



KURD-CHR

CENTRE KURDE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

REPORT ON MINORITIES

INTRODUCTION

The establishment process of the Republic of Turkey is characterized by forced Turkification. This process began even before the establishment of the state, with genocides against the Armenian and Assyrian people (1915) and the Greek-Pontic people through genocide and population exchange (1919-21). The geography inhabited by these peoples, along with their entire historical and cultural heritage, was almost erased, and Muslim-Turkish communities from the Caucasus and the Balkans were settled in their place.

With the establishment of the republic, the policy of displacement and assimilation was also adopted as a fundamental approach towards non-Turkish Muslim communities. The largest group, the Kurdish people, faced both physical genocide policies and simultaneous assimilation. Systematic efforts to erode language and culture were implemented up until the 2000s.

Despite political developments and changes in approach towards minorities appearing due to relations with the EU, there has been no qualitative change in reality. Even today, it is impossible to find a single official document within the constitutional and legal framework that mentions the Kurdish name. Superficial changes are made under general and unspecified headings, such as "living languages."

The UN Human Rights Commissioner's report from February 2017 strongly depicted the destructive nature of the approach, particularly towards Kurds, involving violence and annihilation. Turkey's approach towards minorities continues through multi-faceted political, military, social, and cultural tools ranging from annihilation and denial to assimilation. In this report, we aim to outline the developments from the image depicted by the UN Human Rights Commissioner to the present.

Today, all ethnic and religious differences in Turkey are under pressure and threat. Groups like Armenians, Assyrians, Greeks, Circassians, and Laz, as well as Roma people, continue to face severe cultural and identity pressures despite their small numbers. The release of the murderer of Armenian intellectual Hrant Dink this year, the failure to uncover the background of the murder, and the impunity of murdering a minority member reveal the depth of the current politics.

Given the impossibility of encompassing all the injustices against minorities in Turkey in a single report, we will focus solely on the policies directed at the Kurds.

STATE OF EMERGENCY AND TRUSTEE SYSTEM

Following the coup attempt on July 5, 2016, decrees issued under the State of Emergency (OHAL) banned everything related to Kurdish culture and language.

Relying on the authority granted by OHAL, trustees were appointed to municipalities managed by the Peace and Democracy Party. Starting from September 11, 2016, these appointments ended multilingual municipal services. Kurdish was removed from municipal websites, education support houses offering Kurdish education were closed, Kurdish street and place names were replaced with Turkish ones. These practices continued post-2019 with trustees appointed to municipalities managed by the People's Democratic Party (HDP).



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The daily Kurdish newspaper, Azadiya Welat, was closed by decree. The Kurdish children's channel Zarok TV was also closed but reopened following public reaction. Furthermore, schools offering Kurdish education, the Istanbul Kurdish Institute, the Kurdish Culture Research and Development Association (KURDÎ-DER) branches, and other associations and organizations working on Kurdish were shut down. Kurdish news agencies and newspapers like Dicle News Agency (DÎHA) and Jinha were also closed.

KILLING FOR SPEAKING KURDISH

The policies of polarization and uniformity pursued by the Turkish government post-2016 have led to numerous racist attacks against Kurdish speakers:

- On October 24, 2015, Kurdish singer Selim Serhed (33) was killed by a racist named İdris Ünver for singing in Kurdish at the bar where he worked.
- On September 2, 2015, Sedat Akbaş (21) was attacked by eight people while speaking Kurdish on his cell phone in Istanbul's Kağıthane and died as a result.
- On April 26, 2016, Eren Sömer (26) and Ufuk Çelik (28) were attacked with knives while conversing in Kurdish in Uşak, both were injured.
- In Aydın, a student named Pınar Çetinkaya was expelled from her dormitory for speaking Kurdish.
- On May 10, 2018, Fikret Aydemir was attacked by a group of racist soldiers for speaking Kurdish while serving his compulsory military service in Ağrı.
- On December 16, 2018, Kadir Sakçı and his son Burhan Sakçı were attacked in Sakarya for speaking Kurdish. The father died while the son survived severely injured.
- Racist attacks continued post-2019. Nineteen-year-old Şirin Tosun and his friend Mahsun Zeren, working as seasonal agricultural laborers in Sakarya's Karasu district, were attacked by eight people for greeting in Kurdish. Tosun died after 54 days in intensive care.
- Ekrem Yaşlı (74) and his wife Bedriye Yaşlı (71) were assaulted by another patient's attendant for speaking Kurdish post-surgery in Çanakkale.
- On May 30, 2021, Barış Çakan (20) was killed in Ankara's Etimesgut district by a group for listening to Kurdish music in a park.

PRESSURE AND OBSTRUCTIONS ON KURDISH CULTURE AND ART

The prohibitive mindset towards the Kurdish language and culture dates back to the founding of the Turkish state. The Law on the Maintenance of Order (Takrir-i Sükûn) passed on March 3, 1925, and the Eastern Reform Plan Decree on September 24, 1925, replaced all Kurdish place names with Turkish ones and completely banned speaking Kurdish. These practices continue today.

****Banning and Penalizing Cultural Activities:**** Throughout history, Kurdish cultural activities have frequently been banned. Numerous examples can be given, but within the scope of this report, we will limit ourselves to a few:

- On July 23, 2019, the concert of Kurdish artist Mem Ararat in Van was banned by the Governor's Office.
- On October 8, 2019, seven musicians in Urfa's Viranşehir were arrested for singing Kurdish songs at weddings and charged with "making propaganda for an organization."
- On January 21, 2020, Group Munzur received a 10-month prison sentence for singing Kurdish songs at Newroz celebrations in Van in 2017.



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- On September 20, 2020, Mezopotamya Culture Center artist Weysi Ermiş was arrested for singing Kurdish songs at rallies.
- On October 13, 2020, a Kurdish literary discussion planned by Avesta Publishing with author Mîrza Metîn in Mardin was interrupted by the police.
- On November 13, 2020, the performance of the Kurdish play "Bêrû" by the Istanbul City Theaters was banned by the Governor's Office, and the play was also banned in Urfa the following day.
- On October 16, 2021, the Kaymakam of Kadıköy banned the concert of the Mezopotamya Culture Center, which was planned to celebrate its 30th anniversary at Bostancı Culture Center.

****Banning Language and Culture in Prisons:**** Prisons are not only places where various pressures and violations occur, but also where the Kurdish language and culture are banned. Some examples include:

- On January 5, 2021, Van Prison administration did not allow imprisoned journalist Adnan Bilen to receive the Kurdish newspaper Xwebûn.
- On January 12, 2021, Fırat Darı, imprisoned in Tokat Prison, was given a one-month communication ban for speaking Kurdish with his mother.
- On March 2, 2021, the Free Lawyers Association (ÖHD) reported that Kurdish letters were not given to prisoners in Diyarbakır D-Type Closed Prison.
- On March 12, 2021, Kurdish books in the cells of Şırnak T-Type Closed Prison were confiscated.
- On March 31, 2021, TJA Period Spokesperson Ayşe Gökkan was prevented from making her defense in Kurdish at the Diyarbakır 9th High Criminal Court.
- On May 30, 2021, Fatime Demir was given a six-month visitation ban for speaking Kurdish while visiting her son Emrullah Demir in Diyarbakır D-Type Closed Prison.
- On June 10, 2021, Nudem Duran, imprisoned in Bayburt M-Type Prison, received a one-month communication ban for singing Kurdish songs.
- On September 5, 2021, Mehmet Emin Ado, imprisoned in Adana Kürkçüler T-Type Closed Prison, was asked to submit a petition for visitors with Kurdish names.
- On December 3, 2021, Silivri No. 3 Prison imposed a "knowledge of Turkish" requirement for those calling prisoners.

****State of Kurdish Education:**** After 2010, some steps were taken towards Kurdish education, but these efforts were carried out in a way that diluted the essence and failed to recognize the Kurdish language. Some examples include:

- At Dicle University's Kurdish Language and Culture Department, the most significant violation was the prohibition of writing master's and doctoral theses in Kurdish in 2017 by the rectorate. The underlying reason for this was the official regulation stipulating that the language of instruction in the Kurdish Language and Literature/Culture Departments should be Turkish.
- In 2012, elective courses for "Living Languages and Dialects" were introduced for middle school students in certain regions of Turkey. To open a class for elective languages in any middle school, at least 10 students need to choose the course. These courses are taught for two hours per week. Students who are deprived of education in their mother tongue until university and who receive education in Turkish take Kurdish language courses in the same category as foreign languages like German, Italian, or Latin, under the title "Living Languages." Furthermore, although the practical language of instruction in Kurdish



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departments is Kurdish, it is legally Turkish, leaving the situation without legal protection and open to arbitrary interventions and pressures.

- The value given to this elective education from the Kurdish perspective can be understood from the following example: In the appointment of 20,000 teachers in Turkey (March 2021), 25 positions were allocated for Russian, 210 for German, 503 for Arabic, and 938 for English, while only 3 positions were allocated for the Kurdish language.

- In 2022, similarly, only three Kurdish language teachers (two for Kurmancî and one for Kirmanckî/Dimilkî) were appointed in the Living Languages and Dialects department across Turkey. Despite the presence of thousands of Kurdish language teachers waiting to be appointed in a country with over 20 million Kurds.

Prohibition of Religious Rituals in Kurdish: In a country proud of its 99% Muslim population, Kurdish people are banned from performing Islamic rituals in their native language. Beyond the approaches of the state institution, Diyanet, which denies the existence of Kurds and Kurdish, there are also many practical prohibitions. For example:

- On July 10, 2021, nine members of the Democratic Islam Congress and DÎAYDER were arrested for delivering sermons and leading prayers in Kurdish.

- On September 29, in Bitlis city center, a sign displaying the Surah Al-Ikhlâs in five languages, including Kurdish, was removed and reinstalled only after Kurdish was removed.

- On December 31, an indictment was prepared against DÎAYDER, where sermons read in Kurdish were considered a crime.

- This section should also include the double discrimination faced by Kurdish individuals belonging to the Alevi and Yazidi faiths.

Banning Even Letters: Hostility towards the Kurdish language extends to the Kurdish alphabet. For example:

- The letters “X, W, Q, Ê, Î, Û, Ê” in the Kurdish alphabet, which are widely used, have been banned since 1928. Many people using these letters have been prosecuted or imprisoned under Article 222 of the Turkish Penal Code.

- On January 2, 2021, the AKP-run Artuklu Municipality replaced the Kurdish letters X, W, and Q on village name signs with Turkish equivalents.

- In April 2022, the Constitutional Court did not consider the ban on a name containing the letter “W” a violation and ruled that it was not in accordance with the “Law on the Adoption and Implementation of the Turkish Alphabet.”

CONCLUSION

The multi-faceted assault on the Kurdish language and culture can be considered a form of “linguicide.” The phenomena briefly and roughly described in this report reveal an ongoing discrimination and assimilation against Kurds since the establishment of the republic. This situation has consistently and systematically persisted to the present day, indicating that it is a part of the state’s Kurdish policy.

Linguist J.B. Rudnyckyj defines “linguicide” as effectively evidenced by the following actions:

- Imposing repressive measures to hinder the natural and organic development of a language.



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- Forcing the cultural development conditions of a bilingual community to transform into a monolingual group.
- Denying the right of an ethnic group to have their language taught in public schools and used in mass media despite their request.
- Refusing to materially and morally support the cultural efforts and linguistic preservation endeavors of an ethnic group that speaks a different language despite their request.

All these examples of “linguicide” can be seen in the case of Kurds. The examples and data in this report prove this.