

**Republic of Turkey  
Office of the Prime Minister**

**cc: Ministry of Transport, Maritime Affairs and Communications of Turkey  
Information and Communication Technologies Authority of Turkey**

## **Open Letter to the Government of Turkey on Internet Blocking and Free Expression**

29 October 2015

We, the undersigned, are human rights, media, and political organizations in Turkey and around the world.

We are writing to you before the November 1, 2015 general elections, to request the cessation of online censorship of independent news organizations and citizen journalists. We demand authorities refrain from imposing limitations on access to the Internet or specific online services and remind the government of its duty to protect the right of people in Turkey to freely seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Since the passage of the Internet Law of Turkey (Law No. 5651) in 2007, Internet users in Turkey have been subject to various mechanisms of censorship online. Starting in 2013, there has been a dramatic increase in both bans on access to online content and requests to remove content. The Internet Law has been amended via omnibus bills without any room for public debate or criticism, most recently in March 2015. These latest amendments introduced measures similar to the provisions that were previously found unconstitutional and annulled by the Constitutional Court in October 2014.<sup>1</sup>

We also recall the 2012 ruling of the European Court of Human Rights finding that blanket bans on online platforms violate the fundamental right to freedom of expression.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Constitutional Court of Turkey Decision 2014/149

<sup>2</sup> Case of Ahmet Yildirim v Turkey, no. 3111/10, ECHR (2012)

We are concerned by the lack of transparency and accountability for court orders that restrict online content. According to the volunteer-run website called [Engelli Web](#) (meaning Blocked Web) the number of banned websites surpassed a total of 100,000, as of October 2015. Several of these websites banned under the Internet Law are those of independent media organizations, some of which exist solely online or use Twitter as their main communications medium.

Apart from the access bans ordered by courts, users in Turkey experienced connectivity problems when trying to connect to social media applications such as Twitter and Facebook following the October 2015 Ankara bombings. As shown in data compiled by the volunteer-run TurkeyBlocks project, there were widespread complaints of slow access to social media platforms, to the extent of making them completely inaccessible, which signals an extrajudicial shutdown of social media applications. This alleged “network throttling” came at a time when citizens relied most on independent news and social media, and directly infringes on people’s right to access information.

On November 1, several grassroots groups, political parties, and news agencies will use internet-based communication systems to verify the official results of the general election on 1 November, and to disseminate information.

**Therefore, we, the undersigned organizations in Turkey and around the world, request that the authorities in Turkey:**

- Stop imposing access bans on websites of independent news organizations;
- Pledge not to order any further blocking that might lead to limitations on access to the Internet or specific online services;
- Ensure that online communication networks remain free and open, to protect the right of people in Turkey to freely seek, receive, and impart information.

Signed,

Access Now

*Alternative Informatics Association - Alternatif Bilişim Derneği*

*Alternatif Medya Derneği*

*Ankara Barosu Bilişim Hukukçuları*

*ASL19*

*Committee To Protect Journalists*

*Dağ Medya*

*Demokrat Bilgisayar Mühendisleri*

*Demokrat Haber*

*dogrulukpayi.com*

*dokuz8 Haber*

*EDRi - European Digital Rights Initiative*

*Electronic Frontier Foundation*

*Elektrik Mühendisleri Odası - Chamber of Electrical Engineers*

*Fight for the Future*

*Hafiza Kolektifi*

*Human Rights Watch*

*İnternet Teknolojileri Derneği*

*Istanbul Writers' Café*

*Jiyan.org*

*Kaos GL*

*Korsan Parti Türkiye / Pirate Party of Turkey*

*La Quadrature du Net*

*Linux Kullanıcıları Derneği*

*Mülksüzleştirmeye Ağları*

*Open State Foundation*

*Pardus Kullanıcıları Derneği*

*Punto 24 Bağımsız Gazetecilik Platformu*

*Software Freedom Law Center*

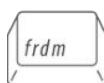
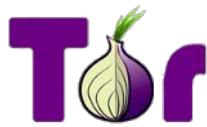
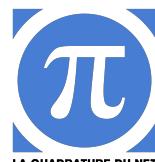
*The Ethical Journalism Network*

*The Tor Project*

*Tüm Internet Derneği*

*TVHI Media Lab*

*Zete.com*



Software Freedom  
Law Center

TVHL Media

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