

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 2014.¹

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.²

¹ Constitutional Court of Turkey Decision 2014/149

² 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

Hafıza 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

Mülksüzleştirme Ağları

Open State Foundation

Pardus Kullanıcıları Derneği

Punto 24 Bağımsız Gazetecilik Platformu

Software Freedom Law Center

The Ethical Journalism Network

The Tor Project

Tüm İnternet Derneği

TVHI Media Lab

Zete.com

