



MILLIONS OF BOOKS DESTROYED: ERDOĞAN'S REGIME ATTACKS THE CULTURE OF ITS DISSIDENT GROUPS

Books play an important role in shaping public opinion and transmitting the culture of a society for the upcoming generations. For that, many authoritarian regimes throughout history have opposed books written in the pursuit of the opposition of those they perceived as enemies. With the goal of asserting complete control over public information and literature, the Erdogan regime has started such a war against the books and other publications of its dissident groups following the suspicious coup attempt on July 2016. In this direction, thousands of books have been outlawed and their publishers have been shut down. Therefore, copies of those books in all libraries and bookstores across the country have been confiscated. After it has been declared that possessing any copies of such books or publications may be considered the evidence for certain crimes, many people have been detained and arrested.

The current report of the Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST) provides an overview of what has happened during Turkey's ongoing post-coup assault on the books and the cultural institutions, with a focus on the affected groups including the Gulen movement, Kurds, leftists, and seculars. Some of the highlights from the report are given below.

- **Book disposals in public libraries:** Constituting approximately **7 percent of the total books** in the public libraries across the country, **135,000 books** are reported to be removed from the public libraries due to their affiliations with the Gulen movement. Of those books:

- **30,000 books** that are authored by Mr. Gulen have reportedly been ordered to be **burned**.
- The remaining nearly 100,000 books have been sent off for recycling.

- **Getting rid of books with a fear of arrest:** After certain books and publications have been blacklisted, many have reportedly burned or tore their books for the fear of being discovered by their neighbors or law enforcement officials. Some reported incidents are:

- D.A., a librarian at a university during the time of the coup asserted how he had to categorize his books in his personal library that constituted nearly 2,000 books to dispose the "dangerous ones" among them.
- In the central province of Yozgat, military police — gendarmerie — found **560 Gulen authored books near a water fountain** in a village. A crime-scene was conducted hoping to find the people whom the books belong to.
- Police officers found **150 Gulen's books**, some of which were totally or partially burned in a village in Northern Cyprus.
- In another story, authorities discovered hundreds of Gulen books thrown into the waters of Ataturk Dam in Eastern Anatolia.

● **Charges over possessing certain books:** In some cases, people who possessed certain blacklisted books have been suspected and persecuted. Some of the reported incidents are as follows:

- **Canan Badem:** An associate professor at Tunceli University, who was detained in August 2016 on charges of association with the terrorist organization after the police have found a Gulen-authored book at his university office. As a well-known critic of Gulen and a professed atheist, Dr. Badem will be facing a long prison sentence if found guilty.
- **A housewife, R.Y.** has reportedly been detained over allegations of burning Gulen's books at a place close to her home. She faces charges of membership in a terrorist organization and making terrorist propaganda.
- Four **school officials** have been reportedly detained by the gendarmerie forces after they found them burning some documents in the garden of a school in Mugla province.
- A college's attempt to get rid of Gulen-authored books from the college's library right after the coup attempt has **sparked an investigation** in the western province of Afyon.

● **Banned publishers, media outlets and other incidents:** Aside from the Gulen associated books, Erdogan regime's war on cultural instruments has taken various forms during the ongoing post-coup crackdown. Some of such drastic actions are as follows:

- With the government's decree law as part of the post-coup crackdown, **three news agencies, 16 TV channels, 23 radio stations, 14 magazines, 29 publishing houses** have reportedly been shut down over alleged ties to the Gulen movement.

- Authorities have **pulled off the shelves** 72 books of Aram Press, one book of Tekin Press, and one unpublished book draft of Kirmizi Kedi Press.
- Istanbul Fourth Civil Court of Peace has issued a ruling to ban the distribution of the satirical weekly **LeMan's "Special Coup Issue"**. This has been accompanied by trolls disseminating LeMan's address with threats of ransacking it.
- A famous novelist, **Zulfu Livaneli** has also suffered from a similar ban when the ads of his latest novel has not been allowed to be displayed in public spaces by the authorities.
- Famous writers and philosophers including **Albert Camus, Baruch Spinoza, Louis Althusser, Servet Tanili, and Nazim Hikmet** have become suspects in the indictments prepared against the former head of now-defunct Free Journalists Association, Nevin Erdemir and in the indictment on **Gezi protests** in Ankara.
- Numerous physical assaults have occurred against publishers and bookstores across the country. In Diyarbakir province, for example, **a warehouse of Avesta Press** has been set in an arson attempt. Many branches of NT – **a Gulen movement affiliated bookstore** – have been destroyed and burned.
- Reports of the United Nations and other respected human rights organizations suggest that the conditions of Turkey's prisons have been associated with already alarming records of human rights violations. One such issue is **inmates' limited access to books**. While prisons do not allow book donations from outside, the prisoners have been allowed to possess 15 books at most. Furthermore, certain books that are either affiliated with the Gulen movement or in Kurdish language have also been blocked. The number of affected inmates is reportedly more than 200,000 – including generals, diplomats, judges, academics, journalists, doctors and other people from all walks of life.

In addition to the cases that have been stated, there are officially more than half a million cases that are subjected to such terroristic crimes as reported by the minister of interior. With the pursuit to persecute individuals who attain these books, it is presumed that most of these individuals have already removed such publications from their possessions. Subjectively, if every individual was to get rid of several books, the total number of books disposed would be in the millions. This suggests that the multitude of the assault of Erdogan's regime on the culture of its dissident groups, are far more reaching than what is reported.