

JWF EDUCATION REPORT 2017

BRIEF SUMMARY

Ever since the beginning of its rule, in particular since 2011, the AK Party embarked on a systematic effort to permanently Islamize Turkey's education system. During his final term as prime minister lasting from 2011 to 2015, President Erdoğan resolutely pursued his vision to materializing his so-called "pious generation" project, or the devoutly religious generation.

The reforms the AK Party embarked on since the beginning of its rule resulted in 932,000 students attending İmam Hatip schools in 2014–2015 school year - from 65,000 at the beginning of the AKP rule in 2002, roughly a 93.5 percent increase.

İmam-Hatip schools, crucial in their role to further political Islam agenda as a breeding ground for radical elements continue to receive extensive political and material support, including through unlawful seizure (theft) of thousands of closed private educational institutions and land – to only perform extremely poor in all state tests.

The mushrooming of İmam-Hatip schools, the current rise in homegrown radicalization - along with the surge in the number of terrorist attacks and victims caused by terrorism show that Turkey's social fabric is undergoing a very harmful change; with maybe an irreversible damage already inflicted to the traditional mainstream understanding of Islam in the country.

Efforts of the AK Party since 2004 aimed at eradicating the Gülen movement - a renowned movement combating extremism and radicalization by promoting quality secular education, both nationally and globally.

The December 2013 corruption scandal and the failed coup attempt of July 15, 2016 was followed by an unprecedented purge targeting citizens from all walks of life,

in particular the alleged sympathizers of the Gülen movement in the education system, both in Turkey and abroad.

The large-scale assault against the movement after the scandal began with the introduction of a bill in 2013 to close preparatory schools, aiming at cutting off a “major source of revenue for the movement,” and to simultaneously increase AKP influence in the education system.

In the late hours of July 15, 2016 a small faction of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK) that called themselves the “Peace at Home Council” attempted to overthrow the Government of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan by seizing control of several key places in Ankara, Istanbul and other locations. The so-called “Peace at Home Council” cited an alleged erosion of secularism, the elimination of democratic rule, a disregard for human rights, and Turkey's loss of credibility in the international arena as reasons for staging the coup.¹ As crowds of people took to the streets dozens of pro-coup soldiers abandoned their tanks and other military vehicles. Forces loyal to the government were able to defeat the coup plotters and the attempted coup was thwarted within approximately 12 hours. According to official sources at least 248 people were killed and 2,193 were injured during the attempt.²

Measures that followed under the state of emergency have had a devastating effect to primary, secondary and higher education, in particular on dedicated educators across the country from different backgrounds, regardless of their political and other convictions - who overnight became a suspected and oppressed class, with the swift government assault on education, relentless and increasingly expanding.

By the end of January 2017 the unprecedented assault on education has seen 6,986 academics purged from their positions, along with 41,667 teachers and employees

1

<http://www.haber3.com/asker-trt-binasinda-iste-darbe-bildirisi-3977124h.htm>

² Based on government statistics in the aftermath of the attempted coup.

of the Ministry of Education. Tens of thousands of educators across the country have been detained and arrested on very serious charges, with no evidence.

The assault on the principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression have already dismantled much of the existing structure of Turkish education; towards finalizing the process of asserting total control on educational institutions.

The repression on teachers and the assault on the Gülen movement inspired schools abroad, well-known for their excellence in education and among the largest and strongest rivals of radical Islamic trends around the world, is still ongoing.

In parallel, efforts by the Turkish government, *inter alia*, through its recently established radical subsidiary (Maarif foundation) to take over Gülen movement inspired schools aim at using them as a springboard in further contributing to youth radicalization and extremism in sovereign countries.

The unprecedented assault on education, both in Turkey and abroad and the Islamic transformation of the education system is likely to have long-term implications for Turkey and on the choices it will make on where it belongs politically.

Rise of radicalization will inevitably have its own cost and long-term negative social and political repercussions in Turkey, the volatile region and also countries where Maarif foundation would be successful in establishing itself.