the PKK and the state, the dimensions of the relationship between the PKK and the Kurds are other important themes that cannot be discussed freely in universities.

The text “We will not be party to this crime!”, which will be discussed below and resulted in the expulsion of dozens of academics from the university, is such a text. With this text, academics went beyond the limits drawn by the state on how to discuss and take a stance on the conflicts between the state and the PKK, and then a large part of them were severely punished. Therefore, in terms of Kurdish Studies in Turkish universities, “conflict analysis” and how the policies of the state in Kurdistan are discussed are one of the main issues.

### **3.3. Concepts in the declaration “We will not be party to this crime!” “Em ê nebin hevparên vî sûcî!” and Punishment of Signatory Academics**

According to 1997 UNESCO *Recommendation concerning the Status of High-*

## *er-Education Teaching Personnel*

[...] all higher-education teaching personnel should enjoy freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly and association as well as the right to liberty and security of the person and liberty of movement. They should not be hindered or impeded in exercising their civil rights as citizens, including the right to contribute to social change through freely expressing their opinion of state policies and of policies affecting higher education. They should not suffer any penalties simply because of the exercise of such rights. Higher-education teaching personnel should not be subject to arbitrary arrest or detention, nor to torture, nor to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment. In cases of gross violation of their rights, higher-education teaching personnel should have the right to appeal to the relevant national, regional or international bodies such as the agencies of the United Nations, and organizations representing higher-education teaching personnel should extend full support in such cases.

The maltreatment suffered by the signatory academics of the declaration “*We will not be party to this crime!*” “*Em ê nebin heparên vî sûcî!*”, which was published in Turkish and Kurdish, and openly expressed their views on the policies of the state, clearly violate most of the above principles. As shown below, academics have been subjected to many human rights violations expressed in this excerpt. As clearly written in this excerpt, academic staff should have the right to freely express opinions about decisions affecting the country’s politics and to contribute to social change in this way and should not be punished for that reason.

The repressive and punitive response of the political power against the declaration “*We will not be party to this crime!*”, which was shared with the public on January 11, 2016, six months before the announcement of the SOE regime, signed by 1128 academics and PhD students initially and 2212 academics<sup>31</sup> later, has significantly affected academics who have signed this text and carried out studies in the field of Kurdish Studies as much as academics working in many different areas. Both the academics we interviewed and the number of the survey respondents who signed that declaration and were subsequently expelled from the university were mentioned in the introduction to the report. As seen in the introduction, many academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies signed this declaration and were significantly impacted by the rights violations that began after the declaration.

“*We will not be party to this crime! Em ê nebin heparên vî sûcî!*” is important in terms of the history of Turkish-Kurdish relations and the impact of these relations

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<sup>31</sup> Including PhD students for academics.

on Turkish university history. For the first time in the history of the Turkish university, academics and PhD students from Turkish, Kurdish and other ethnic groups, from very different disciplines and academic positions signed a statement written in Turkish and Kurdish that openly and harshly criticized the state's policies towards Kurds.<sup>32</sup>

Signatories criticize the policies of the state during the ongoing armed conflicts in areas heavily resided by Kurds such as Sur, Silvan, Nusaybin, Cizre and Silopi, and invite the State to act in accordance with both its own domestic law and international law.

Immediately after this declaration was shared with the public, then-President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in a press release, considered the declaration a “betrayal” and a “support for terrorism”, and insulted the academics who signed it using adjectives such as “so-called intellectuals”, “self-proclaimed intellectuals”, “ignorant”, “dark” and “mandate supporters”.

Immediately after this speech, propaganda and attacks began against academics who signed the declaration, especially by the media and by many different circles. On the same day immediately after the President's speech, that is January 12, 2019, the General Assembly of CoHE held an emergency meeting on the subject and made a statement declaring that they had meeting with the rectors about the signatory academics and “will take the necessary action”:

The declaration, published by a group of academics describing our state's ongoing fight against terrorism in the Southeast as ‘massacre and slaughter’, has brought the entire academic community under suspicion. The profession and status of the person who supports terrorism does not provide concessions to the person in any democratic country, and his support for terrorism cannot be underestimated in any way. This declaration of support for terrorism cannot be reconciled with academic freedom. Ensuring the safety of our citizens is the fundamental duty of the state. The necessary action regarding this declaration will be taken in accordance with the law. We will meet with our Rectors and the Interuniversity Board to discuss this issue. (Sözcü, January 12, 2016).<sup>33</sup>

In parallel with this statement of CoHE, a great pressure and punishment policy started to be implemented by the university administrations against the signatory

<sup>32</sup> For more information about the content and discussions on the statement, see [https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar%C4%B1%C5%9F\\_%C4%B0%C3%A7in\\_Akademisyenler\\_bildirisi](https://tr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bar%C4%B1%C5%9F_%C4%B0%C3%A7in_Akademisyenler_bildirisi)

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.sozcu.com.tr/2016/gundem/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-suriye-kokenli-bir-canli-bomba-saldirisi-oldugu-degerlendirilen-teror-olayini-esefle-kiniyorum-3-1039871/>

academics. Several academics have been sued by the prosecutor's office for allegedly spreading "propaganda for a terrorist organization". Although not all signatories go through the same processes and there are many differences in their experience, signatory academics have been subjected to different rights violations such as imprisonment, detention, dismissal, disciplinary investigation, litigation, forcing for resignation, forcing to withdraw their signature, restriction to passports, and ban to travel abroad. What is done to academics by the state is completely contrary to UNESCO's *Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff*, which was cited at the beginning of this chapter.

This issue will not be discussed in depth, as several reports have been prepared on rights violations experienced by academics who signed the text "We will not be party to this crime!". The reports in the footnote can be studied for detailed information on the subject.<sup>34</sup> In addition, data on rights violations are regularly updated at <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/314> by Academics for Peace.

All of the rights violations expressed in this title are completely contrary to Article 19 of the Convention on Civil and Political Rights, of which Turkey is a party, and article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The punitive practices of the state, which blocks freedom of expression and academic freedom in this way, are also a very important message about what academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies in Turkey can say and cannot say in their academic studies and lessons.

It is not known how many people working in the field of Kurdish Studies signed this declaration. On the other hand, it was revealed both in the survey and during the in-depth interviews that academics working in this field had been subjected to many of the rights violations. For example, some of the signatory academics we interviewed were expelled, while some others were not. Nine of the interviewees

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<sup>34</sup> Some of these important reports are as follows:

- Brief History of Academics for Peace Case 11 January 2016-11 January 2019, ECHR Academy
- Academic Purge in Turkey Human Rights Violations, Losses, and Empowerment, Human Rights Foundation in Turkey, 2019 [https://tihvakademi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Academic\\_Purge\\_in\\_Turkey\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](https://tihvakademi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Academic_Purge_in_Turkey_Executive_Summary.pdf)
- Academic Exports, Rights Violations, Losses and Strengthening Processes, 2019 <https://tihvakademi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/akademisyenihraclariy.pdf>
- Academics for Peace Solidarity Group Report, 2019, <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/sites/default/files/Bakraportr041219.pdf>
- Extraordinary State of the University, A Review on the Destruction of the Academic Environment, Serdar Tekin, Human Rights Foundation of Turkey, 2019, <https://tihvakademi.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/universiteninolanustuhaliy.pdf>
- Academy of Sciences Academic Freedoms Report 2016-2017g <https://bilimakademisi.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/bilim-akademisi-akademik-ozgurlukler-raporu-2016-2017-agustos-9.pdf>

signed the declaration and 4 out of 9 were dismissed from their positions with the Decree-law, 1 resigned from their position and 1 person's contract was not extended. 3 of the signatory interviewees continue their job. Likewise, 17 academics out of 58 who were surveyed reported that they were dismissed from their positions with the Decree-law because they had signed the declaration.

One of the signatory academics we interviewed stated that since he did not know what he had been accused of, he created the possible criminal charges and then defended himself when he shared with us what he had written to the SOE Commission against the decision of his expulsion from the university. The interviewee had to defend himself without knowing what he was accused of, what actions and words were considered a crime. This situation illustrates the violations of rights against the general principles of law, especially the "presumption of innocence" and the "right to a fair trial", which are also protected by the ECHR.

I'll tell you the defence I wrote, maybe you'll understand better. There's no case, they're just dismissing you for connection with "terrorism." Since there was no case, I wrote my defence like this: You probably kicked me out because of this, here's my defence. A second reason could be this, so my second defence is this. A third one could be this. I created four or five possible "criminal allegations" like this. [...] First they ask you to imagine a crime, to think of a criminal element, then you defend yourself against it. Tragicomic.

Signatory academics working in the field of Kurdish Studies and academics working in other fields have experienced similar processes. Since numerous reports have already been published on this issue, the rights violations in the context of the declaration "We will not be party to this crime!" are not detailed separately.

### **3.4. Suppression of Discussions on Zaza, Kurdish and Zaza Language within the Zaza Language and Literature Departments**

The controversy over the Zazas began within the scope of denial and assimilation policies, and arguments were produced that the Zazas, who identified themselves as Kurds, were not Kurds. During this period, this old strategy was tried to be revived in academia.

A significant violation of academic freedom and freedom of expression that emerged during the interviews was concerning the departments of Zaza Language and Literature. Zaza Language and Literature departments exist at only two universities, Munzur University in Dersim and Bingöl University in Bingöl. On the other hand,

in other universities where there are Kurdish language and literature departments, the language/dialect known as Zaza in Turkish is taught as a separate course, also called Zazakî-Kirmanckî-Dimilkî-Kirdkî. It will be called Zaza in this report because the dialect or language called Zazakî-Kirmanckî-Dimilkî-Kirdkî is known as Zaza in Turkish.

During the interviews, Zaza emerged as an area where a lot of discussion was mad upon, unlike Kurdish-Kurmanji. For example, apart from the Kurdish alphabet developed by Celadet Ali Bedirxan, which is generally accepted among Kurdish writers and academics, different alphabets are used in Zaza and there is no standardization in the Zaza alphabet.

The academics we interviewed about Zaza departments expressed that there are many different approaches to Zaza alphabet. Three of these approaches stand out. One of them is the so-called “*Kurdish Alphabet*” or “*Bedirxan Alphabet*”, developed by Celadet Ali Bedirxan in the 1930s. This alphabet is used by publishing houses such as *Avesta*, *Nûbihar*, *Peywend* and *Rûpel*, especially the *Vate Working Group and Publishing House*, which has made significant contributions to the Zaza literature. The other alphabet is named as Jacobson/Ware Alphabet in relation to the spelling manual published by *Ware Magazine* and linguist C.M Jacobson in 1993, which was first used by journals such as *Ayre* (1985-87), *Piya* (1988-1992), and *Ware* (1992-2003), which was first published in the post-1980 period.<sup>35</sup> In addition to the Bedirxan and Jacobson/Ware alphabets used in Zaza writing, another alphabet that stands out in universities is the alphabet developed by Zülfü Sercan, a professor at Munzur University.

Mesut Keskin, who has an article on the subject of Zaza alphabet, stated that Bedirxan and Jacobson/Ware alphabets are the main divergence points in the Zaza alphabet. Because these two alphabets are used in different journal circles and publishing houses. Depending on the alphabet used, there are strong implication as to whether the Zazas are Kurds or Zaza is a separate language. Those who use the Jacobson/Ware alphabet, both in Keskin’s article and as the interviewees pointed out, regard Zaza as a separate language and the Zazas (or themselves) as a separate ethnicity, while those who use the Bedirxan alphabet describe Zaza, zazakî-Kirmanckî-Dimilkî-Kirdkî, as a dialect of Kurdish, and those who speak Zaza as Kurds, not as a separate ethnic group. Therefore, the alphabets used have political implications.

The above mentioned alphabets use the Jacobson/Ware alphabet in the Department of Zaza Language and Literature at Bingöl University, while the Alphabet

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<sup>35</sup> Mesut Keskin (2011), a Look at the Zazaca Alphabet Problem and a Solution Proposal, “I. International Zaza Symposium” Bingöl University Publications.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301356467\\_ZAZACADAKI\\_ALFABE\\_SORUNUNA\\_BIR\\_BAKIS\\_VE\\_COZUM\\_ONERISI](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/301356467_ZAZACADAKI_ALFABE_SORUNUNA_BIR_BAKIS_VE_COZUM_ONERISI)

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developed by Zulfü Selcan is used in the Department of Zaza Language and Literature at Munzur University. The use of two different alphabets in the Zaza language and literature departments that exist at only two universities clearly shows that standardization in the Zaza alphabet is not supported by university administrations and that inter-alphabet differences/divergences are deepened through universities. Criticizing these practices, some interviewees said the use of two separate alphabets in Dersim and Bingöl was due to the state's aim of deepening the separation between Sunnis living in Bingöl and Alevis living in Dersim. In addition, establishing Zaza language and literature departments shows that the state in itself considers the Zazas as an ethnicity separate from Kurdish and Zaza (Kirmanckî) as a completely separate language from Kurdish and wants to strengthen this perspective in universities. Therefore, when these departments were established, from the beginning, the state and university administrations determined a position in this highly politicized debate. The view that Zaza/Kirmanckî speakers are a separate ethnic group, and Zaza/Kirmanckî is a different language from Kurdish, is predominant in the Zaza Language and Literature Departments of Munzur University and Bingöl University, where two different alphabets are used.

The interviewees said that during the periods when repressive rectors were in office and the general political conjuncture allowed, different forms of pressure were put on academics who thought differently from the views mentioned above, for example, on academics who identified themselves and their mother-language as Kurdish, defined Zaza as Kurdish, and wanted to use the Bedirxan alphabet in their lectures and articles. The level of this pressure varies in different political conjunctures and rectoral periods. One interviewee said academics who held different views on Zaza-Kurdish issues than what could be officially defined as those supported by the state and the university were accused of "Kurdism" or "sympathiser of terrorism". The interviewee, who did not want to name his university, said a university administrator had explicitly said that someone who considers Zaza as a dialect of Kurdish would not be admitted to the Department of Zaza Language and Literature. The academics we interviewed stated that three academics were expelled from Bingöl University due to differences of opinion on these issues. On the other hand, these expulsions expressed in the interviews were not reflected in the media or in the case files.

In the media screening carried out within the framework of this report, it was reflected in some reports that these issues and discussions, which are deeply related to ethnicity studies and linguistics, were highly politicized and that the rectors were also a party in this discussion. For example, in 2015, students at Bingöl University went on hunger strike against police pressure, disciplinary penalties, and investigations against students. This hunger strike caused political controversy. Gıyasettin

Baydaş, the rector of Bingöl University, who criticized the hunger strike while the hunger strike was ongoing, said in a press release that Zazas are not Kurds. He said “In this process, someone is actually striving for the use of students here. Like if you see those yesterday’s statements. I agree with something there that I have made a statement that the Zazas are not Kurds. True. I have such a claim, and it’s my business.”<sup>36</sup> The “statements of yesterday” pointed out by the rector belonged to Selahattin Demirtaş, HDP’s co-chair of the time. During the hunger strike carried out by the students against the pressures at Bingöl University, Demirtaş makes a statement and says: “One comes from the Faculty of Science and writes ‘Zazas are not Kurds’. I am calling upon the rector of Bingöl University, hand laid on children will break. Bingöl University should be handled right away without causing any provocation”(Bingölonline, 3 March 2015).<sup>37</sup>

It was expressed by the academics interviewed that academics whose mother language is Zaza-Kirmanckî and who describe themselves as Kurdish, Zaza as a dialect of Kurdish, and who want to use the Bedirxan alphabet in their courses, were admitted to the Zaza departments, and if they had been admitted before, they were suspended from the departments or advised to follow the official view of the university in different ways. In addition, such practices restricting the freedom of expression of academic staff were reflected in the interviews. For example, some students shared with some of their teachers that they could not discuss the alphabet comfortably with some of their teachers, that they were forced to use the alphabets requested by the university administration, and that they could get low grades from some of their teachers or were considered unsuccessful in the course if they did not use the alphabet requested by the university administration in their exams or assignments.

### 3.5. Kurdish Thesis Ban and Discrimination Against Kurdish at Dicle University

During the study, it was revealed that one of the most important rights violations in Kurdish departments took place at Dicle University. Compared to the Kurdish Language and Literature/Culture departments in other universities, Dicle University conducts a repressive and assimilationist policy on Kurdish thesis writing.

In 2012, a department called “Kurdish Language and Literature” was opened under the Department of Eastern Languages and Literatures of the Faculty of Literature, but no students were admitted. The master’s program without thesis was opened in 2013 and the master’s and doctoral programs with thesis were

<sup>36</sup> <https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2inh5a>

<sup>37</sup> <https://www.bingolonline.com/haber/ogrencilere-kalkan-eller-kirilir-51002.html>

opened in 2015.<sup>38</sup> Although a PhD program has been opened in this department at the university, there is no academic employment in this branch. Almost all of the faculty members who taught in this department came from the Faculty of Theology. Although these three programs have been founded, only master's and doctoral programs are active in the department. Therefore, while no students are admitted to the undergraduate department and the students in the department consist of master's and doctoral students. Dicle University has a very important position in terms of Kurdish Studies due to its PhD program in Kurdish. There are only two PhD programs in Kurdish (Kurmanji) at Turkish universities, including the PhD program jointly implemented by Muş Alparslan University and Bingöl University, and the PhD program at Dicle University. Although there are enough academic staff to provide doctoral education at Mardin Artuklu University and despite the fact that academic staff and graduate students request the opening of a doctoral program, a PhD program in this field is not opened at Artuklu University.

The most important violation of rights, which is not in other universities and emerged in the Department of Kurdish Language and Culture at Dicle University, is that Kurdish master's thesis and doctoral thesis writing are not allowed in the department and Kurdish thesis writing was banned by the rectorate in 2017. The interviewees stated that all written and oral exams were conducted in Kurdish in the master's and doctoral programs in the Department of Kurdish Language and Culture at Dicle University, that the teachers and students spoke Kurdish to each other during the classes, that even the doctoral proficiency exam was conducted in Kurdish, but that Kurdish thesis writing was banned and persistently prevented. Therefore, students who carry out all courses and exams in Kurdish during their education in the same department are obliged to write their thesis in Turkish. In addition, PhD students who can write their master's thesis in Kurdish at other universities have to write their doctoral thesis in Turkish at Dicle University. In fact, this situation means an academic decline and pressure on academic freedoms both for the departments and academics and for students.

In the official regulation, it is stated that the language of teaching in Kurdish Language and Literature/Culture departments is generally Turkish. On the other hand, at the time of the drafting of this report, departments at other universities besides Dicle University allowed the writing of master's thesis and doctoral thesis in Kurdish, and CoHE accepted the thesis written in Kurdish and Kirmanckî/Zaza. Therefore, even if the teaching language of these courses is named as Turkish in official legislation, CoHE approves the thesis written in Kurdish and students can obtain their master's and doctoral diplomas after the thesis written in Kurdish. Therefore, there is no Kurdish thesis ban in terms of CoHE and universities in other universities except Dicle University.

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.dicle.edu.tr/tr/duyuru/dicle-universitesinden-kamuoyu-aciklamasi>

Dicle University implemented the Kurdish thesis writing ban in 2017 by indirectly making a change in the thesis writing legislation. Between 2015 and 2020, two different regulations on *Dicle University Graduate Education and Examination Regulations* were published in the Official Gazette. The first one is the regulation published in the Gazette no. 29431 on July 31, 2015. In this regulation, in the Paragraph 7 of the Article 21 under the title *Chapter Five PhD Program*, the following statement is mentioned about the thesis writing language: “Students who study in programs whose teaching language is Turkish must defend their thesis in Turkish. Students can write their thesis in a language other than Turkish.”<sup>39</sup> Therefore, the regulation published in 2015, the year of the opening of the master’s and doctoral program with thesis in the department, allowed graduate and doctoral students to write thesis in a language they wanted. In parallel with this regulation published in 2015, when the CoHE database<sup>40</sup> is examined, it is seen that in 2017, Halil İçen’s thesis written in Kurdish from beginning to end with the title “Di Nav Çanda Kurdi de Çirokêk Sîndrella” (A Cinderella Story in Kurdish Culture) was added to the CoHE thesis database. On the other hand, the language of this thesis, which is Kurdish, is stated in the database as “Turkish”. This thesis, whose language is called Turkish and English only, but whose content was written in Kurdish from the beginning, was defended at Dicle University and accepted by CoHE on January 13, 2017.

A few months after Halil İçen defended his Kurdish thesis, a second regulation titled “Dicle University Graduate Education and Examination Regulations” was published in the Official Gazette on June 4, 2017, during the SOE period. In this regulation, the article on thesis writing was completely changed. This article appears as the article used by the university administration in the process of preventing Kurdish thesis writing. The below article was written in the Paragraph 18 of the Article 23 under the heading “General Principles on Education and Training”:

The writing language of the thesis is the teaching language of the program it follows. However, if the advisor and the competent boards of the institute approve, the thesis can be written in a foreign language. In that case, the thesis advisor must have provided the requirements sought within the scope of the Regulation on the Principles to Be Followed in Foreign Language Teaching, and Foreign Language Teaching in Higher Education Institutions, and should be deemed appropriate by the authorized boards of the institute. It is mandatory to defend the thesis in the language in which it is written. In addition, the jurors who will take part in the thesis defence exam must be determined in accordance with the provisions of the

39 <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2015/07/20150731-2.htm>

40 <https://tez.yok.gov.tr/UlusalTezMerkezi/>

regulations mentioned in this paragraph.<sup>41</sup>

As can be seen in the citation, this article leaves the thesis language to the will of the academic staff who are the thesis advisors and the will of the institute. In accordance with this article, thesis advisors are required to request permission from the Institute Directorate within the university in order for students to write their thesis in Kurdish. On the other hand, when students and their advisors make such a request, they are rejected by the institute to write thesis in Kurdish based on this article of the regulation, citing that Kurdish is not the language of education and it does not bear the status of a foreign language. The interviewees stated that this article was not implemented in departments such as Arabic Language and Literature, English Language and Literature, but was implemented only in the process of preventing Kurdish thesis writing.

As revealed by the above regulation differences and obstructions in practice, although CoHE recognizes Kurdish theses and thesis written in Kurdish at other universities can be awarded master's and doctoral diplomas, the Rector's Office of Dicle University has banned the writing of Kurdish thesis arbitrarily without any legal grounds. As the interviewees said, students of Dicle University and some academic staff had repeatedly reported this problem to the university rectorate and departmental head offices and demanded that the practice be changed, but at the time of drafting the report, Dicle University's practices that suppressed Kurdish continued.

During the writing of this report, the Kurdish thesis ban at Dicle University in the last days of July 2020 became a topic on social media and in the media.<sup>42</sup> Following that news, the Rector's Office of Dicle University issued a press release aiming to cover the differences in implementation and regulations, which did not address the differences in these regulations, and made the following statements:

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<sup>41</sup> <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2017/06/20170604-14.htm>

<sup>42</sup> Selim Temo: For 10 years, I've been deciphering this incompetence approach to Kurdish. Here is the new infidelity: In the Kurdish Language and Literature departments in universities, the writing of thesis in Kurdish language was banned and the language of all courses was Turkish. This is what a domestic and national academy is like!

<https://twitter.com/temoselim/status/1288826066962984962>

After this twitter post by Selim Temo, the issue was reported in the media and the following news about the issue was reported in the press.

Kürt Dili In The Department Kurdish Thesis Forbidden (New Life, July 30th, 2020) <https://yeniyasamgazetes1.com/kurt-dili-bolumunde-kurtce-tez-yasak/>

Kurdish Thesis Ban on Kurdish Language and Literature Students (Wall, 30 July, 2020) <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/gundem/2020/07/30/kurt-dili-ve-edebiyati-ogrencilerine-kurtce-tez-yasagi/>

Dicle University bans Kurdish thesis writing (Rudaw, 31 July 2020)

<https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/kurdistan/310720201>

In recent days, it has been observed that a number of posts claiming that “Kurdish thesis writing is prohibited” in our university in social media have been circulated and the public has tried to be misguided through false and misleading information. Therefore, it was necessary to inform the public by sharing the correct information about the subject. The Kurdish Language and Culture program was opened at the undergraduate level in 2012. In the same field, our Master’s Program without Thesis was opened in 2013 and our Master’s and Doctoral Programs with Thesis were opened in 2015. The language of teaching of these programs is Turkish. Similarly, Turkish is the language of teaching in all departments of philology such as English Language, Arabic Language and Persian language in our university. To date, 86 students have graduated from our Master’s program without Thesis in Kurdish Language and Culture, 10 students from our Master’s program with Thesis and 6 students from our PhD program. Since the day it became operational, no status changes and language changes have been made in these programs.<sup>43</sup>

As can be seen in this excerpt, Dicle University states in this statement that the language of the Kurdish Language and Culture program is “already” Turkish, that there is no new amendment in this field, that the public is misled by creating a perception that there is a new prohibition practice, and therefore the ban is a very old practice. In this statement, although it is stated in the legislation that the language of teaching in these departments is Turkish, as mentioned above, the language of teaching in the department takes place in Kurdish from the beginning. In addition, in 2017, a Kurdish thesis was defended at Dicle University, CoHE approved this thesis, and in June 2017, the Rector’s Office of Dicle University carried out a regulation amendment preventing Kurdish thesis writing, as shown above.

In the department, the language of teaching is practically Kurdish from beginning to end, while the thesis writing language is Turkish. Both courses and exams take place in Kurdish. However, it is forbidden to write theses in Kurdish. In addition, in the departments of Arabic Language and Literature and English Language and Literature students can write thesis in any language. In this example of academic rights violations carried out by the Rector’s Office of Dicle University, it is noteworthy that there are differences in the practices and regulations of universities. While the legislation on the language of teaching is the same for all universities, students in Kurdish language departments at other universities can write thesis in Kurdish and CoHE approves these thesis, the Rector’s Office of Dicle

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43 Dicle Üniversitesi’nden Public Statement (2 August 2020) <http://www.dicle.edu.tr/tr/duyuru/dicle-uiversitesinden-kamuoyu-aciklamasi>

University has banned Kurdish thesis writing with a new regulation and has taken an approach of denial and assimilation to the Kurdish language.

#### **4. A HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE IN KURDISH STUDIES: MARDIN ARTUKLU UNIVERSITY AND ACADEMIC RIGHTS VIOLATIONS**

The opening and operation of Kurdish departments in some universities in 2009 is a very important development in the history of the Turkish university, which has been operating for years through the denial of Kurds, Kurdistan and Kurdish, as expressed in the previous chapters. It can be said that the opening of Kurdish education departments in universities is a great “revolution” for Kurdish Studies. On the other hand, when we look at this issue from outside the Turkish academy, it should be mentioned that this development lags far behind the rights and freedoms demanded by the Kurds, especially the demand for education in the mother tongue. Students who are deprived of education in the mother tongue until university, who receive education in Turkish and who are educated in these departments with very limited number of students that are mostly Kurds, receive Kurdish education in the category of foreign languages such as German, Italian, Latin and under the name of “Living Languages”. In addition, although in most Kurdish departments the language of education is Kurdish in practice, the language of education is officially Turkish. This deprives the de facto situation of legal security and causes arbitrary interventions and pressures.

Mardin Artuklu University is the first university that opened in the field of Kurdish higher education. For the first time, Kurdish higher education was started in practice within the Institute of Living Languages established at this university. In addition to this, Mardin Artuklu University (MAU) has significance in the field of Kurdish Studies conducted

in Turkish universities in terms of university autonomy and current political conjuncture on academics, as revealed both in the interviews within the framework of this study and in media screening, in terms of showing partial “liberating” or quite “repressive” roles played by the state, CoHE and rectors.

Founded in Mardin in 2007, during the AKP rule, MAU is a university where academic freedoms and university autonomy were partially achieved between 2009 and 2014. However, this partially free and autonomous university structure was eliminated in 2014 under intense pressure from Mardin’s local forces, CoHE and state power. The pressure that MAU was subjected to in 2014, when the dialogue process between the PKK and the State continued, i.e. from the 2016-2018 SOE period and the publication of the text “We will not be party to this crime!”, is a historical example of showing academic rights violations in the field of Kurdish Studies.

Founded in 2007, MAU was founded as a university aimed at implementing these discourses of power at a time when the AKP government circulated the rhetoric of “Brotherhood of Islam” between Turks and Kurds in order to disarm the PKK, as well as “multiculturalism” and “multi-faith” discourses on the axis of policies in line with the demands of the European Union. Unlike other Kurdish cities, the presence of non-Turkish ethnic groups such as Arab, Kurdish, Assyria, Armenian and Ezidi in Mardin, gives it a more specific role.

Due to the original mission attributed to MAU, the establishment of a university suitable for the multicultural structure of Mardin in the early years of the university was constantly emphasized by both the media and the university administration, and it was expressed by the university administration that MAU was aimed at being the largest university in the Middle East. (Cumhuriyet, June 10, 2009). The most important feature that distinguishes the MAU from other universities where Kurdish Studies are carried out and where there are Kurdish departments is that the first rector, Serdar Bedii Omay, was tried to be overthrown by the conservative local dynamics of Mardin that are pro-government, some Mardin shopkeepers, associations and local broadcasters - through reports and accusations by some groups within the university and CoHE. Many conservative institutions in Mardin were highly disturbed by the university’s partially autonomous and libertarian policies compared to many other universities and started a public campaign against university administration. Following these campaigns, reports, and tensions between the rector’s office and CoHE, the first rector was dismissed in 2014 before the dialogue process ended and Ahmet Ağırakça, the dean of the Faculty of Theology was assigned by CoHE to replace the first rector, and he started implementing a despotic and repressive management approach as soon as he took the office.



Mardin  
STOKLY  
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#### 4.1. The Period of the First Rector Serdar Bedii Omay: Partial Autonomy at the University

The academics we interviewed called the term of the first Rector Serdar Bedii Omay (2007-2014) at MAU a free and autonomous period compared to other universities in Kurdish cities and the periods of subsequent rectors in terms of freedom of expression in the field of Kurdish Studies and the carrying out of academic activities such as publications, panels and seminars. Serdar Bedii Omay, the first rector at the time of the AKP government's "democratic opening" policies, which it called the "solution process", expressed the "multiculturalism" project aimed by the state in Mardin as follows:

We have prepared a very nice architectural project for the campus. It will be in accordance with the historical structure of Mardin. In accordance with Mardin's multilingual and multi-religious structure, the campus will have a mosque, an Assyrian chapel (church) and a small Yazidi temple. In some parts of Midyat district, our Yazidi citizens live. In history, Mardin is the largest university centre in Upper Mesopotamia. It is a city of 13 madrassas in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. This tradition of science will be revived on this campus[...]

I believe that we will contribute to the peace of this country with the work we will do by bringing together the languages, religions and cultures that originate from the genes of this land and have lived in peace with each other for hundreds of years[...]

Of these, Assyrian is a language spoken in our region from the Arami language group of Semitic languages. We are working to establish the Kurdish Language and Literature department initially. We've completed the preliminaries. We will apply for approval to CoHE. Following the approval of CoHE, we will establish this department this year. We plan to start teaching in the department with 20 students in 2010. For this, we signed a preliminary agreement with the universities of Dohuk and Kirkuk in northern Iraq and the University of Damascus for the Arabic department. They will provide us with teacher support for Kurdish Language and Literature. As they requested us to establish Departments of Turkish Language and Literature. That's what we're going to support them with. We are contacting the departments that teach Assyrian Language and Literature. We have great support in the local and national context in our work on the opening of the Department of Kurdish Language and Literature.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.ab.gov.tr/p.php?e=43430>

As can be seen in this excerpt, MAU is designed as a university that partially embraces all languages and religions in the region where it is founded with the understanding of “multiculturalism” and supports these religions and languages. It is also stated that preliminary agreements were signed with the universities of the Kurdistan Regional Government during the first rector’s office. MAU is the first university in Turkey where Kurdish and Assyrian education is provided in higher education. The first Kurdish theses were written and defended within this university. Therefore, it is the first Turkish university to take a leading role especially in the field of Kurdish. In addition, many Turkish citizens who conduct Turkish or English studies in Kurdish studies as well as Kurdish Studies, or many foreign academics who have received Doctorate degrees from different universities around the world have worked at MAU on a staff or contract in anthropology, political science, philosophy, architecture and other departments. In parallel with the multiculturalism discourses of the period; Academics working on different ethnic groups of the Middle East such as Kurds, Assyrians, Arabs and Yezidis had the opportunity to find academic positions here.

During that period, especially in 2013-2014, due to the dialogue process between the PKK and the state, the interviewees said that there was a comfortable environment at the university, especially for Kurdish Studies and Kurdish departments, that they did not feel threatened at the university, and that the rector’s approach towards them was positive. For example, an academic who was dismissed from his post in the post-2016 period for signing the text “We will not be party to this crime!” said about the approach of the university administration to languages other than Turkish under Serdar Bedii Omay in 2014:

Mainly we are talking about the Solution Process in November 2014. There is an atmosphere dominated by the Solution Process. We are also talking about Mardin Artuklu University being an area of the wave of reforms that are developing within the scope of the Solution Process. Let me give you one example: When I went to Artuklu, all our signs were in four languages. It was an environment where there was Arabic, Assyrian and Kurdish except Turkish and English, reflected even in the corridors. Each undergraduate student had to complete the 24-hour credit by selecting either Arabic, Assyrian or Kurdish and taking extra lessons for four years during the four-year study period. So he had to learn at least one local language of Mardin. There was an atmosphere of legitimacy during the university period, about Kurdish, the Kurdish language and the issue. These were more casually spoken.

However, the relatively comfort and freedom of that period does not mean that there was no pressure from other circles on academics and the Institute of Living Languages. For example, three interviewees from MAU said that there was pressure on Kadri Yildirim, director of the Institute of Living Languages, from some unnamed circles for the classes on the Kurdish language to be delivered in Turkish. As mentioned above, although courses are given in Kurdish in practice, the language of these courses is mentioned as Turkish in the legislation. A interviewee who completed his Master's degree at MAU and continued to work as an academic at the same university in the following period stated:

[...] Kadri Yildirim was the director of the institute at the time and vice-rector at one point while we were taking lessons. We came and saw that he wrote his notes in Turkish. Of course, there were all conscious people in the first group to enter [master's]; people who write, draw, have a certain opinion. We went and talked to the teacher, said it couldn't be that way. This is Kurdish Language and Literature, so if you distribute Turkish notes, if you tell the lesson in Turkish after a while, it doesn't suit us. And he said, "I get e-mails and stuff, and there's pressure." Of course, he didn't say much about the content, but we gave him a little encouragement, and we blocked the way for that. Maybe it was the collective awareness of those friends, maybe I don't know, the lessons or even the theses could be in Turkish today. But all together, of course. Obviously there was pressure from certain places that we didn't know about, whatever they were.

As can be seen in this excerpt, academics continue to teach the courses in Kurdish by resisting these pressures, in which the source is not expressed with the support of the students. During the period of the interviews, the courses in the Kurdish Language departments in MAU continued to be given in Kurdish.

#### **4.1.1. Tension with CoHE over Kurdish Teaching Formation Quota**

While the courses continue to be given in Kurdish at MAU, there is a significant tension between the Rectorate of MAU and the Institute of Living Languages and CoHE in the process. This tension is about the quota of the non-thesis master's program, which has been opened since 2012 to train the teacher staff who will teach elective Kurdish courses in various secondary schools for. Following the opening of Kurdish language and literature departments in Turkish universities, there is another significant development in 2012: "Elective Living Languages and Dialects" courses are opened for secondary school students in certain regions of Turkey. At

least 10 students must choose this course to open a class for elective languages in any secondary school. Within the framework of this course, it became possible to choose Abaza, Adige, Zaza and Kurmanci.<sup>45</sup> Kurdish was arranged to be given two hours a week as an elective course. Initially, the need for teachers was met primarily from the teachers of Turkish, Literature and Social Studies and foreign languages who knew Kurmanji and Zaza (*Sabah*, 3 October 2012; *Hürriyet*, 6 February 2013)<sup>46</sup>

In this process, the Ministry of National Education prepares a joint protocol with MAU and the Council of Higher Education for the textbooks needed in the elective courses opened, and the Kurmanji and Zaza textbooks to be taught in secondary schools are initially prepared by the Kurdish language teachers at MAU. In addition, it is decided to open a master's formation program without thesis that will train teachers for elective courses where these textbooks will be used.<sup>47</sup> MAU administration opens a quota of 500 people for the non-thesis master's program to train teachers who will teach elective Kurdish courses at the university and 2,528 people apply to the program. Following this development, CoHE announced that it does not approve this quota of 500 people and will reduce the number to 250, and will not give formation approval to these 250 people<sup>48</sup> (*Doğru Haber*, October 28, 2012).<sup>49</sup> This statement indicates a direct over-the-top intervention and intense pressure on university autonomy and management. UNESCO's *Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff* states the following regarding the necessity and importance of autonomy in higher education.

17. Autonomy is that degree of self-governance necessary for effective decision making by institutions of higher education regarding their academic work, standards, management and related activities consistent with systems of public accountability, especially in respect of funding provided by the state, and respect for academic freedom and human rights.

<sup>45</sup> According to a report by The Hurriyet newspaper on February 6, 2013, the number of students who chose Kurdish courses in the 5th grade at the time of the news was 18,847. Another 9,714 students chose "Elective Living Languages and Dialects" but did not make a definition of dialect. 26 students living in provinces such as Duzce, Tokat and Kutahya chose Abazaca and Adigece languages (*Hurriyet*, 6 February 2013).

<sup>46</sup> <https://www.sabah.com.tr/egitim/2012/10/03/kurtce-secmeli-ders-egitimi-basladi>  
<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/iste-secmeli-kurtce-nin-turkiye-haritasi-22534618>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.memurlar.net/haber/291481/kurtce-ogretmen-adaylarindan-eylem-video.html>

<sup>48</sup> <https://www.memurlar.net/haber/291481/kurtce-ogretmen-adaylarindan-eylem-video.html>

<sup>49</sup> <https://dogruhaber.com.tr/haber/51481-mardin-artuklu-universitesi-secmeli-kurtce-ders-surecin-den-cekiliriz/>

<https://www.memurlar.net/haber/291481/kurtce-ogretmen-adaylarindan-eylem-video.html>

18. Autonomy is the institutional form of academic freedom and a necessary precondition to guarantee the proper fulfilment of the functions entrusted to higher-education teaching personnel and institutions...

19. Member States are under an obligation to protect higher education institutions from threats to their autonomy coming from any source

20. Autonomy should not be used by higher education institutions as a pretext to limit the rights of higher-education teaching personnel provided for in this Recommendation or in other international standards set out in the appendix.<sup>50</sup>

As seen in this excerpt, in the above example, CoHE intervened in the management of MAU in a repressive way by victimizing students who had been admitted to the department through intervention in the quota determined by the university. After CoHE announced that it would reduce the quota for the recruitment of graduate students without thesis, the students who were eligible to enter the department protested this decision of CoHE by making a press release and invited CoHE to withdraw that statement (Doğruhaber, October 28, 2012).<sup>51</sup> Like the students, the MAU Rector's Office issued a press release on September 28, 2012. In the release, CoHE's decision to reduce quotas was strongly-criticised, and was stated that "merit" was based on student admittance, and it was announced that the university would withdraw from the elective Kurdish course process. The following statements are included in the release:

Before we put into practice our idea of withdrawing from the elective Kurdish process we present the following issues to the public and related authorities:

[...]

The most important pillar of the democratic opening is undoubtedly the step that allows the Kurdish language to be used gradually in education. As the Department of Kurdology at Mardin Artuklu University, we decided to support this step and instead of questioning the intentions behind it, we would rather fill it in in terms of quality and quantity. In this context:

1) We strengthened our Kurdish unit with a staff of 10 people with specialities in Kurdish language, literature and culture and at least ten years of work; In doing so, we accepted only the "merits" of the relevant

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50 Advice on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff, 1997, p.7 <http://80.251.40.59/politics.ankara.edu.tr/altipar/Yayinlar/Yuksekk%20Ogretim%20Tavsiye.pdf>

51 <https://dogruhaber.com.tr/haber/51481-mardin-artuklu-universitesi-secmeli-kurtce-ders-surecin-den-cekiliriz/>

<https://www.memurlar.net/haber/291481/kurtce-ogretmen-adaylarindan-eylem-video.html>

members as a measure.

2) We received the master's student with thesis by prioritising merit, whose number was 60 with the new ones and some of them delivered their thesis and graduated.

[...]

7) We subjected 2528 candidates who applied for the advertisement we put for " Elective Kurdish Master's Education without Thesis " which is currently being made a problem, to take science exams in 10 different schools under the coordination of our ÖSYM Provincial Examination Unit and completed the final registration and placement procedures of 500 people as a result of an objective evaluation in which we accepted nothing other than merit as a measure. The majority of these candidates have left their jobs at home and abroad and some have moved to Mardin individually and some with their family and are waiting to start training.

[...]

**Conclusion:** While keeping our hope, we respectfully announce to the public that we will withdraw from the process related to the Elective Kurdish Course, which we suspended for ten days, unless this number of our 500 candidates who have registered for the Elective Kurdish Course Master's Program without thesis is approved and 234 candidates without pedagogical formation are allowed to form pedagogical formation (Mardin Artuklu University Press and Public Relations Unit).<sup>52</sup>

Following this statement by the university administration, an interviewee from MAU stated that neither CoHE nor MAU stepped back on this issue, that the university continued its master's education without thesis and divided the quota of 500 people into two as first term and second term students. As can be seen from this excerpt, CoHE and the central government are constantly trying to keep this area under their control and management, although they open space in universities in the field of Kurdish Studies. On the other hand, MAU's press release provides some clues as to the sources of tension between CoHE and MAU. In this statement, MAU management emphasizes too much on the word "merit". The fact that there is so much emphasis on the concept of "merit" in such a protest article written for CoHE also shows that the tension between CoHE and MAU about the quota is actually about "merit" in student recruitment. The criteria by which 500 people to be selected out of the 2,528 people who applied to this program to train Kurdish teachers are

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<sup>52</sup> Public Statement (Elective Kurdish Lesson)

<http://www.mardintime.com/m/?id=2137>

<http://www.radikal.com.tr/egitim/artuklu-universitesi-kurtce-ogretmen-yetistirmeyecek-1102072/>

the main reason for CoHE's intervention. As shown later in the report, the issue of "merit", i.e. determining who will be trained as teachers, and the selection of graduate students in general and the caderisation issues related to academic staff will be the issues that Kadri Yildirim, director and vice-rector of the Institute of Living Languages, underlined the most when he resigned from his position.

#### **4.1.2. Efforts of Mardin Local Powers and Intra-University Conservatives to Prevent Academic Freedoms and Freedom of Expression**

Another important event that negatively affects university autonomy in MAU occurs in 2013. A person or persons who are disturbed by the Serdar Bedii Omay administration at MAU and the partial free environment within the university prepare a "whistle-blower" report accusing the MAU Rector's Office of "keeping distance from the Islamic circles", which is sent via e-mail to CoHE, some senior state administrators and university administration. It is claimed that the report was prepared by the F.D. who worked as a lecturer at MAU, because it was sent from the e-mail account of F.D. The lecturer F.D., who made a statement on the subject, claims that he was framed by breaking his e-mail password. This whistle-blower report, which accused Serdar Bedii Omay's administration of caderisation and discrimination and blacklisting some academics, reported that some academics working at MAU had worked in local governments run by legal Kurdish parties in the past as crimes, and that some academics were leftists, pro-Alevits and atheists and therefore guilty. Following the announcement of the report in the public field, the university administration issued a statement condemning the report (Talks; *Cumhuriyet*, 23 February 2013; *Hürriyet*, 23 February 2013).

The circulation of such a "whistle-blower" report creates reactions within the university and creates unease among critic academics. It is not known who prepared the report. The academics we asked about the issue said that they thought this report was prepared by local forces reacting to the university administration and some within the university who were uncomfortable with the expression and academic freedoms at the university (academics and civil servants).

While such accusations against the Rector's Office of the time continued, there was another significant violation of rights in the field of academic freedoms, freedom of expression and rights violations against LGBTI+ groups at the university, and this violation was reported in the media. Associate Prof. Levent Şentürk, who was working in the Faculty of Architecture, planned to organize a panel titled "From Disease to Claim of Rights - The Course of the Meaning of Homosexuality", which would be organized by Ali Erol on April 17, 2014. After it was heard that this panel would be organized, there were sexist and anti-LGBTI+ hostile reactions to the pan-

el both from around Mardin and around the school (*Cumhuriyet*, March 20, 2014 and statements of some interviewees).

Among the groups reacting to the panel to be organized are Mardin-Dost Der (Association for Friendship Education Cooperation and Solidarity), and the president of the association, Mehmet Arasan, made a written statement on the issue:

We are deeply saddened that a panel that is contrary to the integrity and tolerance of our Muslim people is being organised and that Mardin Artuklu University is taking initiative in that. We strongly condemn this disgusting panel. We complain to our honourable Muslim people about all individuals and institutions who want to organize this panel, help, or sponsor it (*Milliyet*, 21 April 2014).<sup>53</sup>

Imams also reacted to the panel, and Din-Bir-Sen Regional representative Mehmet Şirin Ersan said:

We are aware that this panel is not an academic study. The person who is invited to the panel as a speaker is not someone who does academic studies on the subject, and it is the biggest indicator of this. This person is known throughout the country as the director of an organization that bears the mission of spreading the propaganda of homosexual understanding. Because it is not an academic activity intended to be carried out, but by eroding the basic values and sensitivities of the society, a silent revolution is carried out, as some teachers in the Faculty of Architecture say. Has Mardin Artuklu University become a school where those who want carry out a revolution through architecture dominate? The Faculty of Architecture was recently mentioned in the reports that a teacher who was the head of the department had a mass drinking binge in the faculty building with his students[...] Is the main reason for all these developments in the Faculty of Architecture that some 'Gezi spirited' professors who have not had the opportunity to spread their thoughts in other universities recently have gathered in this faculty purposefully? All this, and finally, the panel, which is tried to be held with the desire of carrying out a silent revolution, is alarming in terms of the point the university has come to. It increases our concerns that the university is drifting apart from its founding mission. The arrogant interpretation of some reactions of NGOs to the subject "with other purposes and intentions under the guise of religion" raises our con-

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/escinsellik-paneli-mardini-karistirdi-1870564>

cerns about the issue. (*Milliyet*, 21 April 2014).<sup>54</sup>

Following the afore-quoted statements that were sexist, LGBTI+ hostile and demanded that the university operate along an Islamic line, the rector's office and dean's office backed down and this panel was cancelled by the university administration (*Milliyet*, 21 April 2014). The fact that the Rector's Office cancelled this panel also shows that the university administration, which has made significant resistance to CoHE on the non-thesis master's program, actually signed up with homophobic and conservatory circles when it comes to LGBTI+ individuals. Therefore, it is revealed that the rector's office has not taken enough libertarian academic attitudes about academic freedom and freedom of expression.<sup>55</sup>

The cancellation of the panel following the anti-LGBTI+ reactions is a significant violation of freedom of expression by the rectorate in the field of freedom of expression, which was reported in the media regarding the Serdar Bedii Omay period. By cancelling the panel, LGBTI+ phobic approaches are legitimized. Following this incident, the article written by M. Müfit Yaray on an internet portal called *Doğruhaber* targets Levent Şentürk, who works as an academic in the Faculty of Architecture and organizes the panel: "Cancellation Is Not Enough, These Immorals Must Leave Mardin!" Academic Levent Şentürk is described as a "pervert", MAU rector Serdar Bedii Omay is openly accused and the government and CoHE are called to intervene in the university:

[...] Will the government and CoHE be silently watching those who, in the name of individual freedoms, engage in activities that would poison the whole society using the opportunities and academic titles provided to them by the state? Can't anyone ask them what is homosexuality doing in architecture school? Why did the rector of Mardin Artuklu University, Prof. Serdar Bedii Omay, allow the name of his university to be used for such nonsense in the first place, while publishing messages of Qadr Night? I wonder if he has an emotional connection to these gays. Even though he knew the religious feelings and beliefs of Mardin province and its people, didn't the rector's permission to this provocative conference until the last day make him solely responsible for all the events that might arise? Would the Rector be able to answer for any events that might arise for this reason? (*www.dogruhaber.com*, 17 April 2014).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/escinsellik-paneli-mardini-karistirdi-1870564>

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/escinsellik-paneli-mardini-karistirdi-1870564>

<sup>56</sup> <https://dogruhaber.com.tr/haber/125261-iptal-yetmez-bu-ahlaksizlar-mardinden-gitmeli/>

During the same period, 12 academics issued a declaration condemning all these pressures and made the following statement:

The justification was the groundless and unsubstantiated claim that these presentations within the scope of a graduate course would insult our religious values. It is unacceptable to target our faculty and university through individuals. It is a mistake to remain silent in the face of impositions that destroy the field of academic freedom. It is regrettable and illegal that the academic presence of our faculty, university, guests, faculty members from various countries of the world and students of different ethnic, socio-cultural and religious backgrounds is targeted in lynching language. Our academic activities should not be hindered by hatred, slander, and othering. Our scientific activities do not in any way insult belief, race, language, religion, or way of life. It does not target any group or person and does not insult anyone's values (Milliyet, 21 April 2014).<sup>57</sup>

In this case, the Rector's Office of MAU was accused of distancing from Islamic sections, employing academics close to "Gezi spirited" and LGBTI+ groups, and allowing panels to be organized in this field. Therefore, it has been claimed that the university acted contrary to the AKP government's rhetoric of "Brotherhood of Islam" and its conservative line.

#### 4.1.3. Liquidation of Serdar Bedii Omay Administration in 2014

In an atmosphere of circulating hostile rhetoric against the activities of the MAU administration, state institutions take action and in November 2014 a large-scale investigation was launched at the university by the Mardin Prosecutor's Office for alleged corruption in tenders at MAU, and searches were conducted in the chambers of rectors and deans. In the following period, this investigation was expanded and 68 people were detained, including Prof. Kadri Yildirim, Vice Rector and Director of the Institute of Living Languages. Among those detained are business people who participated in the tenders, as well as the University Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General, and the Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts. During this operation, the rooms of the deans, including the room of the university rector Serdar Bedii Omay, are searched; many hard drives, documents and files are confiscated (*Cumhuriyet*, 19 November 2014). Twenty-nine detainees, including Vice Rector and Director of the Institute of Living Languages Prof. Kadri Yildirim, are sent to the court on charges of "establishing an organization for the purpose of committing crimes, mem-

<sup>57</sup> <https://www.milliyet.com.tr/gundem/escinsellik-paneli-mardini-karistirdi-1870564>

bership in the organization, collusive tendering within the scope of the organization, qualified fraud against the public institution, disclosure of confidential information”. The next day, 24 people, including Kadri Yildirim, were released, while 5 people were arrested (*Evrensel and ilkehaber.com*, 22 November 2014).

Following these events, on November 26, 2014, a statement by Kadri Yildirim was reported in the press. In this statement, Yildirim associates the investigation and detention against him with the non-thesis graduate staff, who, two years before this incident, caused tension between MAU and CoHE in 2012, which were mentioned in the previous chapters of this report, where the word “merit” that was repeatedly emphasized in the press release made by the rector’s office. Yildirim says he was framed for rejecting MPs’ requests for caderisation.

I didn’t allow unjustly bringing men into Kurdology; The deputies sent me faxes and gave me their list of names about the candidates who applied for the advert of the program we opened for 500 students. Different communities, cults, trade unions and associations placed the same orders. I calculated, and the number exceeded 500. On the day of the exam, I gathered the students, explained the situation, and tore up all those order lists and threw them away. I wish I hadn’t thrown it away and presented it to you today as a document. Anyway, since these orders were not fulfilled, they went on the offensive and spread that 480 of the 500 people I received were PKK sympathizers and passed some reports and whistleblowing to CoHE, MoNE, Ministry of Interior, President and Prime Minister. The investigators from CoHE came and they interrogated me. However, we were going through a conflicting process at the time, and the BDP was protesting our program and warning the people close to them not to apply for it. So the only party that didn’t give us a list was the BDP. Among these people we recruited were people from all walks of life who have succeeded in the exam. So, it is a different issue (*Yurt Haber*, 25 November 2014).

A interviewee who worked at the institute during that period and was expelled with Decree-law during the SOE period told about the pressure on the Institute from those close to the government to have their own staff in the department:

To be honest during the exam periods, they came from all walks of life, to say recruit this, recruit that. I mean the children of these MPs, take this, take this, the Fethullahists were already sending lists, we didn’t care. Honestly, we didn’t care about any of them, not this, not that, we didn’t care about any of them, so we are clean on that. Not the HDP, not the AKP, not

the Fethullahist, not any other community. Kadri Yildirim also paid for it. We and Kadri Yildirim paid for it, by being expelled like this. Because we had been paying attention to these kinds of issues.

Therefore, both Kadri Yildirim and the academics we interviewed on the subject regarded the main reason for Kadri Yildirim's detention and the operation against MAU administration as an attack by the state and CoHE against the partial freedom environment at the university and in order to eliminate university autonomy and to control the caderisation and student selection at the university. Also, the same interviewees said, in addition to these views, that some people in the university administration may have made irregularities or procedural errors in financial matters, which were used to liquidate the university administration. In the following period, the director of the institute and vice-rector Kadri Yildirim was acquitted of the charges against him (interview with Kadri Yildirim, 7 August 2020).

In the process following the events described above, Serdar Bedii Omay, the first rector of MAU in December 2014, was removed from his position as rector by the CoHE Supervisory Board at the request of the Mardin Attorney General's Office and replaced by Ahmet Ağırakça, Dean of the Faculty of Theology (*Cumhuriyet*, December 4, 2014). Following the assignment of the new rector, Kadri Yildirim, Director and Vice Rector of the Department of The Institute of Living Languages, submitted his resignation petition to the university administration in January 2015 (*Hurriyet*; 14 January 2015).

#### **4.2. Period of the Second Rector Ahmet Ağırakça: Decline in Academic Freedoms**

Following the dismissal of Serdar Bedii Omay in 2014, Ahmet Ağırakça, who began as the acting rector, was officially appointed rector in March 2015. Ahmet Ağırakça continued as rector until 2019 and then was replaced by İbrahim Özcoşar, the 3<sup>rd</sup> rector. At the time of the drafting of this report, İbrahim Özcoşar was the Rector of MAU.

Interviewees who worked at MAU identified the 2nd rector Ahmet Ağırakça period using adjectives such as "regression", "nightmare" and "darkness". To name the Ağırakça period, one interviewer said, "Ağırakça ran over us like a bulldozer. CoHE knows very well which people to bring and where in what period." One of the most important rights violations and the biggest interventions in university autonomy throughout Turkey is the abolition of the rectorate elections held within the universities and the appointment of rectors to universities directly by the President without elections during the SOE period, which began in 2016, as will be discussed

in the next section. As a result of the specific developments in MAU, as mentioned above, the 2<sup>nd</sup> rector Ahmet Ağırakça was appointed as the rector of MAU by President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in March 2015, long before the SOE period (Cumhuriyet Education Supplement, 19 March 2015).

#### 4.2.1. Liquidation, Pressure, Intimidation, and Threats at University

Using the phrase “I am Erdogan’s representative” when he was appointed rector, Ağırakça committed many rights violations against academics working in different disciplines and the academic staffs created during the Serdar Bedii Omay period were mostly liquidated from the university. The liquidation policy carried out during Ağırakça’s period is also evidence that the operation carried out against the university administration in the previous period was not limited to financial reasons. The liquidation of unwanted staff initiated by the financial operation is continued for academic staff during Ağırakça’s period. Some of the rights violations against academics within MAU during this period were also covered in the media. During this period, many foreign academics, including European academics working at MAU, were dismissed. A report in Cumhuriyet newspaper said that 25 foreign academics were dismissed (Cumhuriyet, 23 February 2017).

Other media reports during this period were related to Ağırakça’s publications and political views in previous years. For example, a publication called the Encyclopaedia of Islam, which Ağırakça directed, is raised in the media. In this encyclopaedia, there are ideas that those who convert from Islam should be killed, that women should be beaten if they do not obey their husbands, and that democracy and social democracy are shirk systems (Cumhuriyet, 28 March 2018). The interviewees said that after Ağırakça’s appointment in relation to his religious and political stance, the partial libertarian environment at the university changed noticeably negatively and more conservative and repressive practices were implemented. Panels, conferences and seminars previously held in different languages and themes were squeezed into a narrower framework and activities related to Arabic language and culture were emphasized. In the interviews, it was stated that elective courses in Kurdish, Syriac and Arabic were chosen by the students on their own initiative previously, and that Kurdish lessons were delivered by visiting lecturers at an additional cost. It was stated that there was a high demand and the students of each department could take two hours of Kurdish lessons. However, they stated that the heads of these departments and some teachers have not allowed these departments to be opened for the past thirteen years, and that complaints had reached them that students had been forced to take other courses.

Research Assistant Emre Özyetiş from the Faculty of Architecture has faced severe violation of rights. According to some claims, the severe rights violations initiated against Özyetiş begin when a student reports him to a powerful relative in Mardin after he hadles issues such as social gender and gender appointment in his class (interview with Emre Özyetiş, 13 May 2020). Afterwards, Ağrakça calls Özyetiş to his room and insults him in a sexist way. Özyetiş said that the rector threatened him with sexist words in the news prepared by Zeynep Yüncüler on December 27, 2017 and published on the internet platform Journo:<sup>58</sup>

He just asked me, “Do you want to be a girl?” “Don’t you realize you’re in Mardin?” he continued in the face of my surprise. As I said that I wanted to understand what was going on, he started shouting, “Get out!” I’ve stated that that was hate speech and that I’m going to press charges against him. He threatened me to leave the room, taking his hand around his waist as if reaching for a gun (Journo, December 27, 2020).

In the news report, it is said that Ağrakça was reached by phone and he uttered the following words to the journalist who called him:

This man is rude and despicable. He talks dirty things to kids at school. I don’t want a teacher at my school who’s a boy and acts like a girl. If you publish this story, you will pay a price, I will sue. Just drop it. You’ll get in trouble (Journo, December 27, 2020).

Following this incident, academic Özyetiş filed a criminal complaint against the rector’s office. After the criminal complaint, he is exiled by the rector’s office to the Faculty of Physical Education, where he has no students from the Faculty of Architecture. Because of displaying the rector and pressing charges against him, Özyetiş is investigated for “praising terrorist organizations, insulting state majors and university administration”, citing his social media postings, (*Evrensel*, December 29, 2017; *Journo*, 18 January 2019).<sup>59</sup> In addition, Özyetiş is investigated by the prosecutor’s office for the crime of spreading propaganda of a terrorist organization, insulting the president and insulting Turkishness, and Özyetiş is detained twice (interview with Emre Özyetiş, 13 May 2020).

According to *UNESCO’s Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff*:

Higher education institutions should endeavour to open their gover-

<sup>58</sup> <https://journo.com.tr/agirakca-kiz-gibi-hoca-istemiyor>

<sup>59</sup> <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/342025/cinsiyetci-sozlere-maruz-kaldi-yeri-degistirildi>

nance in order to be accountable. They should be accountable for:

- (g) adopting policies and procedures to ensure the equitable treatment of women and minorities and to eliminate sexual and racial harassment,
- (h) ensuring that higher education personnel are not impeded in their work in the classroom or in their research capacity by violence, intimidation or harassment<sup>60</sup>

The principles quoted above have been completely violated in the case of Emre Özyetiş. After these violations, Özyetiş was punished, not those who committed the violations. The mobbing applied to him gradually increased and he resigned in the summer of 2018, unable to withstand the pressure. He was acquitted of all cases filed against him in the ongoing process (interview with Emre Özyetiş, 13 May 2020).

Seven academics at MAU, including the Kurdish musician Mehmet Atlı, an academic in the Faculty of Architecture, filed a petition with the rector's office in order to object to the rights violations experienced by Özyetiş and show solidarity with him. Following this petition, these seven people faced heavy mobbing and threats. The threats were that they would receive disciplinary action and their academic careers might be hindered. Following the threats, 4 people withdrew their signatures from the petition. Mehmet Atlı resisted pressures and did not withdraw his signature. However, in August 2018, Mehmet Atlı and another academic friend were disciplined for the same reason and then resigned from their positions at MAU (interview with Mehmet Atlı, 16 April 2020).

The experiences of Emre Özyetiş and Mehmet Atlı are only some of the pressures, intimidation and rights violations imposed on academics by the rectors personally and the university administration as an institution. Similarly, the rebuke, threats, intimidation, shifting the position, forcing to resign or expulsion are general violations of rights experienced by academics. According to the interviewees, being called to the rector's office and being reprimanded, threatened or intimidated verbally was experienced not only in MAU but also in other universities.

#### 4.2.2. Punishment of PhD Academics at Zaho University

Another significant violation of rights in the field of Kurdish Studies during the Ağırkaça's period within MAU is the opening of administrative investigations against academics who started their PhD program at Zaho University of the Kurdistan Regional Government under the 1<sup>st</sup> rector Serdar Bedii Omay and went to Zaho at regular intervals during both rectors' periods, and that CoHE did not give diploma recognition to these students. During Serdar Bedii Omay's period, the rector's office

<sup>60</sup> UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff <http://80.251.40.59/politics.ankara.edu.tr/altipar/Yayinlar/Yuksekk%20Ogretim%20Tavsiye.pdf>

signed a protocol with Zaho University because there was no PhD program on Kurdish at MAU. This protocol opens the way for some students from MAU to go to Zaho as PhD students. One interviewee described this program with the following words:

There was no PhD program in Turkey either, thanks to Serdar Bedii Omay at the time, they went together. He and Prof Kadri signed a protocol with Zakhō University during a trip in the South, just because it is close. They say here we have 6 faculty members, they take our courses, if you could open a PhD program for them. They had 3 lecturers, you see, we did it with them. Within that framework, a protocol was signed just for this reason at the end of 2013. Based on this protocol, we were all given a post. We went to Zaho University and enrolled. We started training in 2014. After 6 months, we had already entered the thesis process. That's how we were going back and forth for our classes.

According to the interviewees, CoHE also had a diploma equivalence agreement with Zaho University at the time the protocol was signed. Academics enrolled in this PhD program went to Zaho University and attended the necessary courses. Since a protocol had already been signed during those visits and they usually went to Zaho on weekends, they did not need administrative permission in regards to their travels. Then, in Mardin, while they continued to work, they delivered their doctoral dissertations and received their doctoral degrees from Zaho University.

The interviewee, who has completed his PhD at Zaho University, applies to the CoHE Inter-University Board for diploma recognition. However, CoHE suspends the application for diploma recognition for a long time and after a long period of time, the application is finalized. In the response given to him, it is reported that CoHE no longer has an equivalence agreement with Zaho University. The interviewee's application for diploma recognition is rejected because the recognition agreement with Zaho University has been cancelled. While this process is ongoing, an administrative investigation is opened to students who go to Zaho University for their doctorate during the second rector, Ağrakça's period. The administrative investigation is opened on the grounds that these students did not receive written administrative permission when going abroad for doctoral education. Following this investigation, academics are fined for salary deduction.

Rights violations at MAU are not limited to what is mentioned here. In addition to what is mentioned here, there are many violations of rights. In the first part of the report, all rights violations against the academics who signed the declaration discussed in the chapter "We will not be party to this crime!" and the general rights violations in the SOE period to be addressed in the next chapter were experienced during the Ağrakça's period in MAU. On the other hand, in this part of the report, the differences in practices between academic freedom, academic autonomy and free-

dom of expression and the ways and mechanisms by which university autonomy, university self-government and academic freedoms were damaged during the two rectors' periods were shown in the case of MAU.

## 5. THE GENERAL IMPACT OF THE TERMINATION OF THE DIALOGUE PROCESS AND THE SOE PERIOD ON THE KURDISH STUDIES

As stated in the previous chapters, the general political conjuncture, the current “Kurdish policy” of the State, Turkey-EU relations, the course of armed conflict, the academic and personal approaches of rectors acting in accordance with the demands of political power, academic and personal approaches to academic freedom significantly affect the working conditions and rights violations of academics.

When describing their experiences of rights violations, the interviewees used concepts such as “rector X’s period”, “rector Y’s period”, “solution process period”, “post-solution period”, “ceasefire period”, “war period”, “negotiation period”, “dialogue period”, “SOE period”, “coup period”. In the summer of 2015, the end of the period of de-confliction between the PKK and the State, called “negotiation”/ “dialogue”, and the state’s subsequent severe human rights violations, the destruction of cities, the mutilation of hundreds of people and the loss of life caused great psychological destruction primarily on the academics and students involved in the field of Kurdish Studies and conducting their work in Kurdish cities. Some interviewees said that not only university administrations, but also the climate of armed conflict had negative and severe effects on Kurdish Studies. In fact, they said, some students lost relatives in the process, some students began not coming to university, students had reduced access to books, and some students destroyed Kurdish books by burning or throwing them away because of the fear atmosphere the conflicts created.

They said that during those hard times when many people lost their lives, interest in academic studies decreased and motivation for both life and academic studies decreased significantly. After 2015, the resumption of the conflict, the subsequent SOE regime, mass arrests, the arrest of elected Kurdish mayors and deputies, and the management of municipalities through appointed trustees, severe human rights violations and all those political and social developments affected the field of Kurdish Studies very negatively, and that negative impact was continuing during the period in which this report was being written.

In the period 2016-2018, many academics were dismissed from their positions at the university through the Decree-laws amended by the Council of Ministers during the SOE period. In addition, academics have been violated due to the attitudes and decisions made by university administrations and rectors who benefit from the broad authority provided by the state in the post-2015 period and especially during the SOE period between 2016 and 2018. For example, while a university rector implemented partially more libertarian policies during the “solution process”, the same rector was able to turn to harsh and repressive practices in the period following August 2015, when the dialogue process was terminated, especially during the SOE period.

One of the most important points that we should mention in this chapter is that compared to the interviewees who conduct / have conducted studies at Mardin Artuklu University, we observed that interviewees from other universities, whether expelled or not, were more timid when sharing their experiences.

A significant number of these interviewees shared their experiences and observed experiences at universities, but asked not to be quoted directly. The interviewees, who allowed the citation, asked that the university names not be mentioned in the report. In addition, while the rights violations experienced in MAU have been significantly reported in the media, many rights violations at other universities have not. We have got the impression during the interviews that the reason for the academics to be timid is that they feel less safe because the rights violations experienced are less reflected in the public and the media since those universities are in smaller cities. For those reasons, some specific events, and excerpts to be mentioned in this section will be conveyed without mentioning the name of the university.

### **5.1. Expulsion of Academics, Repressive Rectors, Reduction in Academic Activities and Policy of Exile**

The number of academics expelled during the SoE period is 6,081.<sup>61</sup> In that pe-

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<sup>61</sup> *Academic Exports Rights Violations Losses and Strengthening Processes*, 2019, Human Rights Foundation publications of Turkey, p.6.

riod, 15 universities were closed on the grounds that they were associated with the Gulen Community, which was declared a terrorist organization during that period.<sup>62</sup> CoHE and university administrations have taken an active role in the expulsion of academics. While some of the academics expelled during this period were associated with the PKK, a significant number were associated with the Gulen Community, and some were expelled or forced to resign for expressing only dissenting views without being associated with any organisation, etc.

The most important pressure on university autonomy and management during the SoE period is the complete ban and removal of the rector's elections, which were already held under the pressures of the state and CoHE in the previous period. With the Decree-law published on October 29, 2016, the elections for rector were banned and the decision to directly determine and appoint university rectors among the three people to be proposed by CoHE was announced in the Official Gazette (Official Gazette, 29 October 2016).<sup>63</sup> Many rectors who were elected or appointed directly by the President after 2016 have gone on to punish academics designated as "dangerous," "separatist," "enemy of the state" and "pro-terrorism" through investigations and intelligence channels. In this process, rectors were decisive in the expulsion of academics who were not signatories but who they thought were not loyal to the state.

According to *UNESCO's Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff*:

Higher-education teaching personnel should have the right and opportunity, without discrimination of any kind, according to their abilities, to take part in the governing bodies and to criticize the functioning of higher education institutions, including their own, while respecting the right of other sections of the academic community to participate, and they should also have the right to elect a majority of representatives to academic bodies within the higher education institution.<sup>64</sup>

The complete abolition of the election for rector after 2016 and the repressive policies implemented by the rectors are completely contrary to the principle quoted above and the international conventions expressed in the first chapter of the report. With the SOE, the rights of higher education personnel to take part in the governing

<sup>62</sup> *The University's State of Emergency Is a Review of the Destruction of the Academic Environment*, Türkiye Human Rights Foundation Publications

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/10/20161029-5.htm>

<sup>64</sup> UNESCO Recommendation on the Status of Higher Education Academic Staff <http://80.251.40.59/politics.ankara.edu.tr/altipar/Yayinlar/Yuksekk%20Ogretim%20Tavsiye.pdf>

bodies with the right to choose their representatives in higher education institutions have been completely taken away from them.

One of the interviewees, an academic who had been expelled, gave a striking example of how the general political conjuncture when the dialogue, also called the “solution process”, continued and the general political conjuncture after 2015, when this period was terminated, affected the university administration and in particular the discourses and policies of rectors, regarding the increasing pressure of rectors in the post-OHAL period and the labeling of some academics as “traitor”. He said that some activities related to the “Kurdish issue” were organized within the university where he worked before 2015. This interviewee was investigated by the university administration after 2016 and then dismissed from his position with the Decree-law. According to the interviewee, the reason for his expulsion was his views within the university and his overall dissenting position. The interviewee, who served at different universities besides MAU, requested that the university name not be mentioned in the report.

It was much more relaxed in the solution process. Sometimes the university’s administrators also attended events at the university. For example, at one point [a member of parliament from the pro-Kurdish party] came, he was making a speech, slogans were being shouted. At one point, a workshop was held on the solution of the Kurdish question. The rector also attended, even made a speech. I remember very well that one of the speakers who attended said in his speech, “Here’s what President Apo said. The rector called us to his room before he expelled us. I went in, and he said, “Were you going to found a state?” I was surprised. I laughed. I’m still being investigated, I’ve not been expelled yet. “What do you think the state is? What do you think of the Turkish state? It will stay still and then hit you in the head like this.” Of course, when his intentions were clear, I said, “I didn’t come to you to talk about these things. What you’re talking about is different, I don’t intend to found a state or what.” He said, “This state knows who is who, and one day it will confront to you like this.” And I said, “Teacher, what are you kicking me out for, you’ve opened an investigation, obviously you’re going to kick me out, but what are you going to kick me out for? Do I have any legal problems?” He said, “No, you don’t have any legal problems, but the state doesn’t trust you, and I don’t trust you.” I said, “I mean, what am I supposed to do to gain that trust?” He said “Do you know anyone in this state now? In CoHE, for example, or in the ministry?” I said, “No, I don’t know anyone.” “Do you know anyone at the top level of the AK Party? Do you know a governor or so?” I said, “No.” He said, “Let

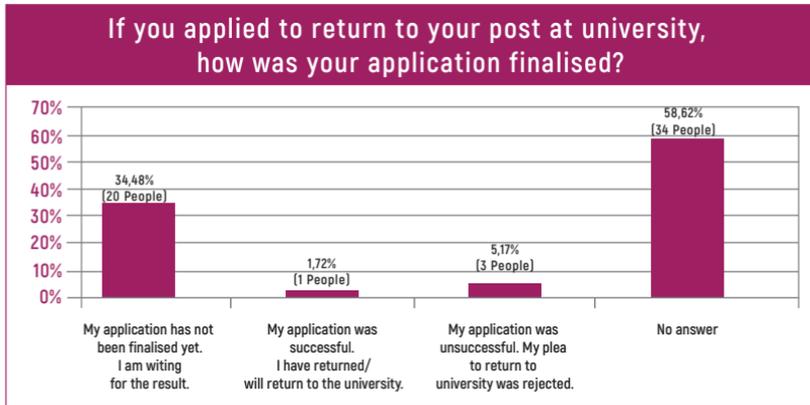
one of them vouch for you and send me a text, and tell me that I know him and that he has no problem, and I will consider your situation.” I said, “I don’t know anyone like that, teacher.” He took an example from his desk and said, “There’s a teacher who’s in a similar situation as yours, and we’ve opened an investigation, but the AK Party congressman vouched for him. We’re going to close his case now. Find a way like this if you want.” I said, “I don’t know anyone like that, so tell me if there’s a crime you’re accusing me of.” He said, “No, you prove to me that you’re a friend of the state.” And I said, “I mean, how can I prove it? Is there anything legal about it? You’re going to press charges, and I’m going to answer it.” He said “No charges. You’re not on the side of this state.” I said “So How am I going to have my word?” He said “Do you have, for example, a photo of you at terror-damnation rallies, a single frame?” There was a time when these rallies were held, people would condemn terrorism. I said, “Well, teacher, I don’t.” He said, “Then you’re not with the state.”[...] Of course, when you talk to an investigation commission, you have to say some things that you wouldn’t normally say[...] I said, “Now you’re saying that you have nothing identified as a subject of investigation. For example, you say peace signatories and what (they were investigated at the time, they were being kicked out) and I don’t have my signature on that document.” And he said, “Extremists like you wouldn’t sign a document like that anyway.” I was shocked. “The state is already looking at it, it’s examining it, the most radical people in this business are not signing it,” he said.

In many respects, this lengthy excerpt also sums up the period of dialogue between 2013 and 2015 and the specific aspects of the breakdown that followed. This example generally reflects the spirit of the period of dialogue. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the political atmosphere has changed both in the region and throughout the universities since the restart of the armed conflicts in 2015. The meeting with the rector mentioned in this excerpt is not a normal rector-academic interview. This interview is part of an investigation on the academic. According to the interviewee’s testimony, the rector here has questioned him like a police officer. The questioning rector accuses a university-working academic of trying to found a separate state and of being disloyal to the State. The accused academic is told that he must prove his loyalty to the state and the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) in order to continue his academic post. As evidence, he is expected to bring a reference letter from senior AKP figures, present a photograph showing his participating in anti-PKK rallies, or find a governor that vouch for him. Here, the rector’s incriminatory and degrading attitude towards academic staff without

justification is very evident. The Rector revealed the practical situation within the academy by telling the academic that he would only be cleared when he met the above mentioned conditions or he would be considered a “traitor”, and this attitude is completely contrary to the articles in the international conventions signed by the Republic of Turkey and UNESCO’s Recommendation.

Many academics who carried out studies in the field of Kurdish Studies during the SOE period, who did not have any ties with the Gulen Community, who were could not be associated with the Gulen Community and who did not sign the declaration, were also either expelled through the power of the SOE regime or were forced to resign due to mobbing. For example, the three interviewees who did not sign the declaration were expelled with the Decree-law only because of their dissenting views expressed within the university, even though they were not associated with the Gulen Community. Two interviewees resigned due to mobbing. Of the 58 people who answered the survey, 14 resigned from their positions. Therefore, many academics who trespassed the red lines of the state during the SOE process or who the rectors did not find acceptable, considered suspicious or declared traitors, and were removed from the university in different ways.

After the end of the SoE period in 2018, some academics who were expelled with the Decree-law applied to the Presidency of the SoE Transactions Review Commission in order to return to the university, and some did return to the university. In the survey we conducted, we asked a question to the academics who applied to return to their positions at the university about how their application had been finalized. Of the 58 people, 24 answered this question. The answers are as follows:



As can be seen in this graph, most academics are still waiting for the result of their application. Only 1 of the academics we interviewed returned to the universi-

ty on appeal and he was reassigned to another university, not the university from which he was expelled.

In addition to the rights violations mentioned above, an important point to emphasize is that academic conferences and panels held in the field of Kurdish Studies in the post-2015 period have come to a standstill. For example, an interviewee said that the university administration was very disturbed by the interest shown by the city's people in the events organized in Kurdish within the university. The interviewee, who had served at different universities besides MAU, requested that the university's name not be mentioned in the report. Regarding the interest of both students and the people living in the city where the university is located and the reactions to the Kurdish panels and seminars organized within the university in the pre-2015 period, the interviewee stated:

In this department, in the name of Kurdish, Kurdistan, Kurdish history, the fact that teachers in many other branches of the academy became interested in these issues, and that the fear had been overcome created a significant synergy. Of course, there was also the solution process at that time. Let me just say one simple thing. There are student clubs. They are semi-official clubs. Students from every department or faculty come together. Literary club, etc. For example, a student of mine said, "Teacher, there is such an official opportunity. That's also a budget. You organize panels, you can bring people from outside the university." So I said okay, let's think about it[...] I remember, for example, they had an event, or they invite a writer, 1,000 or 2,000 people turn up. This caused big unease in the university administration[...] They said, "Drop it. The university is very disturbed by this. You are holding these kinds of events. You're getting thousands of people into the university. This is causing a serious mobilization." [...] They started to tell me to do this, to do that. For example, they didn't give halls anymore. They said, "There's no hall for you." When we insisted for a hall, they said, "Don't insist, you'll be in danger." The students were afraid of this, so they had to dissolve the community.

As this excerpt shows, the university administration's approach to activities differs over time. In the post-2015 period, activities on Kurdish Studies in all universities came to a standstill. All of the interviewees who continued to work at the universities said that all activities in the field of Kurdish Studies made in Kurdish or Turkish could not find a place in the universities, such activities decreased significantly and were held with reservations even if they were ever held. As with

the whole academy, Kurdish studies in universities are carried out under conditions dominated by oppression and fear, especially in the post-2016 period.<sup>65</sup>

## 5.2. Decline in Kurdish Elective Courses and Kurdish Studies

After 2015, the declines in Kurdish Language and Literature in universities and Zaza Language and Literature have ceased to be an attraction for students who may prefer those departments. In previous years, the interviewees said, those departments had received preferences that were much higher than the number of quotas, and as a result, the department's bottom and top scores were quite high. As one of the interviewees put it:

For example, to put it most concretely, we have a huge gap between the students who come now and potentially the university entrance exam scores of when we first opened the department. While the enthusiasm, morale and motivation of the students who come to the first semester were very different, the situation of the present is much worse, that is, our student profile is unfortunately decreasing. That's not independent of the atmosphere.

For example, the highest department in our university is ours. Not just in the faculty, but in the whole university in general. But this situation is starting to decrease, and we're in a mediocre position now.

During the dialogue process, the opening of Kurdish departments in universities in Kurdish cities with bachelor's degrees, master's degrees with thesis, master's degrees without thesis and PhDs created great enthusiasm, especially among Kurdish students and those who wanted to do their academic studies in these subjects, and a large number of applications were made to these departments. At the height of the applications, the knowledge that the students who will graduate from these departments will be assigned as teachers to elective Kurdish courses in secondary schools was also effective.

A significant number of interviewees who work / have worked in the Kurdish Language and Zaza Language departments said that the interest in these departments and Kurdish-Kurmanji-Kirmanckî-Zazakî elective courses both within the university and in secondary schools disturbed the state and that they thought the state did not want Kurdish to gain strength. In previous chapters, we mentioned

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<sup>65</sup> On how the SOE regime affects Turkish universities in general the following report can be viewed: *The State of Emergency of the University on the Destruction of the Academic Environment A Review*, Human Rights Foundation publications of Turkey

the tension between MAU and CoHE over the quota in the non-thesis master's program formation which would train teachers, and the interest of secondary school students for Kurdish elective courses. After 2015, and especially after the SOE period, the assignment of Kurdish teachers came to a standstill. Co-Chair of Eğitim Sen's Diyarbakır No. 2 Branch Recep Şimşek made a statement on September 9, 2019. According to the statement, the parents of the students who requested the elective Kurdish course said that some school principals did not let the students select Kurdish because there were not enough classrooms, and some shifted those who chose Kurdish to other courses because they did not have Kurdish teachers. Since 2012, MonE has only shared the 2015-2016 figures of the demand for elective language courses in the curriculum. According to MoNE's figures, during the 2015-2016 academic year, a total of 77,931 students selected elective language course, with 71,616 being Kurmanji and 6,315 Kirmanckî (Zaza). However, the MoNE has assigned only 59 staff member (Kurmanji 48, Kirmanckî 11) for Kurdish elective courses so far (*Evrensel*, September 9, 2019).<sup>66</sup> In short, in parallel with the state's repressive Kurdish policy after 2015, it can be said that Kurdish departments are being neutralized and de-functionalized, especially with the cessation of assignment of already insufficient number of teachers to secondary schools.

In addition to weakening elective Kurdish courses in secondary schools, although the departments of Kurdish Language and Literature and Zaza Language and Literature in universities have not been closed, there has also been a significant decline in elective Kurdish courses delivered in different departments of universities. Students studying history, mathematics or economics, etc. in universities where Kurdish Language and Literature departments are opened can also select Kurdish as an elective course. On the other hand, in the post-2015 period, the pressure increased significantly on elective Kurdish classes not only in secondary schools, but also in universities where students from different departments could select Kurdish elective classes. An interviewee who continues to work at the university said:

There used to be a high demand, and it was good after we entered, each department could take two hours of Kurdish lessons. In the last few years, the heads of departments and teachers of these departments have not allowed the department to open or even threatened students that if they take elective Kurdish classes, they will flunk them in other courses. I've been told in person. The students come to me and said if we selected it for the second semester, our teachers will flunk us. What we can do? I'm afraid there's been that kind of problems. Now there are very few electives.

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<sup>66</sup> <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/386372/sectirilmeyen-secmeli-ders-kurtce>

# ISMAIL BEŞİKCI FOUNDATION "INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION"

The fact that the studies on the Kurds at Turkish universities started very late and the problems faced by academics who do research or teach in this field in recent years are undoubtedly not independent of the position and status of the Kurds in Turkey or their “statuslessness”. The denial of existence of the Kurds in Turkey and the development of policies towards this denial go back to the mid-1920s. In the process of building a new nation-state, Turkism was considered as the main constituent element and all policies were regulated accordingly, all characteristics and rights of autochthonous peoples and ethnic groups living in Turkey were ignored and melted down in Turkishness over time. Kurds were one of the peoples most affected. Let alone the studies aimed at the development of their language, which is the most vital element of the re-production and development of the cultural characteristics of any people, minority, ethnic group to hand down to next generations, all other languages other than Turkish were denied with an academically groundless theory called the Sun-Language Theory. Undoubtedly, universities in Turkey have been established and shaped as one of the main devices of the official ideology. For this reason, universities have always maintained their sensitivity to the fields of study, subjects and concepts that will lead to the “indivisible integrity of the state”. Some of these “sensitive” issues and concepts were changed according to the political structure of the periods and international developments, but the concept of “Kurdish” has always maintained its sensitivity during all successive governments. Academics who violated these sensitivities were never tolerated by university administrations, and the implementation of “necessary” administrative and judicial penalties was not held back. Ismail Beşikci is the academic who paid the most price in

this regard due to his research on Kurds in the 1960s. He spent a significant part of his life in prisons because of his books and articles, his defences in the lawsuits for these books and articles, the letters he wrote, etc. The way Beşikçi was treated was also an intimidation against those who were thinking of working on Kurds in the academia. Therefore, although a significant number of books and journals were published on Kurds outside the academy, both in Kurdish and Turkish, especially after the 1960s, it wasn't until the 1990s that the issue was handled in universities. Undoubtedly, the Kurdish struggle for rights for many years played a significant role. Because it showed that the Kurdish struggle for rights could no longer be avoided with simple denialism. And although they were seen as "a problem", almost every circle started to say that something had to be done, at least towards a solution to this "problem".

The opening of the Kurdish TV channel TRT6 after the 2000s, although without placing it in an official framework, and the subsequent opening of institutes, departments, and branches for Kurdish education in some universities, and the opening of Kurdish electives in secondary schools brought along an elevation in Kurdish Studies in Kurdish and Turkish within the universities. However, for the long-term sustainability of such practices, decisions not based on legal regulations brought along some problems. At least the attempts to solve the problem through measures and regulations as if it were a simple problem between two families and not a long-lasting problem of rejection and denial, and the perception about these regulations as if they were a "blessing" by the dominant party was the sign that they would not last long. Also, it is known that despite partial freedoms to study Kurds in universities, concerns towards Kurds are maintained by official bodies. As a matter of fact, the significant decrease in the numbers of panels and conferences in the field of Kurdish Studies in universities in the post-2015 period, the drop in demand of students for Kurdish departments, the almost ended assignment of teachers for Kurdish elective appointments were some of the consequences. Afterwards, many academics who openly criticized the state's Kurdish policy were dismissed from their duties at universities. It was always felt directly or indirectly that the academics who were not dismissed did not have unlimited freedom, that they were aware that there were red lines drawn by the state and that they should not cross the line if they were to continue to work. While the Kurds, one of the main creators and heirs of the Mesopotamian civilisation, have long faced policies of oppression and denial, it is worth noting that in post-2000s Turkey, the steps taken and regulations made to partially eliminate the problem are of historical importance. However, developments in 2015 and its aftermath have eliminated all optimistic feelings and thoughts. The fact that the recognised partial rights lack any legal guarantees makes their reclaim easy.

It is clear from the research data that Kurdish Studies has serious problems because the history of Kurdish Studies is new in Turkish universities. There are steps to be taken and legal regulations that need to be implemented in order for these studies to develop and overcome the existing problems.

1. The ability of Kurdish to find a place and develop in academic life depends on making legal and actual arrangements for the use of Kurdish through all educational life, including preschool. First of all, it is essential to ensure the right to “education in the mother tongue” and this must be guaranteed by including it in all legislation, especially the Constitution. Supportive steps should be taken to protect and improve Kurdish and other languages that have been deprived of the possibilities of modern education for many years. In addition, it is necessary to take priority steps immediately for Kirmancki/Zaza, which is on UNESCO’s list of “dying languages”.

2. In Turkey, the Republic should take supportive actions that include the use of public resources (material and human resources) to address inequality in the re-production of languages belonging to Kurdish and other cultures that are prevented from being taught at any stage of the education curriculum from the beginning to the present day.

3. In universities or other institutions, classrooms, departments, branches, institutes, faculties and similar organizations for Kurdish culture and Kurdish studies should be opened under their own names in line with scientific and academic needs, not with unclear / implied names such as “Institute of Living Languages”.

4. Legal and actual obstacles to the scientific and administrative

autonomy of universities, which are the basic conditions of scientific information production, should be removed and legal regulations should be made.

**5.** Besides the ensured scientific and administrative autonomy, it is necessary to encourage studies on other languages spoken in Turkey, especially the Kurdish studies, to increase their visibility and to provide them with all kinds of support. Legal and actual obstacles to Kurdish thesis writing should be lifted and legal regulations should be made to prevent administrative arbitrariness.

**6.** It is necessary to remove the legal and actual obstacles to freedom of expression and thought, which are guaranteed by international conventions and supported by case law. Scientific and academic studies should not be subject to criminal and administrative investigations in any way. In this context, opinions and studies contrary to the opinions of the state and part of society should be expressed in a freely.

**7.** The rights violations against academics who are subjected to criminal and administrative enforcements due to their research and thoughts should be removed, they should be relieved from victimization, their personal rights should be restored.

**8.** General legal arrangements should be made to provide employment opportunities for students graduating from Kurdish Language and Literature departments in all kinds of official and private institutions and organizations.

**9.** Since academic research on Kurdish studies and Kurdish language is not sufficient, resources should be transferred to the studies in this field within the University.

**10.** Articles, thesis, research, journals, books, etc., which will be written and have been written in the field of Kurdish studies, should be supported for their publication within universities and publication policies should be established to prevent practical obstacles.

**11.** Especially works written in the field of Kurdish language and Kurdish studies; all kinds of works that will serve as sourced to students and departments should be included in university libraries without discrimination of authors, publishers, and languages.

**12.** The equivalence of the diplomas of students who have studied undergraduate and postgraduate education at universities in the Kurdistan Regional Government should be recognized and those students should be able to continue their studies at universities in Turkey.







