

Censorship and

Self-Censorship

in Turkey:

JANUARY 2021 — DECEMBER 2021

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CENSORSHIP AND
SELF-CENSORSHIP

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January 2021

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Foreword

This is the Speak Up Platform's fifth annual censorship and self-censorship report on Turkey and it covers the period between 1 January 2021 and 31 December 2021. This report is a compilation of our daily efforts to monitor, raise awareness, advocate and document censorship in the fields of culture, arts and media in Turkey. The aim is to discuss self-censorship, and prevent censorship. As in previous years, numerous non-governmental organizations in Turkey, including ourselves, continued to work diligently in their given fields this past year, as well as warding off the escalating pressures on civil society itself, and organizing solidarity against such pressures. We leave behind a year in which the conditions for non-governmental organizations to exist and operate with the vision of protecting and defending a number of intersecting rights, including freedom of artistic expression, freedom of expression and the press, and the right to peaceful assembly, such as the Speak Up Platform, were hindered. Despite all these negative developments, when we look back on the one-year period covered by this report, we are pleased to be among those who were able to speak up and speak out, and to be able to convey to public the memory and experience of our rights advocacy, solidarity and struggle through this report.

We would like to extend our gratitude to the individuals, institutions and organizations mentioned in the cases covered by this report for the information they have provided us; to our contributors for their valuable assessments; to the network of participants of the Speak Up Platform, currently more than 120 organizations, for standing together against censorship and self-censorship, and to members of the public who have followed our work, for reminding us the importance of our daily efforts.

Legal Expert Opinion

Figen A. Çalkuşu

Violating Rights and Refusing to Implement the Judgment on Such Violations

As we bid farewell to 2021, I of course, take no satisfaction in continuously having to make almost-perpetual assessments with respect to human rights violations in Turkey.

During the State of Emergency (SoE) which was declared in the wake of the attempted coup of 2016, fundamental rights were suspended; the system of government was changed, and a Presidential System of Government was adopted. This meant that a more authoritarian approach to the country's governance was established. In 2020, rights and freedoms were further restricted under the pandemic conditions. Banning-orders issued by the Interior Ministry and the governor's offices across the country in violation of the **"principle of lawfulness"** have become commonplace.

On the one hand were the prohibitive measures taken due to Covid-19, and on the other were the ceaseless laws enacted by the government that further restricted rights and freedoms.

Let me clarify the sort of mangle we have been put through:

Law No 7242 "Amending the Law on the Execution of Sentences and Security Measures,"

Law No. 7245 on "Bazaar and Neighborhood Guards,"

Law No. 7249 on "the Establishment of Multiple Bar Associations,"

Law No. 7252 on "the Establishment of Digital Platforms Commission,"

Law No. 7253 on "the Regulation of Broadcasts via the Internet and the Prevention of Crimes Committed Through Such Broadcasts"

With these laws, the authoritarian regime was fully consolidated. In a nutshell, nothing has changed with respect to fundamental rights and freedoms. Be it 2020 or 2021: It was six of one and half a dozen of the other. They were practically identical twins. However, in this year's review, I'd like to dissect the very mentality that has become entrenched with respect to rights violations in Turkey.

I would like to mention that I, as a lawyer, have often found myself having to reiterate and recall that "acquittal means not-guilty." Because, in this country of ours, I have witnessed so many occasions where the judgments which

found violations with regard to cases concerning freedom of expression and the press and acquittal verdicts failed to apply retroactively, and where the persons who have suffered such violations and were subsequently acquitted were still treated as "criminals" despite their acquittal verdicts.

I would like to point out a few instances that I have experienced, which demonstrated that the effects of the State of Emergency persist in the most severe manner. The Inquiry Commission on the State of Emergency Measures (SoE Commission) was established with a view to reviewing and resolving the legal grievances that resulted from the dismissals of public officials in the fastest and most effective manner possible, as was pledged to the Council of Europe. That, however, has not been the case thus far.

Out of the 126,758 applications concerning the dismissals of public officials and various institutions and organizations that were shut down by statutory decrees, the SoE Commission concluded its review of 118,415 applications, finding some 15,050 applications admissible.

Let us examine how this has come to be:

The members of the SoE Commission exceed their duties and authorities; declare people criminals; refuse to respect the judgment issued as a result of the criminal proceedings; disregard the presumption of innocence, and refuse to recognize acquittal verdicts. All decisions are issued in this arbitrary and unlawful manner. To put it succinctly, the SoE Commission rejects applications lodged by those who were acquitted and those the criminal proceedings against whom were discontinued alike, and refuses to reinstate them. On top of it, the Commission cites a bizarre fabricated **"accusation"** known as **"guilt by association."**

Those whose applications are rejected file fruitless lawsuits in either of the six administrative courts that the Commission has set up to suit its own ends. Yet, the same **"guilt by association"** conundrum, oddly enough, gets its claws into these administrative courts, which conduct nothing less than extremely **"sensitive reviews."** Just like the members of the SoE Commission, the judges of the administrative courts refuse to acknowledge the acquittal verdicts, or refuse to consider themselves bound by the Constitution, and disregard the judgments rendered by the Constitutional Court (AYM) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

I'd like to give an example of a case I've been handling to illustrate how the rights could not be obtained despite the ECtHR and the AYM judgments,

which found violations, and an acquittal verdict which has become final after it was reviewed by the Supreme Court of Appeals; how the acquittal verdict has been rendered ineffective, and how it was not made retroactive.

Mehmet Altan is my client. He has been a professor, writer and journalist for 30 years. When he was sentenced to aggravated life imprisonment, there were three separate decisions rendered by the Plenary of the Constitutional Court, which found that his rights had been violated. The AYM had delivered the judgment in question by examining all the evidence in his file. Nevertheless, the judges of the Istanbul 26th High Criminal Court, a court of first instance, saw fit to sentence him to aggravated life imprisonment based on evidence, none of which suggested any strong suspicion that he had committed a crime. Like the AYM, the ECtHR found that his rights had been violated, and condemned the decision of the Istanbul 26th High Criminal Court, which ignored the Constitution and refused to comply with the AYM judgment. The AYM delivered a second infringement decision on the grounds that the Istanbul 26th High Criminal Court refused to implement its previous judgment. The Supreme Court of Appeals ruled that Mehmet Altan should have been acquitted; at long last, Mehmet Altan was acquitted.

Still, the seven members of the SoE Commission, all bureaucrats, ignored all these decisions. They refused to comply with the Constitution and the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and failed to consider themselves as bound by the judgments of the AYM and the ECtHR. Under no circumstances can this happen in a state governed by the rule of law. Additionally, the SoE Commission opted to falsify official documents with respect to Mehmet Altan. The Commission rejected the application lodged on behalf of Altan on the grounds that there was an investigation about him at Istanbul University, Altan's former employer, and on the grounds of his conviction.

Mehmet Altan was not convicted, and there were no administrative investigations launched against him in any capacity. An official institution was downright lying, and playing with people's lives. Although he was acquitted, Mehmet Altan was not reinstated in his post; could not receive the monthly wages to which he was entitled; could not receive his retirement grant; could not receive his pension, and could not get his passport back. He had to file separate lawsuits for each of them.

After the SoE Commission rejected our appeal, we filed a lawsuit with the administrative court, as did many other victims of law, who were in a similar

situation. Just like the members of the SoE Commission, the handpicked members of the administrative court refused to regard themselves as bound by the Constitution. They refused to implement the decisions delivered by the high courts and other courts. They chose to ignore the lies uttered by the **members of the SoE Commission**.

Furthermore, they rejected the case concerned even though Istanbul University had informed the relevant court that there were no investigations against Mehmet Altan while he still stood trial. Look how the Ankara 21st Administrative Court explained in its reasoned judgment in writing that it was ignoring the acquittal verdict, which became final:

"...even though an acquittal verdict was rendered in the case brought against those concerned on the charge of membership as part of the criminal proceedings, it is obligatory for the administrative place of jurisdiction to also examine the proceedings in terms of the **elements of liaison and association**..."

What is that **"obligation"** that makes the elements of **"liaison and association,"** which are not prescribed by the law, superior to the Constitution and laws? It is obligatory to comply with the provisions of the Constitution and laws. The members of the SoE Commission and the judges of the administrative court find elements of **"liaison and association"** based on the same evidence examined by the trial court which rendered the acquittal verdict. In this way, they both committed constitutional crimes and created further rights violations.

They are taking over people's lives. **The seven-member SoE Commission** and the three-person administrative court are fabricating a phony legal system according to their own design. There has never been such a period when the judiciary has been so politicized as to wage a war against the Constitution and the rule of law. Unfortunately, the legal struggle for freedom of expression and the press, or any other fundamental right and freedom for that matter, is extremely challenging.

While the court decisions, and even the top court judgments, fail to remedy the effects of rights violations, **it would be a realistic, albeit a painful, assessment to point out the extent to which the exercise of constitutional rights is precarious and unpredictable** in Turkey.

'Man to Man is an arrant Wolf,' wrote Thomas Hobbes, which we might amend as **'Politicized judiciary to Judiciary is an arrant Wolf.'** to express our distress how the law is being betrayed by its expert practitioners.

Journalism

Fatma Demirelli

2021 was a year in which every aspect of the crackdown on media outlets and journalists in Turkey became more intense. Although the number of imprisoned journalists, either in pre-trial detention or serving sentences, decreased, trials against journalists continued unabated, while the area of press freedom was also further restricted through political, administrative and financial mechanisms. Legal regulations concerning disinformation and affecting media outlets that receive foreign funding, which the government announced that it would enact before the end of the year, but have not yet been introduced to the Parliament, have raised concerns that this particular area may be further circumscribed in the not-too-distant future.

First of all, let's examine the decrease in the number of jailed journalists in Turkey. According to the data of the Expression Interrupted, operating within the Platform for Independent Journalism (P24), the number of imprisoned journalists in Turkey was 58 as of the time of writing, January 2022.¹

This number had risen to 170s in the period following the declaration of nationwide State of Emergency (SoE), which saw the highest concentration of journalist detentions. At the beginning of 2021, it was 87. One of the reasons for the decline in these figures is the apparent decrease in new journalist arrests, particularly over the past two years. Another reason is that a considerable number of jailed journalists, the vast majority of whom were detained in the wake of the coup attempt of 15 July 2016 and the subsequent declaration of SoE, were released from prison upon the completion of their sentences of up to five years.

Although the decrease in the number of jailed journalists in Turkey is, in itself, a positive development, it is significant to emphasize that this does not necessarily mean that the pressure on journalists through the judiciary has diminished. Again, according to the data obtained from the Expression Interrupted, members of the press appeared before a court as defendants in more than 30 cases each month throughout 2021, except for May, when no hearings were held unless as a matter of emergency due to the Covid-19 pandemic, and July and August, which coincided with the judicial recess.

¹ Journalists in Prison list, Expression Interrupted, <https://www.expressioninterrupted.com/census.php>

The details of major cases are in this report.² While some trials ended with acquittals, others resulted in convictions totaling 130 years in prison. In the eventuality these sentences are upheld during the appeal process, members of the press who were handed down sentences will go to prison. Again, throughout 2021, new lawsuits and investigations that could result in lawsuits were launched against dozens of journalists.³

Physical interventions and attacks constituted a key part of the crackdown on journalists. Throughout the year, scores of journalists were subjected to attacks and interventions of either the police or the civilians during news coverage. Following, in particular, the contentious police circular prohibiting all audiovisual recording during public demonstrations, issued at the end of April, there has been an undeniable increase in the police violence against journalists, especially during protest demonstrations. During the Pride Parade in June in downtown Istanbul, which was banned by the local authorities, the detention of Bülent Kılıç, a photojournalist for Agence France-Presse (AFP), as he was pressed to the ground with police holding him down with their knees, prompted public demonstrations across numerous cities of Turkey, led by journalist organizations under the slogan "Nefes Alamyoruz" ("We Cannot Breathe"). During the demonstrations, police violence, which threatens the physical safety of journalists and render them almost incapable of performing their duties in the streets, was protested. Even though the Council of State later stopped the execution of the impugned police circular, it is difficult to claim that this judgment affected the situation on the ground.

Violence against journalists did not only originate from the police. Dozens of journalists in different parts of Turkey were subjected to physical attacks of civilians during news coverage. Although some of these attacks were politically motivated (e.g., the attack against journalist Levent Gültekin in front of the Halk TV building, where he presented a TV show, or the attack

² <https://www.expressioninterrupted.com/uploader/uploader/freedom-of-expression-and-the-press-agenda-2021-4>

³ See Freedom of Expression and the Press Agenda reports for relevant data, Expression Interrupted <https://www.expressioninterrupted.com/uploader/uploader/freedom-of-expression-and-the-press-2021-1> <https://www.expressioninterrupted.com/uploader/uploader/freedom-of-expression-and-the-press-agenda-2021-2> <https://www.expressioninterrupted.com/uploader/uploader/freedom-of-expression-and-the-press-agenda-2021-3>

on journalists in Istanbul's Kasımpaşa district, who were covering the protests against the violent killing of seven members of a Kurdish family in Konya province), many of the attacks were observed to have no political motives (e.g., the killing of Hasım Özsu, a Bursa-based local radio host, who was shot dead by a listener who did not like his on air remarks). This raises concerns that the climate of intolerance and impunity to react, created against journalists across the country encourages attacks by civilians. As a matter of fact, it was well-documented that scores of journalists were subjected to threats and targeting of government officials and the politicians affiliated with coalition partner Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) via social media, while violent acts against journalists were not effectively investigated, and perpetrators were rewarded with impunity.

In addition to the attacks, the discriminatory practices during press cards distribution has aggravated the working conditions of journalists in 2021. Again, although the Council of State ultimately stopped the execution of the relevant provision of the Press Cards Regulation, the official press cards of hundreds of journalists were not renewed without justification. Arbitrary practices concerning media accreditation were yet another obstacle for journalists trying to cover news stories on the ground.

Another significant restrictive mechanism for press freedom in 2021 was the decisions issued by the public bodies tasked with media regulation, Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) and The Press Advertising Agency (BİK), which are mandated by law to act independently. It is a well-known fact that public ad bans and staggering administrative fines issued by these bodies create a significant financial burden for newspapers and TV stations.

It was reported, based on official reports, during the year that the BİK, in charge of fair distribution of public advertisements and announcements among the newspapers, disproportionately transferred the public ad revenues to pro-government newspapers, while issuing an array of public ad bans, almost exclusively, to critical media outlets.⁴ Furthermore, the BİK decisions

⁴ "Türkiye'de hükümete yakın medyaya para aktı" (Money was funneled to pro-government media in Turkey),

DW Türkçe, <https://www.dw.com/tr/t%C3%BCrkiyede-h%C3%BCK%C3%BCmete-yak%C4%B1n-medya-para-akt%C4%B1/a-57699280> and "Basın İlan Kurumu cezalarının yüzde 88'i beş gazeteye" (88 per cent of the Press Advertising Agency fines imposed on five newspapers), Bianet, <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/ifade-ozgurluguz/238864-basin-ilan-kurumucezalarinin-yuzde-88-i-bes-gazeteye>

concerning the suspension of the right of *Evrensel* and *Yeni Asya* newspapers to publish public announcements and advertisements since September 2019 and January 2020, respectively, continued to be in effect. These two newspapers also face the imminent threat of permanently losing their advertising licenses, as they failed to reinstate their right to run public ads.

A similar discriminatory and politicized practice was applied by the RTÜK to TV stations: According to the data shared by İlhan Taşçı, a RTÜK member who was elected from the CHP quota, the Supreme Council issued fines to the TV stations Halk TV, TELE 1, FOX TV, KRT and Habertürk to the amount of more than TL 21 million due to their broadcasts critical of the government, while pro-government TV stations were not subject to any fines during the same period. The letters of warning sent by the RTÜK to the executives of TV stations across the country during the wildfires that raged in the southern Aegean and Mediterranean regions during summer, giving instructions as to how to proceed with the broadcasts on the wildfires, and the heavy fines subsequently levied against six TV stations were documented as serious attempts of the RTÜK to censor TV broadcasts.

Cases

MA reporter Mehmet Aslan was taken into custody during a police raid on his house as part of an investigation launched by Antalya Chief Public Prosecutor's Office. (January)

MA reporter Mehmet Aslan confirmed the claims that he was subjected to a strip search when he was arrested as part of an investigation launched by Antalya Chief Public Prosecutor's Office. (January)

Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation against journalist Can Ataklı who said, "Tayyip Erdoğan seçimle gider mi? Bana göre hayır" ("Would Tayyip Erdoğan step down if he loses an election? I think not") in a YouTube video, on the charge of "inciting the public to hatred and hostility." (January)

An investigation was launched against DW Turkish reporter Pelin Ünker over a news report on allegations of shady transactions by Turkey's Aktif Bank in leaked Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) files, titled "ABD bankalarından suçlama: Aktif Bank şüpheli işlemlere aracı oluyor" (US banks accuse: Aktif Bank mediates suspicious transactions") upon a complaint by the Aktif Bank. As part of the investigation, Ünker was called in for questioning to the Istanbul Police Department's Directorate of Combating Financial Crimes. (January)

BİK imposed a three-day public ad ban on *Evrensel* newspaper over a news article on *Cumhuriyet* newspaper staffers who were called in for questioning upon a complaint by CİMER Director Fahrettin Altun. (January)

An investigation was launched against journalist Melis Alphan on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" over sharing a photograph taken during the 2015 Newroz festivities in Diyarbakır on social media. (January)

Istanbul 30th Criminal Court of First Instance issued an arrest warrant for journalist Cengiz Çandar, who stood trial on the charge of "praising an

offense and offender," and a letter rogatory for Çandar's statement to be taken in Sweden. (January)

An investigation was launched against Yılmaz Özdil, a columnist for *Sözcü* newspaper, on the charge of "publicly degrading the Parliament" and "for writing the last three letters of TBMM in lower case" in a news article on the allegations of corruption at the Parliament. (January)

Journalist Zeynel Abidin Bulut was sentenced to ten months in prison on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" for attending a commemoration held in memory of a journalist, who died in 2011. (January)

MA reporter İdris Sayılğan was sentenced to four years in prison on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" over his social media posts. (February)

Journalist Alican Uludağ was sentenced to ten months in prison on the charge of "marking a public official involved in fight against terrorism as a target" for criticizing Yüksel Kocaman, the former Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor. (February)

An indictment was prepared for İbrahim Karakaş, an employee of *Yeni Yaşam* newspaper, charging him with "being a member of a terrorist organization." The fact that Karakaş's mobile phone was turned off at certain times was taken as evidence for Karakaş being in the organization's camp at that time. (February)

In the decision of Van Chief Public Prosecutor's Office to discontinue the proceedings concerning journalist Oktay Candemir, who was briefly detained in September 2020 over his social media posts where he commented on the TV series *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (*Resurrection: Ertuğrul*), it was stated that "Ottoman sultans" were harmed by the alleged crime. (February)

A news article by journalist İsmail Saymaz, titled "Çeberrut state virus" ("Despot devlet virüsü") published on the website of *Sözcü* newspaper, criticizing the gendarmerie, was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (February)

On 4 February, reporters Taylan Öztaş and Rojin Altay were taken into custody as they were covering a public statement to announce the establishment of Birleşik Mücadele Güçleri (United Struggle Forces). Altay was released after giving his statement to the prosecutor while Öztaş was released under judicial control measures. (February)

Medyascope employee Özge Elvan, elder sister of Berkin Elvan who died after being hit on the head by a tear gas canister fired by the police during the Gezi Park protests of 2013, was taken into custody in Kadıköy during a demonstration, even though she did not attend the protest but was nearby. Elvan was released under judicial control measures in the form of an international travel ban. (February)

Journalist and writer Ayşen Şahin, who was taken into custody on 8 February on the charge of “inciting the public to hatred and hostility” over her social media posts, was released after giving her statement to the police. (February)

On a social media post, Ahmet Takan, a columnist for *Korkusuz* newspaper, announced that he was detained due to a recent arrest warrant issued as part of an ongoing trial against him, of which he was not notified. Takan was released after giving his statement to the court. (February)

Journalist Mustafa Hoş, who was investigating a train accident in Çorlu province in 2018 which left 25 people, including seven children, dead, was ordered by a court to pay 40,000 Turkish Liras in compensation on the charge of “deliberately targeting the judicial authority.” (February)

Evrensel newspaper’s responsible managing editor Görkem Kınacı is charged with “inciting the public to hatred and hostility” in a new trial over a news article published in December 2018, titled “Sakarya’da ırkçı saldırı: Baba hayatını kaybetti, oğlu tedavi altında” (Racist attack in Sakarya; Father dies, son hospitalized). (February)

The final hearing in the trial of former executives of *Özgür Gündem* newspaper, which was shut down by a statutory decree, was held. Four journalists were sentenced to a total of 20 years and ten months in prison. (February)

Five journalists, four of whom were jailed pending trial, was charged with “membership in a terrorist organization” in an indictment that was issued 130 days after they were arrested for their coverage of the allegations that two locals were tortured and thrown out of a helicopter by soldiers in the city of Van. (February)

In an individual application lodged with the Constitutional Court by Beyza Kural, a former *bianet* reporter, concerning the police violence experienced in 2015, the top court ruled for a retrial and a compensation of 15,000 Turkish Liras in respect of non-pecuniary damage. (February)

In a joint statement at the Turkish Writers' Union's call, 344 writers, poets, artists and journalists shared their support of Boğaziçi University students with the public. (February)

The BİK penalties, widely slammed by the print media as a form of “financial censorship,” continued unabated, despite a recent judgment delivered by the Constitutional Court, which held that the penalties constituted a violation of press freedom. The agency imposed a two-day public ad ban on *BirGün* newspaper over a news report about Turkey’s Wushu Federation. (March)

In a news article about the TV show *Friends* coming to Netflix Turkey that read, “Netflix, ahlaksız dizi *Friends* ile gençleri hedef almayı amaçlıyor” (Netflix aims to target young people with the immoral TV series *Friends*), *Yeni Akit* newspaper made a call to RTÜK to remove the program from the platform. (March)

The police prevented journalists from interviewing Murat Sarısağ, one of the HDP MPs who started a protest outside the Van Governor's Office after the street where the HDP Van Provincial Organization building was located was closed with police barriers. (March)

AA censored a letter written by veteran actor Ferhan Şensoy for actor Rasim Öztekin, who passed away in March. In its news story, the state-run agency removed the part that read, “Buluşuruz gökyüzünde neşeli bir meyhanede” (We will meet again in a cheerful tavern in the sky) from the letter. (March)

JinNews announced that their Instagram posts, which included photos taken at the Newroz festivities in the city of Van, were removed by the platform on the grounds that they “violated the community guidelines.” (March)

London-based journalist, writer and filmmaker Ruhi Karadağ was taken into custody in Istanbul, for “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” in one of his books. Upon giving his statement, Karadağ was released under an international travel ban. (March)

BİK imposed a five-day public ad ban on *Evensel* newspaper over a news article which used the word “saldırı” (attack) to describe police conduct during Boğaziçi University protests. (April)

The 16th Criminal Chamber of the Supreme Court of Appeals overturned the convictions of jailed novelist and journalist Ahmet Altan and his co-defendant jailed journalist Nazlı Ilıcak, who were sentenced in 2019 to ten years and six months and eight years and nine months in prison, respectively. The top court ordered Altan’s release, taking into consideration the grounds cited for the reversal and the time he spent in detention. (April)

BİK issued a three-day advertising ban to *BirGün* newspaper on the grounds that a news article about the Turkish Wushu Federation titled “Yasa tanımayan federasyon” (The federation that knows no law) was incompatible with the Press Ethics Principles. (April)

BİK imposed a five-day advertising ban on *Evensel* newspaper due to an article penned by columnist Ceren Sözeri. This latest penalty brought the advertising bans levied against *Evensel* since 2019 to a total of 103 days. (May)

Journalists’ Association of Turkey (TGC) announced that they filed a lawsuit against the police circular, dated 27 April, prohibiting all audiovisual recording during public demonstrations, which was described as “censorship,” at the Council of State. (June)

Kültür Servisi, an online cultural news portal launched in 2015, closed due to

economic difficulties. Singer Sezen Aksu had previously filed a complaint against the portal for copyright infringement. (July)

In a public meeting held with the citizens who were affected by the forest fires in Muğla, Murat Kurum, the Minister of Environment and Urbanization, told *BirGün* reporter Sarya Toprak, “You cannot film here even if you are a journalist.” Police officers forcibly removed the reporter from the area. (August)

Prof. Ergün Yıldırım, a faculty member at Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, quit his column at pro-government *Yeni Şafak* newspaper, stating that the opportunity to write freely in the paper had been limited in recent years and his last two columns had not been published. (August)

Yeni Asır newspaper targeted a number of actors and artists who shared posts on social media about the raging wildfires with the hashtag “Help Turkey,” asking, “Which country are you citizens of?” (August)

In its reasoned judgment, concerning the application filed against the temporary closure of *Özgür Gündem* newspaper, the Constitutional Court held that the decision violated freedom of expression and of the press. The top court also noted that the rights of persons who lodged individual applications with the court on the matter in their capacity as readers were violated as well. (September)

At a commemoration held on the 29th anniversary of the murder of writer and journalist Musa Anter, the police did not allow a photo of Ferhat Tepe, a reporter for *Özgür Gündem* newspaper who was killed 27 years ago, to be carried on the grounds that it was “forbidden.” (September)

Cumhuriyet newspaper was prohibited from publishing public announcements and advertisements for 74 days over a news report about an illegal construction on a patch of land in Istanbul, rented from the Directorate General of Foundations by the CİMER Director Fahrettin Altun. (September)

While publishing the video of actress Nihal Yalçın’s acceptance speech after she won the Best Actress Award for her performance in the film *Zuhal* at the

58th Golden Orange Film Festival, *Yeni Akit* newspaper blurred Yalçın's body except for her face. (October)

In a demonstration held in protest against the detention of two university students upon the complaint of the Boğaziçi University's government-appointed rector, the police prevented journalists from performing their duties. Erdinç Yılmaz, a reporter for Halk TV, was beaten. (October)

Private security guards at the entrance of Yıldız Technical University told students that they would be denied entry to the school unless they disposed their copies of *Genç Hayat*, a bi-weekly youth supplement published by *Evrensel* newspaper. (October)

Syrian journalist Majed Sharma, who was sent to the Gaziantep Deportation Center after he published a satirical video on the recent "banana eaters" videos on social media in response to a Turkish citizen who claimed in a street interview that only Syrians could afford bananas in Turkey due to economic hardship, was released from the center after spending nine days in custody. (November)

Van-based newspaper distributor Özgür Ali Ağaoğlu was detained and taken to the Van Police Department in an armored police car without any justification while he was distributing papers in the İpekyolu district. The police seized all copies of *Yeni Yaşam* and *Xwebûn* newspapers Ağaoğlu was distributing. (December)

Odatv columnists M. Ayhan Kara and Nurzen Amuran announced that they were leaving the news portal due to a recent change in its editorial policy as their columns were censored. (December)

Music

Lara Güney Özlen

In 2021, the restrictions imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic continued to affect musicians in Turkey. The postponement or cancellation of a number of music festivals until July, and the fact that restaurants and bars where musicians performed were subject to curfew due to the pandemic have put musicians in a dire economic situation. In addition, the lawsuits filed against musicians under Article 1 and Article 7 of the Anti-Terror Law (TMK) or Article 299 of the Turkish Criminal Code (TCK) and bans on concerts were noteworthy forms of violations in the field of music this year.

During the "normalization" process, initiated in July, when the pandemic surged, restaurants, cafes and performance venues were forced to close at 00:00. In the following months, this restriction was relaxed, and the venues could remain open until later; however, it was stipulated that the music played in such venues, either live or recorded, was to stop at midnight. In June, the Ankara Bar Association lodged a lawsuit with the Council of State on the grounds that the impugned decision was unlawful and contrary to Articles 2, 10 and 64 of the Constitution.⁵

Musicians endeavored to cope with the deepening economic insecurity and crisis due to the pandemic restrictions. In particular, many musicians protested, either individually or collectively, against the midnight music ban. Culture and art workers gathered in the provinces Istanbul, Izmir and Ankara to hold a silent protest with their instruments for half an hour, and said, "*Sanatın Saati Olmaz*," (Art Has No Time Limits). In order to draw attention to their protest, they posted about their demands on social media with the hashtag "#SanatinSaatiOlmaz (#ArtHasNoTimeLimits).⁶

The popular rock band Redd, who could not perform due to the pandemic conditions, held an open-air concert in Maçka Park in Istanbul province to "draw attention to the desperation of the sector."⁷ Rap musician Burkay Yalnız, more commonly known by his stage name Ağaçkakan, announced

⁵ <https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/ankara-barosundan-muzik-yasagina-dava-haber-1526896>

⁶ <https://susma24.com/kultur-ve-sanat-emekcilerinden-sessiz-ciglik/>

⁷ <https://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/redd-grubundan-konser-tepkilerine-yanit-mackada-yaptigimiz-bir-konser-degil-bir-eylemdi-1843593>

that he would hold a protest concert in Istanbul's Kadıköy Mehmet Ayvalıtış Park to turn the spotlight on the plight of the musicians who were affected by the restrictions imposed due to Covid-19. Ağačkakan was briefly taken into custody, along with six of his listeners, and was released a few hours later. Ağačkakan and his listeners were issued with a judicial fine for "non-compliance with the curfew."

Sadly, more than 100 musicians, who experienced economic difficulties because they were not allowed to work during the pandemic due to the nationwide restrictions and could not benefit from the government aid, committed suicide. In addition, the rights of those who attempted to highlight the hardships experienced by musicians and the musicians who died by suicide, were also violated. Musician İbrahim Ethem Tüzer was briefly detained after he staged a one-man protest of "standing still" outside the Batman Governor's Office, holding a banner that read, "*Pandemide 102 müzisyen intihar etti*" ("102 musicians committed suicide during the pandemic"). Tüzer was released after giving his statement to the police. In a statement, Tüzer said that the reason behind the recent wave of musician suicides was "arbitrary prohibitions and the unmanageable pandemic process."

The Susma Platform compiled a dossier "*Müzisyenler Anlatıyor*" (Musicians Speak), which attracted substantial social media interest, particularly among those working in the field of music and live performance.⁸ It highlighted the economic hardships other problems experienced by musicians as well as limited or non-existent government support for the gig economy.

As in previous years, many concerts and music festivals were either postponed or canceled arbitrarily. The pandemic was not the only reason cited for the cancellation of concerts: Many musical artists, concerts and festivals were criminalized on such grounds as "national security [and protection of public order]," and thus, a number of concerts were canceled at short notice and often without any justification, despite prior permission having been granted. In October, the MKM concert, which was scheduled to take place at Bostancı Cultural Center on the occasion of its 30th anniversary, was banned by the Kadıköy District Governor's Office merely hours before the event on the

⁸ <https://susma24.com/muzisyenler-anlatiyor-binlerce-insan-kadeterine-terk-edildi-bir-dayanisma-agi-kurmaya-calisiyorum/>

grounds that it would endanger "national security, public order, prevention of crime, the rights and freedoms of others." These ostensibly arbitrary banning orders targeted, by and large, the musicians who performed Kurdish music.

In addition to bans on their stage performances, Kurdish musicians also faced numerous lawsuits filed against them, especially under the provisions of the TMK. In 2021, an investigation was launched against Kurdish musician Ferhat Tunç, who was, at the time, facing six separate lawsuits on the charges of "insulting the president," "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" and "membership in a terrorist organization," seeking a total prison term of 20 years or more, on the allegation of "inciting the public to hatred and animosity" (TCK 216) for condemning the ISIS attack on an Istanbul nightclub, Reina, during the New Year's Eve celebrations four years ago. As can be seen, musicians in Turkey also face far-reaching retroactive investigations.

In addition to the TMK, many musicians were also detained and prosecuted for insulting the president or a public official in their social media posts. For instance, rap musician Ufuk Yılmaz, more commonly known by his stage name Şehinşah, was briefly detained on the charge of "insulting the president" over critical lyrics in two songs, *Hepsi Benim 2* and *Sayın Türk*. After he was released, Şehinşah stated that he would "continue to make protest songs." His lawyer said that they would continue to advocate for freedom of expression.

In 2021, rap music artists stood trial especially for "encouraging the use of narcotics or psychotropic substances" (TCK 190/2). Rap music artist Burak Aydoğduoğlu, publicly known as Burry Soprano, was arrested on the charge of "encouraging the use of narcotics" for the lyrics in his song *Mary Jane*. After the musician was detained, many people took to Twitter to request his release, using the hashtag "#freeburrysoprano". After he was acquitted, the music artist said "I wouldn't wish it on anyone to be prosecuted over a song," in a post he shared on social media.

Rap music artist Önder Doğan, known by his stage name Murda, was briefly detained on the charge of "encouraging the use of narcotics" over his lyrics in the songs *Duman*, *Pahalı* and *Eh baba*. The musician was released after giving his statement to the police. It can be claimed that musicians' penning or performing lyrics that reflect the subculture of rap music or contain

political criticism created the “legal grounds” for their arrest or prosecution. To conclude, musicians were forced to contend with increasing precariousness brought on and further deepened as a result of the pandemic restrictions and inaccessible support mechanisms in 2021. Musicians were arrested, prosecuted or their concerts were canceled on such allegations as “insulting the president” or “encouraging the use of narcotics” over their lyrics which contained political criticism or which were written in their mother tongue.

Cases

The ECtHR ruled that the pre-trial detention of singer and columnist Atilla Taş as part of the case publicly known as the “FETÖ media trial” violated his right to liberty and security and freedom of expression. (January)

A Haber targeted the rappers who featured on the song *Susasam (I Cannot Keep Silent)* released in 2019. In a documentary video titled *Susma (Speak-Up)*, it was claimed that the rappers were “criminals” and “served terrorism.” (February)

The trial of Kurdish musician Hozan Canê, who was released in October 2020 under judicial control measures in the form of international travel ban after spending two years and five months in pre-trial detention on charges of “aiding a terrorist organization,” was adjourned to a future date. (February)

A total of 252 musicians released a joint statement in support of the university students who were protesting against the appointment of a rector to Boğaziçi University. The statement read, “We embrace the academics who are committed to democratic values and the students who voiced their objections to injustices.” (February)

Musician Servet Erkan announced that his street performance was blocked by the Eskişehir Odunpazarı Municipality on the grounds that he did not hold a “street performer license” and was warned that he could be “prohibited from conducting any arts or trade.” (February)

In a trial against musician Ferhat Tunç on the charges of “inciting the public to hatred and hostility” and “insulting the president,” the Darmstadt Prosecutor’s Office rejected the Turkish request for the statement of Tunç, who resides in Germany, to be taken by a letter rogatory. The court adjourned the trial until September 2021. (March)

SN Music, singer Sezen Aksu’s production company, presented the cultural news portal *Kültür Servisi* with the options to either “settle” the case for TL 11,000 or to go to court, alleging “a violation of copyright law” due to a news

article which embedded a YouTube video of Sezen Aksu on the website. *Kültür Servisi* claimed Aksu's lawyer was trying to prevent them from covering this story. (March)

Rap music artist Burak Aydoğduoğlu, more commonly known as Burry Soprano, was sent on 12 March to Silivri Prison after his conviction of 4 years and 2 months on the charge of "encouraging the use of narcotics" had become final. In a Twitter post, the rapper announced that he was released from prison. (March)

An investigation was launched against singer Aleyna Tilki upon a complaint made to CİMER by a citizen who was disturbed by her remarks on Covid-19. (March)

An allegedly criminal complaint was filed against musician Eyüp Temirak, who performs street music in Kurdish under the stage name Siwaro, for using an amphitheater in İstanbul's Kadıköy district. His instruments were confiscated in the aftermath of an altercation that broke out when the musician resisted the municipal police. (April)

Singer Sezen Aksu filed a lawsuit against the cultural news portal *Kültür Servisi* over embedding a YouTube video of the song *Ne Yapayım Şimdi Ben* (*What Am I Supposed to Do Now*) on their website. The first hearing in the trial is scheduled for 1 June. (April)

In a parliamentary question to the Minister of Culture and Tourism Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, CHP Deputy Ali Haydar Hakverdi stated that the TBMM invited 200 people, including musicians and technical staff, who had yet to be vaccinated against Covid-19 at the time, to rehearse indoors for four days for the filming of a concert at a time when the number of coronavirus cases was still high. (April)

RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin stated that Spotify had to take steps to adjust the content on its platform in accordance with the laws in Turkey. (May)

Musician İbrahim Ethem Tüzer, who was staging a one-man protest in which

he held a sign that read, "Pandemide 102 müzisyen hayatını kaybetti" ("102 musicians died during the pandemic") outside the Batman Governor's Office, was detained. Tüzer was released after giving his statement to the police. (May)

An indictment was prepared against Koma Awaza Azad singers Fuat Ege and Rohat Aram on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" over the song *Mizgina leheng* (*Mizgin the hero*) they sang at the Newroz celebrations in Van province. (May)

Musician Yılmaz Çelik, who was arrested in December 2019 after a concert and released pending trial approximately four months later, was acquitted in the trial, in which he was charged with "membership in a terrorist organization" and "making propaganda for a terrorist organization." (June)

The first hearing in the copyright lawsuit filed by singer Sezen Aksu's production company, SN Music, against the cultural news portal *Kültür Servisi* for embedding a music video on their website was held on 1 June. The court adjourned the trial until 7 October. (June)

In Diyarbakır, musicians dressed in all black to draw attention to what they went through during the Covid-19 pandemic and called for an urgent solution. In İstanbul, musicians put their instruments on sale for unemployed stage workers. (June)

In a Twitter post, rap music artist Ufuk Yıkılmaz, more commonly known as Şehinşah, was detained on 5 June on the charge of "insulting the president," and released the next day. (June)

Melih Bulu, the government-appointed rector of Boğaziçi University, and his administration did not approve the "Film Music" course by part-time lecturer Feyzi Erçin planned for the summer school and did not send a written document on the subject to the relevant department. (June)

Rap music artist Burcak Yalnız, more commonly known as Ağaçkakan (Woodpecker), gave a midnight concert in İstanbul's Kadıköy district as a

reaction to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's announcement that it was forbidden to play music in public places after midnight. Yalnız and his six listeners were taken into custody, and released after a few hours. (June)

Following President Erdoğan's announcement that the restrictions on music would remain intact as part of the Covid-19 restrictions, the Ankara Bar Association filed a lawsuit with the Council of State to overturn the ban on music after 12 a.m. (June)

Security guards prevented students from performing music in the Marmaray, the intercontinental railway tunnel beneath the Bosphorus Strait, claiming "they were disturbing the passengers." In response, the passengers said to the guards, "They did not receive any support during the pandemic. What are they supposed to do?" (June)

Kurdish musician Dengbej Axîn Biro (İbrahim Ertaş), a prostate patient and a diabetic who was imprisoned in Alanya L-Type Prison, stated that he had been placed in solitary confinement due to his hunger strike against isolation. (June)

The Beyoğlu District Governor's Office banned a planned concert of Grup Yorum, which was to be recorded at the Ferhan Şensoy stage and released on the Internet. (July)

Opera singer Güvenç Dağüstün was taken into custody on the charge of "insult" over a Twitter post, in which he quote tweeted pro-government academic Selman Öğüt, who was, according to Dağüstün, making it seem like those who supported a solidarity campaign for children with SMA "supported terrorism." (July)

Kültür Servisi, an online cultural news portal launched in 2015, closed due to economic difficulties. Singer Sezen Aksu had previously filed a complaint against the portal for copyright infringement. (July)

The Beyoğlu Municipality's municipal police unit prevented musicians from performing on İstiklal Street in Istanbul, and confiscated the instruments of

the musicians. The police prevented journalist Hakan Tosun from filming the intervention by checking his criminal record and seizing his press card. (July)

A motion of parliamentary investigation submitted by İYİ Party regarding the deepening problems in the music sector due to Covid-19 and the "music bans" introduced during the pandemic was rejected by the AKP and the MHP. (July)

A criminal lawsuit was filed against musician Onur Kocamaz on the charge of "inciting the public to hatred and hostility" over a social media post where he commented against Turkey's cross-border operations, recalling the persecution of the Armenians, the Rum community and the Alevis. President Erdoğan joined the case due to the possibility of being harmed by the alleged offense. (July)

RTÜK considered the performance of the song *Cemo* by Hilmi Yarayıcı, a musician and former CHP MP, in the TV program *Görkemli Hatıralar* (*Glorious Memories*) as "making propaganda for a terrorist organization," and issued a program suspension order and an administrative fine to Halk TV. (July)

The Beyoğlu Municipality's municipal police unit prevented musicians from performing in Kurdish on İstiklal Street in Istanbul, and confiscated their instruments. (July)

İbrahim Birincioğlu, a street musician in Mersin province, who had worked for various arts organizations and was unemployed for a year, committed suicide on 1 August, as a result of economic difficulties. (August)

Disciplinary proceedings were launched against nine women prisoners at the Elaziğ Women's Closed Prison, including former DTK Co-Chair and HDP MP Leyla Güven, for "singing in Kurdish." (August)

Music band Koma Gulên Xerzan and musician Şêrzat, who were scheduled to perform at the joint Batman rally held by DTK, Free Women's Movement, Democratic Regions Party and the HDP, were denied entry to the concert area by the police. (August)

The prisoners at the Bakırköy Women's Closed Prison stated that an investigation was launched against them for singing in Kurdish and that they were prevented from making their defense statements in Kurdish. (August)

Opera singer and *BirGün* daily columnist Güvenç Dağüstün, who gave a concert with pianist Burçin Büke at Kadıköy Özgürlük Park Open Air Stage on the occasion of 30 August Victory Day, was physically attacked by two unidentified individuals as he was leaving the scene. (August)

Ahead of a HDP rally in Batman province, where many musicians, including Şivan Perwer, were scheduled to take place, the police confiscated the instruments of the musicians. (September)

An investigation was launched against 13 individuals on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" for dancing the "halay" to a Şivan Perwer song, *Serhildan Jiyane (To Live is to Resist)*, at a HDP rally held in Batman province. (September)

Shortly before the start of the fall semester, Naci İnci, who was appointed as the rector of Boğaziçi University, and his administration terminated the contract of Seda Binbaşgil, who had been teaching jazz at the university for 16 years. (September)

The Adana Governor's Office banned a planned concert of Kaldırım Müzik Topluluğu and Grup Munzur on the grounds of "the posts that aimed at calling on people to attend the concert on social media platforms shared by marginal groups" and "the intelligence that members of terrorist organizations were coming to Adana to stir things up." (September)

The "Peace and Solidarity Concert" organized by the İHD Hatay Branch, where the musical bands Kaldırım Müzik Topluluğu, Babilok Erbane Topluluğu and Grup İsyen Ateşi were scheduled to perform, was banned by the Defne District Governor's Office. (September)

The AYM held that the 2-year prison sentence levied against a public bus driver in Diyarbakır on the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization"

by listening to Kurdish songs on his route was lawful, and thus, the sentence in question did not violate his freedom of expression. (October)

A planned concert of Bulgarian musician Azis as part of the Balkan Festival in Bursa was canceled after pro-government *Yeni Akit* newspaper targeted the musician for being gay, as well as the festival. In its statement, the Kestel Municipality said that they had made the mistake of granting permission to the concert without seeing any of the musician's photos or videos in advance. (October)

Rapper Murda was detained in an İstanbul airport on the charge of "encouraging the use of narcotics and psychotropic substances" over his songs *Duman*, *Pahalı* and *Eh baba*; Murda was released after giving his statement. (October)

In Şırnak, an event to celebrate the anniversary of the HDP's founding was prohibited due to the "pandemic" by the district governor's office, which granted permission to two-day concert series organized by the Şırnak Municipality, run by the AKP. (October)

A planned concert where musicians Mikail Aslan and Cemil Qoçgiri were scheduled to perform in the Seyit Rıza Square as part of the Fall Events organized by Dersim Municipality was blocked due to a soldier's funeral and Covid-19 pandemic. (October)

A concert to be held at İstanbul's Bostancı Cultural Center on the occasion of MKM's 30th anniversary was prohibited by the Kadıköy District Governor's Office at the last minute on the grounds of "national security" and "potential danger to the rights and freedoms of others," despite a permission granted by the governor's office. (October)

During the HDP's "Call to Democracy" rally held in İstanbul's Çerkezköy district, the concert of the musical band Bajar was prohibited at short notice and without given justification. (November)

Kurdish musician Brindar Ali, known for his song *Batmane Batmane* was detained and sent to prison on the allegations of "making propaganda for a

terrorist organization” and “insulting the president” over his songs and social media posts. (November)

Kurdish musician Veysi Ermiş was sentenced to one year six months and 20 days in prison on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over his songs that include the words “guerrilla” and “Kurdistan.” (November)

It was claimed that the AKP-run Keçiören Municipality unilaterally canceled the contract for the concert hall at Neşet Ertaş Cultural Center, where Kurdish musician Mem Ararat was scheduled to perform, on the grounds that “There would be Kurdish music.” (November)

Syrian musician Omar Almasikh, more commonly known as Omar Souleyman, was detained on the charge of “membership in a terrorist organization” in the southeastern province of Urfa; the musician was released by the court to which he was referred. (November)

In a Twitter post, the folk-rock band Grup Yorum announced that nine members of the band were detained during a police raid on İdil Cultural Center, where the band was practicing. (December)

Cinema

Sonay Ban

Movie theaters, which had remained closed since 2020 as part of the Covid-19 measures, started to reopen their doors to the public within the framework of the “gradual normalization measures” on 1 July 2021. However, it seems unlikely in the short term that the sector will reach the pre-pandemic figures in terms of the movies produced and shown in movie theaters or box office numbers. Having said that, as was stated in our annual report for 2020,⁹ due in no small part to the fact that most people were stuck at home because of the pandemic, the censorship and self-censorship of film productions, domestic or foreign, continued in the digital realm. It should therefore be noted here that there are overlapping/similar cases of censorship and self-censorship under this title and the section, “Television and Internet Broadcasting.”

It would be appropriate to explain how we grouped together the cases under the section “Cinema” to illustrate how we separated and analyzed the cases under these two titles. We have documented and examined several cases of censorship and self-censorship that took place on the various platforms such as Blu TV; Netflix; Puhu TV and DMAX as a result of the entry into force of the law publicly known as “social media law”¹⁰ and the political and financial crackdown of the RTÜK on digital platforms. As can be seen below, we have archived the examples of censorship (such as blurring, cutting off scenes, bleep censor, differences in the translations of subtitles and dubbing, etc.) that platforms practiced over domestic and foreign films in their catalogue, mostly out of self-censorship. Throughout the year, we expressed our view on the subject in webinars/panels we organized¹¹ or podcast interviews¹² we attended. It is significant to emphasize here that the RTÜK does not directly interfere with the movie broadcasts, but the platforms practice self-censorship (in view of the ongoing practices) due

⁹ <https://susma24.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Censorship-and-Self-Censorship-in-Turkey-2019.pdf>

¹⁰ Law No. 5651 on “the Regulation of Broadcasts via the Internet and Prevention of Crimes Committed through Such Broadcasts”

¹¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fh7oAUvP8M4&ab_channel=SusmaPlatformu

¹² <https://acikradyo.com.tr/fasikul/susma-platformuyla-sansur-ve-otosansur-uzerine>

to the RTÜK hanging like the sword of Damocles over their broadcasts. In addition, we archived, yet again, the cases where the TV stations practiced self-censorship over domestic or foreign films by blurring images, cutting off scenes, or replacing certain words or expressions with a beep sound.

The targeting of documentary filmmaker and academic Can Candan by the pro-government newspaper *Yeni Şafak* over his video-interview with the Euronews Turkish during the protests against Melih Bulu, the government-appointed rector of Boğaziçi University and his administration, on grounds that he was “complaining about Turkey to the West,” was a “prominent” example of the censorship of cinema that would surge throughout the year. This case not only demonstrated how powerful the protests in academia, and especially at Boğaziçi University, were and how the government considered it essential to “prevent” them, it also drew attention, albeit accidentally, to the “threat” of documentary filmmaking and documentaries. That the Constitutional Court cited, in its reasoned judgment in writing concerning the application of jailed businessperson and human rights defender Osman Kavala, the documentaries *Küçük Kara Balıklar: Güneydoğu’da Çocuk Olmak* (*The Little Black Fishes: Growing Up in the Southeast*) and *Rojava’nın Işıkları: Kadın Devrimi* (*The Lights of Rojava: The Women’s Revolution*) and an uncompleted project titled 1994, found in a flash disk owned by Kavala, as associated with the crime of “espionage” should make us reconsider the concept of “documentaphobia,” as recalled by documentary filmmaker Necati Sönmez.¹³

Prior to 1 May 2021, the General Directorate of Security issued a circular, prohibiting all audiovisual recording during public demonstrations. It was not a coincidence that the Association of Documentary Filmmakers in Turkey was among the first to protest and to organize a petition against the circular in question, which was interpreted as “a censorship circular protecting lawbreaking public officials”¹⁴ and was reportedly legitimizing police intervention against those suspected of noncompliance with the circular. As the Speak Up Platform, we monitored the trials of director Weyî Altay (*Nû Jîn*, 2015), who was prosecuted and handed down a prison sentence

¹³ <https://bianet.org/bianet/siyaset/163813-belgesel-korkusu-documentaphobia>

¹⁴ <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/431949/emniyetten-kollugu-koruma-genelgesi-polisin-goruntu-ve-ses-kaydinilmak-yasak?a=446>

(the announcement of which was later deferred) on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” for screening his documentary, and video-activist and that of documentary filmmaker Oktay İnce, who was prosecuted and handed down a prison sentence on the allegation of “insulting the president” over his social media posts, in 2021, as well. In December, Oktay İnce’s audiovisual archive of approximately 20 years that had been confiscated during a police raid nearly three years previously, was returned. While this was confirmed the importance of fighting for one’s rights, it did not change the fact that İnce should have never had to put up this three-year struggle in the first place.

Freedom of expression violations in documentary cinema continued unabated through various mechanisms and actors. Serra Bucak’s application to the crowdfunding platform Fongogo for her documentary project about her grandfather Faik Bucak, a lawyer and poet as well as the Chair of the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey (T-KDP), was rejected for “touching sensitive topics.” This case is also noteworthy as it raises pertinent questions about which authorities have *the right to decide* which topics are “sensitive,” “unfavorable” or “unproblematic.”

In addition, we witnessed that film festivals, either local or international, which recently stand out as prominent censorship mechanisms, made “political decisions” and refused to include certain films about Turkey in their lineup due to “the political atmosphere.”

We learned from Seda Gökçe, one of the Turkish producers of the documentary film *Ölümüne Boşanmak* (*Dying to Divorce*, 2021) which has its topic the legal struggle with violence against women in Turkey, that the Istanbul Film Festival refused to include the feature in its lineup “due to the political atmosphere.” The fact that Gökçe shared this information with the public for the first time at our event, titled “Documentary Films Resist Censorship,” was valuable in its own right, and a reminder of the need for spaces to discuss censorship. Another case of “festival censorship” took place at the 5th Slemani International Film Festival [in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq]. The movie *Ji Bo Azadiyê* (*The End Will Be Spectacular*), which is about the clashes during the government-imposed curfews in Diyarbakır, was removed from the festival selection shortly before its screening. It was claimed that the decision was political, and that Turkey had intervened in the festival. This case was documented as yet another example of the intervention of

the Turkish consulate and the state authorities in a film festival outside the borders of Turkey.¹⁵

In our last example, we will look back on the Boğaziçi University protests. One of the main reasons why these protests, ongoing for a year, can be considered within the framework of violations of freedom of expression, and why we analyze them under this heading as a case of censorship, is that, as was mentioned above, they demonstrate how pressures were simultaneously put on both the cinema and the academy. The administration of Naci İnci, who was appointed by the government as the rector of Boğaziçi University to replace Melih Bulu, who was dismissed from the same post by a presidential decree after six months, prevented the courses of Özcan Vardar, a film editor who was teaching film editing at the university, as well as Feyzi Erçin, who was teaching film music. Soon afterwards, documentary filmmaker and academic Can Candan was notified that he was dismissed from his full-time teaching post of 14 years in July; also canceled were the courses of Seda Binbaşgil, who had been teaching jazz at the university for 16 years. In addition to preventing Vardar's, Erçin's, Binbaşgil's and Candan's courses, practices such as the prohibition of their participation in any courses or artistic activities on the university campus or denying them entry to the campus was documented as massive blows for the cinema industry, academic freedom, as well as any current or future academic studies and cultural accumulation in the field of cinema. Furthermore, as the year drew to a close, the Dean's Office for Student Affairs, working as part of the government-appointed administration of the university, canceled a screening of *F Tipi Film (F Type, 2012)* and interview with the director, as well as an exhibition on "Operation Return to Life," a military operation in December 2000 in several prisons across Turkey, and thus, added new – but hopefully final – items to the long list of violations of freedom of expression.

¹⁵ For another example, see Gitmek: Benim Marlon ve Brandom (My Marlon and Brando, 2008) <https://sadbey.com/2008/11/03/gitmek-benimarlon-ve-brandom-ve-sansur/>

Cases

Yeni Şafak newspaper targeted documentary filmmaker and Boğaziçi University faculty member Can Candan for allegedly "complaining about Turkey to the West" in a video broadcast on Euronews Turkish. (February)

Digital platform Puhu TV was claimed to cut off a number of violent scenes from the Spanish movie *[Rec]³: Diriliş ([Rec]³: Génesis, 2012)*. (April)

In its reasoned judgment concerning the individual application lodged with the court on behalf of jailed businessperson and human rights defender Osman Kavala, the Constitutional Court cited the documentaries *Küçük Kara Balıklar: Güneydoğu'da Çocuk Olmak (The Little Black Fishes: Growing Up in the Southeast)* and *Rojava'nın Işıkları: Kadın Devrimi (The Lights of Rojava: The Women's Revolution)* and an uncompleted project titled *1994* as associated with the crime of "espionage." (April)

The line "are you and Jade official?" in the animation *The Mitchells vs the Machines (2021)* was allegedly translated into Turkish differently in dubbing and subtitles options by Netflix Turkey. In an article on the issue published on the website of Fasikül, it was stated that the difference in dubbing and subtitles translations could stem from censorship targeted at child viewers. (May)

In response to the police circular by EGM prohibiting any audiovisual recording during public demonstrations, the Association of Documentary Filmmakers in Turkey- issued a joint statement, signed by many directors, video activists, photographers and journalists, was shared with the public. The statement claims that the circular might encourage police violence. (May)

Digital platform Blu TV allegedly cut a sex scene from the movie *The Terminator (1984)*. (May)

Naci İnci, who was appointed by the government as the acting rector of Boğaziçi University, prevented Feyzi Erçin, a part-time lecturer on film and music, from opening a new course, and announced that documentary filmmaker and academic Can Candan would be dismissed from his post. (July)

The International Istanbul Film Festival did not include *Dying to Divorce* (2021), a documentary focusing on violence against women and the legal struggle for the issue in Turkey, in its selection “due to the political atmosphere.” (August)

The crowdfunding platform Fongogo rejected a project of Serra Bucak, who applied to the platform to provide funding for her first documentary on her grandfather who was the leader of T-KDP (Turkey Kurdistan Democratic Party), judge, and poet Faik Bucak (August)

During its broadcast, Star TV allegedly cut off a scene from the movie *Hükümet Kadın 2* (*Government Woman 2*) where people were voting for CHP and another scene where a teacher speaks Kurdish and says, “You, too, have learned our language.” (August)

During its broadcast Star TV cut off several lines from Turkish comedy film *Vizontele* (2001), including “Güzel içiyor adam” (The man drinks well) and “Beyefendi sudan daha da güzel bir şeyimiz var” (“Mister, we have something even stronger than water”). A scene where a man is seen reading *Cumhuriyet* newspaper was also blurred. (September)

During its broadcast, Star TV censored a number of expressions in the film *Kibar Feyzo* (*Feyzo, the Polite One*, 1978), including the line “işçiler kardeş patron kalleş” (“Workers are brothers, the boss is treacherous”) and the word “ayı” (“bear”) used as a slang word. (September)

During its broadcast, the TV station DMAX cut off the “Blue Oyster Bar” scene from the film *Polis Akademisi 4* (*Police Academy 4: Citizens on Patrol*, 1984), which takes place in a fictional gay bar. According to viewers, censoring the gay bar scene, also featured in other movies of the series, stemmed from homophobia. (September)

One week before the fall semester started, Naci İnci, appointed as the rector of Boğaziçi University by President Erdoğan, and his administration canceled Özcan Vardar’s course, who had been teaching film editing at the university for eight years. (September)

The retrial of filmmaker Weysî Altay, the director of the documentary *Nû Jîn* (*New Life*, 2015), and Dicle Anter, the former manager of the Yılmaz Güney Movie Theater in Batman, where the documentary was screened, on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” got underway after a regional court of appeals overturned their sentences and ordered a retrial. Altay was sentenced to one year and fifteen days in prison; the court commuted the sentence imposed on Anter to a judicial fine. (October)

Documentary filmmaker Can Candan was denied entry to Boğaziçi University campus, where he went to teach a course. The administration of Naci İnci, who was appointed as the rector of the university by President Erdoğan, had previously dismissed documentary filmmaker and academic Can Candan, who had been teaching as a full-time lecturer at the university for fourteen years, from his post. In response, Candan had stated that he would offer his course as an open course. (October)

Two film directors interpreted the absence of any films in Zazaki among the 24 short films in the lineup for 3rd International Bingöl Short Film Festival as a practice that “begs questions.” In response, the festival organizers stated that they did not select the film for the lineup based on which language they were produced. (October)

Can Candan, who was invited to discuss his documentary *Duvarlar-Mauern-Walls* (2000) in a lecture at Boğaziçi University, was denied entry to the campus on the grounds that it was prohibited by the government-appointed administration of the university. (November)

The Fatih District Governor’s Office banned the stand-up performance of Özgür Ateş, titled *Dawîya Dawî* (*Sooner or Later*), organized by the HDP Youth Assembly at Su Performing Arts Stage. (November)

Documentary filmmaker and video-activist Oktay İnce was sentenced to one year two months and seventeen days in prison on the charge of “insulting the president.” The court deferred the sentence. (November)

The government-appointed administration of Boğaziçi University prevented

documentary filmmaker and academic Can Candan, who was scheduled to make a presentation at an academic event, and Feyzi Erçin, who used to teach film music at the university until quite recently, from entering the campus on the grounds that “They did not have permission.” (December)

The audiovisual archive of documentary filmmaker and video-activist Oktay İnce, who was sentenced to one year two months and seventeen days in prison on the charge of “insulting the president,” was confiscated in 2018 by the police. İnce finally received his archive, more than two and a half years later. (December)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on the digital platform Netflix over a film titled *More the Merrier* (*Donde caben dos*, 2021) for “intensely discussing homosexuality, incest and swinging,” which was allegedly “contrary to spiritual values of the society and public morality,” and decided to pull the program off streaming. (December)

The 5th Slemani International Film Festival, also known as Suleymaniyah, in Iraqi Kurdistan, canceled a screening of *Ji Bo Azadiyê* (*The End Will Be Spectacular*, 2019), which is about the clashes during the state-imposed curfews in Diyarbakır. It was claimed that the decision was political and that Turkey had intervened in the festival. (December)

Dean’s Office for Student Affairs at Boğaziçi University canceled the film screening of *F Tipi Film* (*F Type*, 2012) and interview with the director and an exhibition on “Operation Return to Life,” organized by Boğaziçi University Social Services Club at the Boğaziçi University Mithat Alam Film Center on the university’s campus. The exhibition was about a military operation conducted in December 2000 in several prisons across Turkey against prisoners who were protesting against the plan to transfer prisoners to F-Type cells, which left at least 32 prisoners dead. (December)

Can Candan, who was invited to Boğaziçi University to discuss his documentary *Benim Çocuğum* (*My Child*, 2013), was denied entry to the campus on the grounds that it was banned by the government-appointed administration of the university. (December)

Television and Internet Broadcasting

Sonay Ban

The government’s censorship of digital platforms via the RTÜK and political-financial sanctions continued in 2021. In addition, new sanctions were introduced with the amendment to Law No. 5651, which entered into force on 1 October 2020 and was publicly known as the “social media law.”¹⁶ Reportedly, non-compliance with the law, which required social media providers such as Twitter, Facebook, Clubhouse, Pinterest, etc. to designate local representatives in Turkey to readily respond to the demands of the government and individuals to block or remove content in 48 hours, would result in increased penalties and drastic bandwidth reduction. The government stated that the purpose of the law was to “fight against disinformation and fake news” on social media. However, there remains debate that the impugned law has turned into a pressure and control mechanism, and restricted freedom of the press, in the guise of fighting against violations of personal rights and keeping the Internet safe through regulations.¹⁷

In addition to administrative fines, 2021 saw an abundance of judicial fines meted out in the field of television and Internet broadcasting. It was also a year in which pro-government newspapers or members of the general public targeted those who expressed their opinions on digital platforms. A case in point was when actor Ersin Korkut was targeted and many asked for his arrest for his remarks, “Diyarbakır, Amed, başkentimiz” (“Diyarbakır, Amed, our capital”) in a video he posted on TikTok. In response to the public outcry, Korkut apologized, and claimed that he was misunderstood. As for cases of legal punishment, Syrian refugees who shared satirical “banana eaters” videos on social media in reaction to a Turkish citizen who claimed in a street interview that only Syrians in Turkey could afford bananas due to economic hardship and racism, as well as a Syrian journalist who reported on these videos, faced the risk of deportation. Similarly, two young people who

¹⁶ Law No. 5651 on “the Regulation of Broadcasts via the Internet and Prevention of Crimes Committed through Such Broadcasts”: <https://www.mevzuat.gov.tr/MevzuatMetin/1.5.5651.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://susma24.com/sosyal-medya-yasasinin-basin-ozgurlugu-uzerine-etkileri-izleme-arastirmasi-raporugozetim-ve-baskiya-yepyeni-bir-yontem-daha-eklendi-icerik-kaldirma/>

shared a satirical video about the power status of the Turkish passport were imposed judicial control measures in the form of an international travel ban on the charge of “degrading the symbols of state sovereignty.” Additionally, a social media influencer who goes by the name Porçay online was handed down a prison sentence on the charge of “encouraging the use of narcotics” over a satirical video about rapper Ezhel he shared on social media.

With the regulation that came into force in 2019,¹⁸ RTÜK was authorized to censor audiovisual and audio broadcasts on the Internet. In 2021, broad and vague grounds such as “violation of the national-spiritual values and public morality of the society” were cited to issue fines and program suspension orders. That the RTÜK imposed an administrative fine to the digital platform Exxen over the talk show *Konuşanlar* and ordered the platform to take a certain episode of the program off its streaming catalogue was one such incident. In turn, the platforms continued to exercise all too typical self-censorship to “stay off the radar.” In the promotional posters for the Turkish series *Hamlet* put up on the streets, the digital platform Gain saw fit to “cover” actress Elit İşcan, while she appeared lying naked in the digital posters. A telling example of indirect censorship was that the digital platform BluTV opted not to advertise the premier of the second season of the TV series *Çıplak (Naked)*, the first season of which was previously suspended and re-released with a rating of +18.

Censorship of TV stations continued in the forms of fines. The RTÜK imposed fines on TV stations, especially Kanal D, Show TV, Star, FOX TV and TV 8, on such grounds as “depicting violence,” “disregarding Islamic sensitivities,” “deviant relationships and dialogues,” “false allegations,” and “violation of public morality and the principle of protection of the family.” The grounds for the RTÜK penalties included “violation of the Turkish family structure,” “contradiction to gender equality,” “physical and psychological violence,” and “depicting scenes that are in violation of gender equality and that abuse women.”

Among the reasons for the administrative fines imposed by the Supreme Council on the TV stations critical of the AKP government (mostly Halk TV, TELE 1, FOX TV and KRT TV) were that some programs “mocked faith and moral values,” “were contrary to the religious sensitivities of the society,”

¹⁸ The Regulation No. 39849 on “Radio, Television and On-Demand Broadcasts on the Internet”

included statements such as “BİK and RTÜK put pressure on the press,” and included remarks that “degraded and humiliated” certain institutions and organizations. That the RTÜK launched an investigation against FOX TV due to the remarks of Başak Demirtaş, the wife of jailed Kurdish politician Selahattin Demirtaş, who attended the TV program *Çalar Saat (Alarm Clock)* as a guest was a notable example of political censorship. In the meantime, RTÜK member İlhan Taşçı, who was elected as a member from the quota allocated for the main opposition party CHP, frequently stated on social media that the Supreme Council hardly ever issued fines against the TV stations that “supported the government.” According to Taşçı, RTÜK issued a total of TL 5 million in 22 administrative fines to dissenting TV stations, while no pro-government channel was issued with a fine in the first six months of 2021. Taşçı also drew attention to the fact that the recently introduced practice which required viewers to provide their identity numbers and open addresses while submitting complaints to the RTÜK, upon the instruction of RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin, could amount to “profiling.”

Throughout the year, we witnessed citizens “calling the Supreme Council to action” through complaints about various TV series and shows. RTÜK received complaints about the TV program *Güldür Güldür Show*, aired on Show TV, on the grounds that an actor who portrayed an imam in a skit appearing on the stage in earrings and flip-flops was “disrespectful towards religious values.” Citizens also submitted complaints to the RTÜK that the depiction of two characters lying in bed in the TV series *Yasak Elma (Forbidden Apple)*, aired on FOX TV, “disrupted the family structure,” asking the Supreme Council to “do what is necessary.” In another related example, the state-run TRT 2 was “warned” by the viewers due to the rainbow colors in a social media post, which was purported to have hinted at LGBTQI+ individuals. The TV station reportedly removed the post from its official Instagram account due to user comments such as, “Careful there! The rainbow colors might cause you trouble” and “Look at that perception.”

Towards the end of July, the government’s ineffectual response to the scorching wildfires that ravaged the Mediterranean and Aegean sea coasts was widely slammed by dissident media and caused a public uproar. In response, RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin announced that they were closely monitoring all news segments and broadcasts on the raging wildfires. It was also claimed that the Supreme Council sent private letters of “instructions” and warning

to the executives of TV stations concerning the broadcasts on wildfires; TV stations were handed down hefty fines on the grounds that news reports about the wildfires could “cause fear and indignation among the public” and reporters for certain TV stations, including FOX TV and Halk TV, were denied entry to the areas where the forest fires continued to rage. Pro-government *Yeni Akit* newspaper targeted celebrities who shared posts on social media with the hashtag “HelpTurkey” to inform the international public about the ongoing wildfires and ask for humanitarian aid.

It was a widely known practice that TV stations attempted to stay off the RTÜK’s radar and thus evade any sanctions by blurring images, cutting off scenes or bleeping certain words and expressions, namely by practicing self-censorship. The examples that can be listed under this subtopic include any criticism of the central government (such as when a professor claimed that he was censored during a live broadcast he attended as a guest to comment on the recent earthquakes, or when Habertürk TV haphazardly cut to another segment when a local citizen criticized the government during a live broadcast on the wildfires); Habertürk TV censoring the live broadcasts of group meetings of opposition parties; the suspension of live broadcast of Meclis TV (Parliament TV) or CNN Türk refusing to broadcast the remarks of Greater Istanbul Municipality (İBB) executives in response to the allegations uttered by AKP mayors about the İBB live on air.

Finally, I’d like to open a short parenthesis to briefly mention the self-censorship practiced by the government over the videos shared through official accounts. In a video posted on YouTube in which Fahrettin Altun, the Presidency’s Director of Communications, criticized the Boğaziçi University protests in English, the comments were turned off, and public dislike counts were hidden due to mounting criticism in the comments section. Similarly, an animated short film titled *Yalan Üretim Merkezi (The Center for Manufacturing Lies)*, posted on the AKP’s social media accounts, in which the AKP satirized the CHP, was removed without any explanation shortly after it was shared. All the aforementioned cases are striking in that the public reaction to the pressures and sanctions of the state mechanisms, in turn, puts pressure on the state authorities in some capacity and drive institutions, private or public, to heavy-handed self-censorship.

Cases

RTÜK issued separate administrative fines on Halk TV and TELE 1 over former Minister of Culture and Tourism Fikri Sağlar’s remarks about judges wearing headscarves and statements about The Directorate of Religious Affairs in the main news bulletin, respectively. (January)

According to a decision published in the *Official Gazette*, Twitter, Periscope and Pinterest were imposed advertising bans for their failure to comply with the social media law, which required them to assign local representatives in Turkey. (January)

Social media networks Facebook and LinkedIn announced that they would designate a legal entity as a representative in Turkey. (January)

In a lawsuit that was filed by Halk TV to overturn a sanction imposed in 2020 on the TV station over the program *Şimdiki Zaman Siyaset*, the defense statement of the RTÜK read, “In a situation where the media can lead to the collapse of the government, dominate economic decisions, to put it bluntly, in a situation where the media is so important that it can bring anyone it wants to power, and overthrow anyone it doesn’t want, it will never be possible to talk about the freedom of each and every show guest to say whatever they want through the media.” (January)

RTÜK received a number of viewer complaints about the 95th episode of the TV series *Yasak Elma (Forbidden Apple)*, aired on FOX TV, on the allegation of “destroying the family structure.” (January)

Prof. Övgün Ahmet Ercan stated that he was censored by Habertürk TV during a live broadcast he participated as a guest to comment on the earthquakes that took place in İzmir province on February 2021. (February)

RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin described the Boğaziçi University protests as “provocative events” in a Twitter post, and stated that the Supreme Council were closely monitoring the broadcasts on the subject. (February)

It was stated that students who shared social media posts about the Boğaziçi University protests were taken into custody on social media platforms Twitter and Clubhouse. (February)

Osman Gündü, who hosts a TV show titled *Kent ve Yaşam (City and Life)* on KRT TV, was assaulted by unidentified individuals as he was leaving his office in İstanbul's Kartal district. (February)

Twitter removed a post shared by MHP Chair Devlet Bahçeli concerning the protests against the appointment of Melih Bulu as the rector of Boğaziçi University. (February)

Comments for the Presidency's Director of Communications Fahrettin Altun's YouTube video on Boğaziçi University protests were turned off; the public dislike counts were hidden. Reportedly, critical comments and public dislikes on the video were unprecedentedly high. (February)

Access to news articles about Erdil Yaşaroğlu's cartoons was removed from Google Search upon a copyright complaint filed on the grounds that Yaşaroğlu's cartoons were used in news content. (February)

RTÜK issued administrative fines on the TV shows *Sen Çal Kapımı (You Knock on My Door)*, *Baraj*, *Kırmızı Oda (The Red Room)*, *Sefirin Kızı (The Ambassador's Daughter)* and *Çukur (The Pit)*, broadcast on FOX TV, Show TV, Star and TV 8, respectively, on the grounds of being "contrary to the Turkish family structure, contradicting gender equality, and physical and psychological violence." (February)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on Halk TV due to a news story in the TV program *Özlem Gürses ile 20. Saat (The 20th Hour with Özlem Gürses)* for broadcasting "a news story which can be investigated within the framework of the professional principles of the press without ensuring its accuracy." (February)

A social media influencer known as Porçay was sentenced to four years and two months on the charge of "encouraging the use of narcotics or

psychotropic substances." Porçay's lawyer, Ali Gül, stated that they had been trying to explain to the relevant court that it was all a joke and parody since 2018. (February)

The remarks of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan concerning CHP Chair Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, whom he cited as responsible for the death of thirteen individuals in the Garê region of northern Iraq, at the AKP's Ankara Provincial Congress were removed from the presidential website. The CHP described the situation as "censorship." (February)

Ali İsiyel, Fırat Yeşilpınar and Batuhan Baran, the web editors for Halk TV, stated that they were subjected to censorship and mobbing by Cafer Mahiroğlu, the owner of the TV station, before they were dismissed. (February)

Habertürk cut off its live broadcast of the CHP group meeting at the Parliament, when CHP Chair Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu began to talk about former the Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak and the Central Bank in response to President Erdoğan's allegations. (February)

CHP MP Utku Çakırözer stated that he asked Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, the Minister of Culture and Tourism, about the suspension of program order and administrative fines levied in December 2020 by RTÜK against Habertürk, to which he responded, "The program host did not react to the MP's statements in a serious manner compared to other guests, and failed to openly object to them." (February)

A lawsuit was filed against YouTuber Fariz Bakhshaliyev, who recently shot a viral video with a water boy that later emerged to be fictitious, on the charge of "inciting the public to hatred and hostility, or insulting them," which carries a penalty of imprisonment for a term of up to one year and six months. (March)

Hilmi Şanlı, the Chair of Turkish Religious Foundation Union's Bursa Branch, expressed his disapproval of the satirical TV series *Güldür Güldür Show*, aired on Show TV, in which an actor playing the role of an imam appeared on stage in earrings and flip-flops. Şanlı "called on RTÜK" to ban the program. (March)

The state-run TRT 2 allegedly censored the TV program *Operet Gecesi* (*The Operetta Night*), which included in its cast soloists and the orchestra of Ankara State Opera and Ballet. In a statement, The State Theater, Opera and Ballet Employees Foundation claimed that the program was not broadcast because some of the pieces in the concert included the words “şarap” (“wine”) and “şampanya” (“champagne”). (March)

After Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu, HDP MP and a member of TBMM's Committee on Human Rights Inquiry, was stripped of his MP status, Meclis TV (the Parliament TV) cut off its live broadcast during a sit-in protest in the parliament; attending journalists were removed from the scene. (March)

In a YouTube video he attended as a guest, RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin claimed that the supreme council could not practice censorship as per the Constitution, yet they were fighting to “protect the national and moral values.” (March)

Following the new social media law and shortly before it would be imposed a drastic bandwidth reduction, Twitter announced that it would designate a legal representative in Turkey. (March)

Yunus Alkaç, the General Director of Prisons and Detention Houses of the Ministry of Justice, announced that they would file a criminal complaint against the TV series *Akıncı* (*Raider*), aired on ATV, on the grounds that “penal institutions and their staff were brought under suspicion” in a scene depicting a prison in the show. (March)

Part of a kissing scene in the 30th episode of the TV series *Menajerimi Ara*, the Turkish version of the French series *Dix pour cent*, aired on Star TV, was censored. (March)

RTÜK concluded that hate speech against HDP in a number of TV programs broadcast on Habertürk, CNN Türk, ATV, and A Haber fell within “freedom of expression.” (March)

Actor and TV host Okan Bayülgen was acquitted at the end of a trial, in which

he was prosecuted for calling YouTuber Muhammet Çumanoğlu “an idiot” in a TV program. (March)

RTÜK imposed administrative fines on Halk TV and TELE 1 on the grounds that some expressions in various TV programs “ridiculed faith and moral values” and were “contrary to the religious sensitivities of the society.” (April)

A total of 70 bar associations filed a complaint against the TV series *Arka Sokaklar* (*Back Streets*), aired on Kanal D, on the grounds that in the 583rd episode of the program “there was an element of provocation against and unfair and ugly treatment of lawyers” and that the episode “pitted the police and lawyers against one another.” (April)

Pinterest announced that it would designate a legal representative in Turkey to comply with the social media law. (April)

Actor Ersin Korkut became the target of many newspapers, politicians, and social media users for his remarks, “Diyarbakır Amed, başkentimiz” (“Diyarbakır Amed, our capital”) on a TikTok video. In response to the public backlash, Korkut said he was misunderstood. (April)

RTÜK issued administrative fines on Kanal D, Show TV, FOX TV, TV 8, and Halk TV over various shows and programs aired on the TV stations. The grounds for the penalties included violent scenes, “lack of attention to Islamic sensitivities,” “deviant relationships and dialogues,” “inaccurate allegations,” and “violation of the principle of protecting public morality and the family.” (April)

Actress Pelin Akil claimed she became the target of heated online vitriol on social media for not fasting during the Ramadan after she posted a photo of her kids on social media. (April)

Ruling that certain expressions in a TV program broadcast on Halk TV were “defamatory against the MHP” and that some remarks about President Erdoğan in a TV program broadcast on KRT TV “exceeded the limits of criticism,” RTÜK imposed maximum administrative fines on the two TV stations. (April)

The state-run TRT 2 allegedly did not include the phrase “trans women” in the simultaneous translation in its live broadcast of the Academy Awards ceremony. (April)

RTÜK issued an administrative fine to KRT TV over the televised remarks of CHP Group Deputy Chairman Engin Altay concerning President Erdoğan during a TV program he attended as a guest. (April)

Two young people, who were detained on the charge of “degrading the symbols of state sovereignty” over a TikTok video in which they allegedly posted about “Turkish passport in a humiliating manner,” were released under judicial control measures in the form of an international travel ban and an obligation to check in with the nearest police station at regular intervals. (April)

In a circular issued prior to May Day, the General Directorate of Security banned all audiovisual recording during public demonstrations. The circular argued that the audiovisual recording during protests would “amount to preventing law enforcement officers from performing their duties” and that audio and video recordings were “broadcast on various digital platforms in a way that is harmful to the personal rights and security of our personnel and citizens.” The circular also said that legal action would be taken against anyone who recorded such footage during protests. (April)

RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin reportedly sent an instruction to TV stations to use footage of empty streets instead of crowded ones during nationwide lockdown. In response, Şahin stated that he had made a “constructive reminder as part of his duty.” (May)

An animated short film of CHP Chair Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu and CHP Spokesperson Faik Öztrak, commissioned by the AKP, was removed from the AKP’s social media accounts two days after it was posted. (May)

RTÜK allegedly requested the local digital platform Exxen to pull an episode of the program *Katarsis (Catharsis)* that featured trans model and actress Çağla Akalın from streaming. In a statement, RTÜK rejected the allegations, stressing that the council did not hold such an authority. (May)

RTÜK member İlhan Taşcı stated that viewers were required to provide their identity numbers and open addresses while submitting complaints to the RTÜK, upon the instruction of RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin. Taşcı raised his concern that the practice could amount to “profiling.” (May)

The application lodged with the Constitutional Court for the annulment of the amendments to the RTÜK law, which entitles the supreme council to practice censorship over the internet, was concluded. In the judgment, in which five members of the AYM, including the AYM President, expressed dissenting opinions on the grounds of “freedom of expression,” the request for the annulment of the regulation was rejected by a majority. (May)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on Halk TV for two per cent of its advertising revenues on the grounds that President Erdoğan’s remarks about İYİ Party Chair Meral Akşener, who was protested in Rize province, was criticized in a TV program hosted by Şirin Payzın. (June)

RTÜK imposed administrative fines on FOX TV and KRT TV over a number of scenes in the TV show *Masumiyet (Innocence)* and the televised remarks of Doğru Party Chair Rifat Serdaroğlu in a TV program he attended as a guest, respectively. (June)

It was claimed that in the reruns of the TV series *Tatlı Hayat*, the Turkish version of the American sitcom *The Jeffersons*, on teve2, some scenes were blacked out, and some lines and words were censored. (June)

BluTV, a subscription-based video-on-demand service in Turkey, allegedly did not advertise or announce the second season of the TV series *Çıplak (Naked)*. The first season of the series was suspended in December 2020 before being re-released with an 18+ rating. (June)

In a Twitter post, actor Levent Üzümcü announced that he was called in for questioning at the Istanbul Anatolian Courthouse for using an ellipsis in a tweet. (June)

The state-run TRT 2 allegedly removed a post that included a rainbow from its

Instagram account due to user comments such as, “Careful there! The rainbow colors might cause you trouble,” and “Look at that perception!” (June)

In the first six months of 2021, RTÜK imposed 22 administrative fines on dissenting TV stations, which amounted to a total of TL 5 million, whereas no fines were levied against pro-government TV stations, according to RTÜK member İlhan Taşçı. (July)

RTÜK, which refused to process Sözcü TV’s pending request for a logo change concerning the TV station “SRT Sivas,” recently acquired by the Sözcü group, for 11 months and then downright rejected it, approved the logo change after a regional administrative court overturned its decision. (July)

According to Twitter Transparency Report, Turkey ranked second, after India, in terms of the legal demands submitted to have the platform remove content posted by verified journalists and news outlets around the world. (July)

An Instagram account that prepared and posted a video spoofing the promotional video about Istanbul commissioned by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism was reported to Instagram due to copyright; the video was removed. (July)

A group of people attacked the live broadcast of the TV program *Gökmen Karadağ ile Açıkça* (*Plainly with Gökmen Karadağ*) on raging wildfires, aired on Halk TV and recorded in the Marmaris district of Muğla. The assaulters threatened the broadcast team, saying, “When you talk about wrong things, we intervene.” (August)

The Ankara Public Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation against people who shared posts on social media with the hashtag “Help Turkey” to inform the international public about the ongoing wildfires in Turkey and to ask for aid. (August)

Following the “letter of warning” issued by RTÜK to the executives of TV stations about the ongoing wildfires, FOX TV, Halk TV, and Reuters were reportedly denied entry to the areas where the fires were raging. (August)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on TELE 1 on the grounds that the remarks of Can Ataklı, the host of a morning news show titled *Gün Başlıyor* (*The Day Is Starting*), who said, “I am telling you they are being idiots. There is incompetence, there is ineffectiveness. You have destroyed the country, you have burned it down,” were deemed “insulting and defamatory.” (August)

RTÜK issued an administrative fine on TELE 1 over airing live broadcasts from the areas where the forest fires were raging. (August)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on TELE 1 due to the televised remarks of Merdan Yanardağ, the chief editor of the station, who commented in a TV program titled *4 Soru 4 Cevap* (*4 Questions 4 Answers*) on the RTÜK President and members who issued a warning to the executives of TV stations concerning the broadcast of raging wildfires.

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on Habertürk TV on the grounds that some statements aired during its live broadcast of the wildfires were deemed “illegal.” (August)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on Halk TV on the grounds that some remarks concerning the recent wildfires uttered by guests in the TV program *Kayda Geçsin* (*Let It Be on Record*) “could lead to public indignation and cause fear, panic, and anxiety among the public.” (August)

RTÜK imposed sanctions on TR 35 due to “violating broadcasting principles” over its news reports on the recent wildfires. (August)

İlhan Taşçı, a RTÜK member who was elected from the CHP quota, was barred from attending a supreme council meeting on the broadcasts about the recent wildfires upon a proposal by RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin and by the votes of members elected to the council from the AKP and MHP quotas. (August)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on FOX Main News Bulletin due to the news stories, which included news tickers such as “The situation is dire,” “Turkey has been living a nightmare for six days,” and “Turkey has been on

fire for a week,” which could allegedly “cause fear and indignation among the public.” (August)

The İstanbul Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation against the website Ekşi Sözlük on the allegations of “incitement to commit a crime” and “inciting the public to hatred and hostility” over a discussion topic, titled “halkın ayaklanması için daha ne olması gerekiyor” (“what more does it take for the public to rise up”). (August)

In a statement concerning fatal flooding in the Black Sea region, RTÜK President Ebubekir Şahin said, “We request valuable media organizations to give accurate news and avoid misinformation.” (August)

The new social media bill that is being drafted by the government and will soon be brought to the Parliament reportedly introduces sanctions against those who “produce or disseminate fake news, and insult” on social media. (August)

In addition, the new social media bill will reportedly define new offenses titled “disinformation and misinformation.” (August)

An employee who had worked for the state-run TRT for 22 years was expelled from her post due to her social media posts in which she commented on various topics such as “MPs Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu and Barış Atay, Kızıldereli massacre, and the sexist classroom arrangements in TRT exams.” (August)

TV presenter Didem Arslan Yılmaz prevented someone from the audience who telephoned her TV program from speaking Kurdish on the grounds that it “included insults.” Arslan Yılmaz said, “This is the Republic of Turkey.” (August)

In its broadcast of the TV series *Bir Demet Tiyatro* (*A Bundle of Theater*), Star TV censored a number of expressions, including the word “erotik” (erotic). (September)

CNN Türk practiced censorship by refusing to air the comments of Utku Cihan, the

Head of Transportation Department of the İBB, in response to Esenler Mayor Tevfik Göksu, who was making various allegations against the İBB during the live broadcast. (September)

RTÜK launched an investigation against FOX TV due to the remarks of Başak Demirtaş, the wife of jailed politician Selahattin Demirtaş, former co-chair of the HDP, in the TV program *Çalar Saat* (*Alarm Clock*) that she attended as a guest. In the program, Demirtaş said that contact visits were not allowed in prisons and that she wished that sick prisoners could receive treatment outside the prisons. (October)

The actress Elit İşcan appeared naked in the digital posters for the original series *Hamlet* streaming on the digital platform Gain, whereas she was covered in the posters put up on the streets. (October)

The newspapers *Cumhuriyet*, *BirGün*, *Sözcü* and *Yeniçağ*, as well as the TV stations KRT TV, TELE 1 and Halk TV, were allegedly denied entry to the reopening ceremony of the Atatürk Cultural Center due to the new media accreditation policy. (November)

RTÜK decided by a majority to impose an administrative fine on Halk TV upon a complaint by the BİK. The grounds for the penalty was a televised remark on Halk TV, that said, “BİK and RTÜK put pressure on the press.” (November)

RTÜK issued a second administrative fine to Halk TV for 3 percent of its advertising revenues on the grounds that TÜGVA, which was accused by some of becoming a “parallel structure,” was “defamed and insulted” on the TV station. (November)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on TELE 1 on the grounds that the criticism levied in a TV program on the station against İsmail Kahraman, Deputy Chair of the Presidency’s High Advisory Board, for suggesting that the first four articles of the Constitution should be amended was “defamatory.” (November)

The Presidency of Migration Management of the Ministry of Interior decided

to deport a number of refugees who posted satirical “banana eaters” videos on social media to criticize racism and the statements that put the responsibility for the economic crisis on refugees. (November)

The Facebook page of the website *Ötekilerin Postası* was deleted by Facebook without any justification after two news articles published on the page were reported. In addition, access to four news articles on the website was blocked. (November)

RTÜK issued an administrative fine on Kafa Radyo over the remarks of Nihat Sırdar, the host of the radio program *Nihat’la Sivrisinek (the Mosquito with Nihat)*, who commented on the donations collected by the government during the Covid-19 pandemic. (November)

Only İHA, AA, DHA and TRT were permitted to attend a meeting of minimum wage commission, organized by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security. (December)

Arif Kocabıyık; Hasan Köksoy, and Mehmet Koyuncu and Turan Kural, owners of the “İlave TV,” “Kendine Muhabir” and “Sade Vatandaş” accounts on YouTube, respectively, which host street interviews, were detained. All four were released under judicial control measures in the form of house arrest and international travel ban. (December)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on the digital platform Exxen over the talk show *Konuşanlar (Speakers)*, and decided to pull the latest episode of the program off streaming on the grounds that it was “contrary to national-spiritual values of the society and public morality.” (December)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on FOX TV on the grounds that the word “metres” (mistress) on the TV series *Yasak Elma (Forbidden Apple)* “had a negative connotation in society; and the concept was normalized in the series, which included negative jokes about the concept of family.” (December)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on Halk TV over the remarks of a

guest, who criticized President of Religious Affairs Ali Erbaş in the TV program titled *Açıkça (Plainly)*. The guest had said, “You are betraying the constitutional order of this country,” in the TV program. (December)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on Halk TV on the grounds that the televised criticisms of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and MHP Chair Devlet Bahçeli during a TV program titled *İki Yorum (Two Commentaries)* were “beyond the limits.” (December)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on TELE 1 due to the remarks of CHP Group Deputy Chairman Engin Altay, who described President Erdoğan as “dictator” in the TV program titled *Demokrasi Arenası (Democracy Arena)*. (December)

Facebook deleted the verified page of MA on the platform, which had 100,000 followers. According to MA, Facebook did not take their appeals into consideration. (December)

RTÜK imposed administrative fines on Halk TV, FOX TV, and TELE 1 at the final meeting of 2021. It is reported that the Supreme Council’s fine on Halk TV was due to the fact that journalist Barış Terkoğlu read parts from an investigation report on the Nun Foundation, established by Berat Albayrak. (December)

Theater

Ayşen Güven

The flame of theater continues to burn, but is “the new normal” for real?

In my humble opinion, 2021 has been a year in which the mood of the theatrical world was that “we have nothing to lose but our chains.” Part of the year saw pandemic restrictions in place. That the remainder of the year was replaced by “the new normal” of semi-restrictive practices, the return to live performance was the subject of much enthusiasm.

As we talk about 2021, we can look at how a variety of subjects, from the nature of productions to the ongoing impact of the devastation of the pandemic, from “the new normal” of theater to the controversies caused by the problems pertaining to this period, have turned into censorship.

I am of the opinion that during the pandemic, the long-standing “restrained courage” as regards the theater plays, imagined, written, and rehearsed, has been far exceeded. We are witnessing a bolder selection of scripts and writing in the face of censorship and pressures. In parallel with this, new staging and directing experiences appear to be much more demanding, dynamic and labored in comparison with the pre-pandemic days. While this may be a coincidence, it was crystal clear, as far as the assessments of the last year goes, that with the pandemic, some of the measures were misused, and were turned into a tool of censorship, and even, an attack mechanism against particularly the performing arts.

In view of this, I find that the present courage; the need to bare one’s soul; the accumulated anger; the desire to shout out, “Here I am,” in defiance of the utter disregard for one’s existence was inevitable due to the fact that, as I mentioned earlier, there was nothing left to lose but our chains. I am, of course, not saying, “Our theater is on the verge of a brand new leap forward,” but things were not that good before the outbreak of the pandemic; we all know that. It is significant to recall at once that the cynicism created by the increased oppression and violence of the regime on all segments in the aftermath of critical dates such as the Gezi Resistance or the 15 July coup attempt was effective in the field of art, and in particular, theater. It is not my intention to find a silver lining in the pandemic; however, it is indeed promising to see a refreshing, resurgence of theater.

On the other hand, what our theater has lost financially, in terms of morale

and motivation, or factors of production has yet to be redressed; the damages have not been repaired, the wounds have not healed. In respect of performing arts – except for the permanently closed theaters – the transition to “the new normal” cannot be said to have been established simply by reopening the doors of venues. To the contrary, it would be more accurate to claim that the long-standing problems of theater in Turkey have become more pronounced. In this regard, the demand for theater (and arts, of course) to be publicly subsidized has emerged once again.

And besides, I believe that we now have a better understanding that the need to scrap the classification of theater halls (as well as all cultural and arts venues) as commercial enterprises; the avoidance of inflicting on them the burden of making profit by exempting them from tax liability, and the state support for all theaters, and arts, in a manner that is equal, transparent, without censorship, and unfettered by “the politics of decency,” in an attempt to raise our theater to a world-class caliber based on objectively determined artistic and aesthetic needs, is an urgent issue that can no longer be postponed.

Let’s not skip over the fact that the efforts to scold the arts continued concurrently as part the anti-democratic practices affecting all walks of life. No sooner had we underlined the need for theater to be publicly subsidized, which has become a vital demand, than we realized that the Ministry of Culture and Tourism’s efforts to “grant subsidies” to private theaters functioned as a form of censorship during such a challenging period. It should be noted, in this context, that the pre-determined subsidies do not even come close to covering the preparation of a stage play. Moreover, the usual practices such as the refusal to disclose which theaters were granted subsidies according to which criteria; the refusal to grant subsidies to outspoken theater troupes, such as the Moda Stage, and refusal to grant subsidies to theater companies which have not benefited from state subsidies since the Gezi Park protests of 2013, such as BGS Theater, were repeated. Another thing that has recurred in the past year were bans on theater plays deemed “obscene.” The play *Karahindiba (Dandelion)*, directed by Cevdet Bayram and performed by Sertaç Demir was failed over the use of the word “testicles.” A familiar stratagem was for a play to be denied performance due to “stage renovations.” There was, unfortunately, nothing new about criminal lawsuits being launched against many artists, actors

and theater players over what they did in the areas of personal freedom, and subsequently what they posted on social media, or in the sentences subsequently handed down on them.

That use of the Kurdish language in art remained an unoriginal sin 2021.

Singing in Kurdish; performing a play in Kurdish or talking about Kurdish theater; performing a stand-up in Kurdish, listening to and applauding a Kurdish song. All these were among the topics investigated this part year. In other words, the fact that a work of art was in Kurdish was, again, sufficient to censor, ban or launch an investigation against it.

In the early days of the new year, when there was a rapid increase in infections of the new variant of coronavirus, the PCR test requirement for the unvaccinated was lifted. Rightfully, theater players and musicians clamored against the move, due to which there was a surge of infections among the theater players and a decline in theater attendance. Musicians also protested against the ban on music after midnight, which was to become permanent under the pretext of the pandemic.

The economic crisis, which was intensely experienced in 2021 and is becoming more and more devastating, so that the financial difficulties facing theatre managers has in itself become a form of censorship. . The year 2022 has started in the midst of such pressures. It is difficult to be optimistic. Nowadays, we have to address the major energy price hikes and stage lighting; the ticket prices and the audience's power to make room in their budgets to attend a theater; the restriction caused by public transport price hikes— all of which compound the usual censorship practices of targeting a particular language, sexuality or political satire.

It falls on all of us to ensure that theater can "live on," develop aesthetically, and be accessible to the general public. To that end, we should raise our voices to demand the proper and fair distribution of state resources in accordance with the public interest. Theaters can no longer continue to burn in their own hell! It is my hope that we can transform the year 2022 into a year where our theaters and theater players, who rested and rejuvenated themselves during the pandemic and became more and more liberated as they had nothing left to lose, can lay such a groundwork, together with their audience. After all, the flame of theater continues to burn!

Cases

Of the 47 people who were taken into custody as part of the recent operations against the ESP, five were jailed pending trial, and five individuals were placed in house arrest. 27 people, including five theater actors from Yenikapı Theater, a participant of the Speak Up Platform, were released under judicial control measures. (January)

In a lawsuit filed to appeal the administrative decision to ban the Kurdish play *Bêrû: Klakson Borîzan û Birt (Faceless: Trumpets and Raspberries)*, a Teatra Jiyana Nû (New Life Theater) production, the Gaziosmanpaşa District Governor's Office defended the decision in writing. (June)

A lawsuit filed to stop the execution of an administrative decision rendered by the Gaziosmanpaşa District Governor's Office to ban the Kurdish play *Bêrû: Klakson Borîzan û Birt* from Teatra Jiyana Nû was dismissed. (June)

An individual who worked as a drama teacher at the Urla Municipality was reportedly appointed as a service employee in a buffet by the government-appointed trustee administration. (July)

In a statement, veteran stage actor Genco Erkal said, "We are looking for open-air stages to continue to perform our plays. Unfortunately, in the cities that we look into, either there are no stages or the municipality, the government-appointed trustee or the rector do not give us the stage." (August)

The official permits for the NOTFEST Bozcaada Theater Festival in August were canceled two days prior to the festival. The decision was interpreted as an obstruction directed at dissenting artists, including Genco Erkal and Şevket Çoruh. (August)

The applications of Moda Sahnesi, Kadıköy Boa Sahne and BGST Tiyatro for "state subsidies to private theaters," allocated by the General Directorate of Fine Arts of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, were rejected. To explain the reason for the rejection, the Ministry said they used the following criteria: "the success level of the institution, the contribution of the project

to the art of theater and the artistic level of the plays.” (October)

Actress Berna Laçın was called in for questioning over a social media post, where she commented, “cherries are expensive.” Previously, Laçın was indicted over her social media posts, and her theater plays were banned. (October)

The executives of the magazine *Tiyatro... Tiyatro... (Theater... Theater...)* announced that the Facebook and Instagram accounts of the magazine were suspended, and all posts shared by the magazine’s website were blocked. (October)

The Hatay Governor’s Office banned a planned staging of the theater play *Karahindiba (Dandelion)*, directed by Cevdet Bayram and acted by Sertaç Demir, at the Cultural Center Theatre Hall at short notice. Actor Demir announced that the play was banned because the word “testis” (testicles) in the play script was deemed “obscene” and “contrary to public morals.” (November)

Actor Levent Üzümcü was called in for questioning on the allegation of “inciting the public to hatred and hostility” over a street performance, where he commented that the state failed in its obligation to protect artistic activities and artists, and his related social media posts. (November)

The Fatih District Governor’s Office canceled an upcoming performance of the stage play *Ölüm Uykundaydı (Death Was Asleep)*, which was written by Cuma Boynuğara, directed by Nurcan Çelebi and acted by Ahmet Uçar, on the grounds that it was not “deemed suitable for public safety.” (November)

The Kurdish play *Tartuffe*, an Amed City Theater production, which was scheduled to be performed at Yay Grand Hotel in Mardin, was canceled after the hotel administration terminated their contract with the theater due to a blanket ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations across the province, which was extended by the Mardin Governor’s Office every 15 days. (December)

Publishing Industry

Sumru Tamer

As in the previous year, the decisions taken by the Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications, which works under the remit of the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services, to declare certain books as obscene publications, and the grounds cited for these decisions demonstrated how censorship has become “legalized” and institutionalized in the field of publishing. An examination of the way the board functions in practice confirms that the government’s anti-LGBTQI+ and anti-gender¹⁹ attitude permeated seemingly all state institutions and organizations. Ultimately, 2021 has been a year in which books on gender-based rights or gender identity or with LGBTQI+ characters were, once again, forced to hide in opaque envelopes.

As a result of our year-long advocacy efforts by the Susma Platform, Deputy Sera Kadıgil submitted a parliamentary question on this issue to the Minister of Family and Social Services. The parliamentary question also inquired about the Hotline for the Fight Against Obscene Content, established under the remit of the ministry during the year. Let us recall that the pro-government media praised the launch of the hotline with numerous headlines that, for instance, read, “The system where content harmful to children can be reported with a single click is now active,” and “Citizens take part in the fight against obscene content.” In her written answer to the parliamentary question, which also inquired about to what end the hotline was set up, as well as how, by whom, and based on which capacity the reports to the hotline were evaluated, the Family Minister Derya Yanık gave an obvious, and yet a revelatory response about the censorship mechanism. To assess the plight of censorship in the publishing industry last year, I’d like to delve to some extent into this written answer.

In her written answer, Minister Yanık stated that the primary priority of the ministry was “the protection of our social moral structure” and “the best interests of our children,” adding, “We fight against all kinds of negative content that will affect the development of our children.” Upon closer reading, Minister Yanık recounted her vision of a vicious cycle where the best interests

¹⁹ <https://kaosgl.org/gokkusagi-forumu-kose-yazisi/avrupa-da-ve-dunyada-toplumsal-cinsiyet-esittigi-karsitakimlerin-etkileri>

of children depended entirely on the protection of public morality, and “not exposing” children to any diversity outside this given universe of morality, as well as, consequently, ensuring that children, who are thus instrumentalized as the carriers of this moral structure, purported to have existed, would guarantee the continuity of that order of public morality. In short, she explained, “in compliance with the legislation” and with reference to it, that the ministry was inclined to and capable of fighting against “all kinds of content,” working in a field, which stretched and covered, almost automatically, from the child to family to ultimately public morality, and the borders of which are constantly redefined in line with the current political atmosphere.

With reference to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Minister also mentioned that the principle of “the best interests of the child” and other state obligations stemming from the Convention far outweighed all other international conventions. In other words, the Minister argued for the legitimization of the fact that the right to freedom of expression could be suspended were it in the best interests of the child –which would, of course, be determined in accordance with the purported moral structure of the society– i.e. justified through the discourse of “rights”! In Minister Yanık’s written answer, the questions pertaining to which law prescribed the oft-employed concepts by the Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications, such as “morality of the society,” “national values” and “public morality,” which are, as was mentioned in the parliamentary question, not laid down by laws, and hence unlawful and extremely subjective, were left unanswered; these questions were outright ignored.

Finally, Minister Yanık stated that they launched the Hotline for the Fight Against Obscene Content in an effort to “satisfy the needs of the citizens to express their opinions.” It can in fact be claimed that the ministry both freed itself from constantly monitoring social media channels and institutionalized the culture of online lynching in line with the notion of “necessity” –one of the more effective discourses of populism– by monopolizing the online lynching campaigns.

Then, what happened this past year as a result of the ministry’s efforts to monopolize the public reports about the publishing industry? For instance, books that covered topics such as a child dreaming about switching genders after passing under a rainbow, or a love story between two young men were forced into envelopes, and hence “hidden” from children; real-life issues

were treated as if they didn’t exist.

That being said, there have also been some good developments this past year, which, incidentally, exposed the illegitimacy of some grounds cited by the Board for the Protection of Minors to declare certain books as obscene publications. Lawyer Ümit Erdem filed a lawsuit, as a reader and a parent, to overturn the decision to declare the Turkish translations of the books *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls (Asi Kızlara Yatmadan Önce Öyküler)*, *The Declaration of the Rights of Girls (Kız Çocuk Hakları Bildirgesi)* and *The Declaration of the Rights of Boys (Erkek Çocuk Hakları Bildirgesi)* obscene, which he read with his child, and to request a stay of execution. Even though the expert reports concluded that the books in question were “not obscene,” the ministry appealed against the reports, and doubled down on arguing that the books “encouraged homosexuality” and “provoked complaining about one’s sexual identity.” In the end, however, *The Declaration of the Rights of Girls* and *The Declaration of the Rights of Boys* were released from the shackles of obscenity label.²⁰ The personal struggle of Lawyer Ümit Erdem reminded us all how important a role the readers played in the protection of books.

In an interview with the Speak Up Platform published as part of the video series “Muzir Kitaplar” (“Obscene Books”),²¹ Ece Çavuşlu, the editor-in-chief of Yabancı Publishing House, recounted that the initial and, by far, the largest reaction came from the readers when the graphic novel series *Kalp Çarpıntısı*, the Turkish translation of *Heartstopper*, was declared an obscene publication, and removed from the online catalogue of major bookselling websites. It should be noted here that a significant consequence of declaring books as obscene publications, for readers and publishers alike, is that bookstores are reluctant to stock copies of a book that they cannot display, and hence, such books cannot be found in every bookstore; books cannot be promoted or purchased online. Notwithstanding, the sales of such books can continue thanks to the demands of individual readers and efforts of some bookstores, as in the case of *Kalp Çarpıntısı*.

Although we have highlighted the cases of obscene publications this year, we should emphasize that the intense pressure on Kurdish writers, Kurdish

²⁰ The competent court rejected the lawsuit in respect of *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls* on the grounds that the book “could cause children to experience problems in terms of their identity formation.”

²¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OzF8lAYauSA>

publishing houses and the Kurdish language continued. The mere fact that works in the fields of culture, arts and media, as with all other topics in this report, are carried out in Kurdish has always been deemed sufficient to try and prevent them. In the field of publishing, we witnessed the sanctions that would prevent the works of Kurdish publishing houses and restrict the sales of their books, amounting to indirect censorship, in 2021, as well. Indeed, the applications of Avesta Publishing House to various municipalities and the relevant departments to participate in book fairs were left unanswered last year, as well.

There was also a judicial element to censorship. While some Kurdish writers were handed down prison sentences on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over the statements in their books, some events, such as a public talk by Mîrza Metîn on Kurdish literature organized by Avesta Publishing House, was raided by the police in an attempt to prevent it due to “the pandemic.” Another issue that came up rather frequently this past year was the censorship during the translation and publication stages of books. In social media posts, readers noted that they observed some differences in different translations and editions of a number of books. For instance, it emerged that the word “Kurdistan” was not included in the Turkish translation of a book, published by Can Publishing House. Turkish translator of the book in question stated that the word “Kurdistan” was included in the translation file she submitted to the publishing house, and argued that the censorship could have taken place in the subsequent editorial process. An example of the censorship that occurred during the translation would be the translation of the word “Kürd” (Kurdish) into the Turkish as “adi” (“ordinary” or “simple”) in an academic article. It was also revealed that the expressions “Kurdish insurgents” and “Der Zor” in the English edition of the book *10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World* by novelist Elif Şafak were changed in the Turkish edition of the book (*On Dakika Otuz Sekiz Saniye*). These choices made by the author in the Turkish translation of her own book can be interpreted as self-censorship.

In conclusion, as can be seen in the cases below, this past year, too, writers were often prosecuted; their books were cited as evidence in trials or recalled from bookstores; publishing houses were summarily shut down and subjected to investigations. We hope that 2022 will be a freer year for writers, publishers, bookstores, translators, editors, and, of course, readers.

Cases

Odatv news portal's editor-in-chief Barış Pehlivan and managing editor Barış Terkoğlu face up to a total of 158 years in prison in investigations launched against the journalists over a new book they co-wrote, titled *Metastaz 2: Cendere (Metastasis 2: The Press)*, and their statements about the book quoted in news reports, articles and TV programs. (January)

The Committee for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications declared the children's book *Ben De Okuyorum Öykü Dizisi 3 – Büyülü Gökkuşığı (I Am Reading Too Short Story Series 3 – The Magic Rainbow)* an obscene publication. As per the decision, the book can only be purchased by people over the age of 18, packaged in a plastic bag. (January)

In the reasoned judgment in writing in the “MİT trucks case,” where journalist Can Dünder was sentenced to 27 years and 6 months on the charges of “espionage” and “aiding a terrorist organization”, statements in Dünder's book *Tutuklandık (We Are Arrested)* were presented as evidence. (January)

The decision of the Nevşehir Criminal Judgeship of Peace, which ruled that all confiscated copies of the booklets *Arpalık Aile Şirketi (Sinecure Family Business)* and *10 Maddede Kıdem Tazminatında Fon Aldatmacası (The Deception of the Severance Pay Fund in ten Points)* published by the CHP should be returned, was not executed. (January)

A lawsuit was filed against Gökçe Gökçen, CHP Deputy Chair, on the charge of “assassination attempt or physical attack against the president” over the booklet *21 Soruda FETÖ'nün Siyasi Ayağı (The Political Branch of the FETÖ in 21 Questions)*. (January)

The humor magazines sent to Engin Gökoğlu, a convicted Progressive Lawyers' Association (ÇHD) member and lawyer, by his wife was considered as gifts and were not allowed in Tekirdağ Prison by the administration. (February)

The book *Dr. Said: Dağlar Kilidini Kaybetti (Dr. Said: The Mountains Have Lost Their Key)* about the life of Said Çürükkaya, a peshmerge commander, was

banned and all print copies were confiscated. It was stated that a lawsuit would be filed against the author Selim Çürükkaya and the publisher Doz Publishing House. (February)

Writer Sidar Jîr's Google ad for his book *Şerm (Shame)* in Kurdish was disapproved by Google Ads on the grounds of "violating the advertisement policy" and falling under the category of "unsupported languages." (February)

Kurdish politician, lawyer and writer Mahmut Alınak was sentenced to one year and six months in prison on the charge of "membership in a terrorist organization" over a number of remarks in his book *Mehmet Tunç ve Bêkes (Mehmet Tunç and Bêkes)*, which was previously banned and confiscated. (February)

In respect of a book titled *Makul Şüphesiz (Reasonable Suspicion)* under investigation by a competent prosecutor's office, The Committee for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications decided that the book could potentially have an obscene effect on the spiritual well-being and development of minors. (February)

It emerged that the name "Muhammed" in the Turkish translation of Honoré de Balzac's *Mémoires de deux jeunes mariées, (İki Gelinin Hatıraları)*, published by the Can Publishing House, was removed. Can Öz, owner of Can Publishing, stated that the word "Muhammad" existed in the original translation, but the following translations from different publishers didn't include this word adding that they would deal with this issue as Can Publishing. (February)

The latest hearing in the lawsuit filed against the restrictions imposed on three children's books, which were deemed obscene, was held on 8 March at the Ankara 12th Administrative Court. The Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services had previously challenged the "not obscene" reports about the books in question prepared by independent experts. (March)

In the lawsuit filed against the decision to declare the books *Asi Kızlara Uykudan Önce Hikâyeler (Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls)*, *Kız Çocuk Hakları*

Bildirgesi (Declaration of the Rights of Girls), and *Erkek Çocuk Hakları Bildirgesi (Declaration of the Rights of Boys)* obscene publications, expert reports were presented that determined that the books were not obscene. Ministry of Family and Social Services objected to the reports. (March)

Cartoonist Özgür Kalender appeared before a court in Istanbul for the first hearing of his trial on the allegation of "hurting the religious values of the public by insulting religious leaders" over a cartoon in which he depicted cult leader Ahmet Mahmut Ünlü, more commonly known as "Cübbeli Ahmet Hoca." (March)

The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor's Office drafted an indictment against four executives of the French satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* on the charge of "insulting the president," which carries a penalty of imprisonment for a term of up to 4 years. (March)

The short story collection *Bölücü Görücü Hikâyeler (The Separationist and Arranged Short Stories)* written by journalist Oktay Candemir was not given to a prisoner in Van High-Security Closed Prison on the grounds that the book "endangered public safety and made it difficult to achieve the goal of rehabilitating the prisoners." (April)

In the *Özgür Gündem* newspaper main trial, the charge of "making propaganda for a terrorist organization" against Aslı Erdoğan, novelist and former editorial advisory board member of the newspaper, which was shut down by a statutory decree, was previously "dropped" due to the statute of limitations. Upon the prosecutor's office's appeal against the decision, trial court's judgment was reversed. (June)

The Committee for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications declared a children's book titled *Onlar Ermiş Muradına- En Güzel Türk Masalları (Happily Ever After- The Most Beautiful Turkish Folk Tales)*, published by Karatay Akademi Yayınları an "obscene publication." (June)

In the merged trial concerning the destruction of the Gül Bookstore, HDP provincial building and a number of office buildings in 2015 in Kırşehir

province, 86 defendants were imposed a penalty of imprisonment for a term of three months or a judicial fine. (July)

It was revealed that the word “Kürdistan” was censored in the Turkish translation of *The Enchantress of Florence*, a novel by Salman Rushdie, published by Can Publishing House. Begüm Kovulmaz, the Turkish translator of the book, stated that the original translation she submitted to the publishing house included the word “Kürdistan” and the censorship probably happened afterward. (July)

Can Öz, the owner of Can Publishing House, stated that they were recalling all editions of *Floransa Büyücüsü*, the Turkish translation of *The Enchantress of Florence* by Salman Rushdie, in which the word “Kürdistan” was censored, published as of 2015 from bookstores to correct the censored expressions. (July)

The Istanbul Anatolia Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation into the graphic novel *Kalp Çarpıntısı (Heartstopper)*, published by Yabancı Publishing House, which is about a love story between two young men. Physical and online bookstores D&R, İdefix, Kitapyurdu and BKM stopped selling before an official judgment about the book. (August)

The Inter-University Council refused to recognize and certify the equivalence of a PhD dissertation, titled “1980-2008 Arasında Türkiye’yi Kim Yönetiyor? Sermaye Gücü ve Otoriter Popülizmin Yükselişi” (“Who Rules Turkey Between 1980 and 2008? Business Power and the Rise of Authoritarian Populism”), written by Mehmet Baki Deniz at the State University of New York at Binghamton, USA, on the grounds of its subject matter and content. (August)

The graphic novel series *Kalp Çarpıntısı*, the Turkish translation of *Heartstopper* by Alice Oseman, about a love story between two young men was declared an “obscene publication” by The Committee for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications on the grounds that “certain passages in the book could have an obscene effect on the spirituality of children under the age of 18”; according to the decision, the book can only be sold packaged in an envelope. (September)

A local court decided that all print copies of the 82nd issue of the magazine *Teori ve Politika (Theory and Politics)* was to be recalled over an article titled “İbrahim Kaypakkaya aslında liberalin teki miydi?” (“Was İbrahim Kaypakkaya actually a liberal?”) in the relevant issue due to “praising İbrahim Kaypakkaya,” founder of the Communist Party of Turkey/Marxist-Leninist. (September)

It was revealed that the word “Kürd” (“Kurdish”) in a direct quotation from an Ottoman text in the academic article titled “II. Abdülhamid Döneminde Dersim Sancağındaki İdari Yapı ve Ulaşım Ağı” (“The Administrative Structure and the Transportation Network During the Reign of Abdulhamid II”), written by Prof. İbrahim Yılmazçelik and Asst. Prof. Sevim Erdem, was translated into Turkish as “adi” (“ordinary” or “inferior”). (October)

A lawsuit filed by a reader in request for the cancellation of the restrictions imposed on the children’s books *Kız Çocuk Hakları Bildirgesi (The Declaration of the Rights of Girls)* and *Erkek Çocuk Hakları Bildirgesi (The Declaration of the Rights of Boys)*, which were declared “obscene publications” in 2019 by The Committee for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications, and the stay of execution was concluded. The Ankara 12th Administrative Court decided to lift the “obscene publications” order about the two books. (October)

During a talk on Kurdish literature organized by Avesta Publishing and attended by Mîrza Metîn, the police came to the venue and attempted to prevent the event due to “the pandemic”; the event was interrupted. (October)

In a Twitter post, Avesta Publishing House announced that their applications to a number of municipalities and the relevant departments to participate in book fairs were left unanswered, and that they were prevented from attending book fairs in previous years. (October)

In the trial of writer Hamide Yiğit and Tekin Publishing House on the charge of “violating personal rights” over her book titled *Tekmili Birden İŞİD (ISIS As a Whole)*, Yiğit and her publisher were ordered to pay TL 10,000 in compensation. The plaintiffs included the İHH, President Erdoğan’s son Bilal Erdoğan and his son-in-law Berat Albayrak. (October)

An investigation was launched against Nobel laureate Orhan Pamuk on the charges of “insulting Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and the Turkish flag” and “inciting the public to hatred and hostility” in his latest novel *Veba Geceleri* (*Nights of Plague*). (November)

It was claimed that Boğaziçi University Publishing House was closed by Rector Naci İnci, who was appointed by President Erdoğan, and his administration, which dismissed the last employee of the publishing house. (November)

Other Censorship Cases

The cases we have examined and archived under this heading starkly demonstrate that the censorship in the fields of culture, arts and media in Turkey in recent years has been carried out on different grounds and through various mechanisms. In 2021, the vast majority of the online access-blocking orders issued by courts concerned news reports about corruption and irregularities; the grounds for the access-blocking orders were almost exhaustively “violation of personal rights.” Two points stand out in the blanket bans on all public demonstrations and events declared by the governor’s and district governor’s offices: Either the bans that have been in effect since the declaration of SoE (or even before), as in the province of Van, were extended, or the local authorities declared bans prior to prominent trials or protests across their respective provinces, usually on the grounds of the pandemic (while the ruling AKP congresses were granted exemption from the ban). Also included under this heading are the cases concerning artists who were called in for questioning or detained, as well as the lawsuits filed against them. The main reason for this is that such practices against artists were not necessarily based on their line of work; they were targeted mostly for their social media posts and critical remarks of the government. We also noted that artists who shared posts on social media about the İzmir earthquake and the wildfires in 2021 were investigated and targeted for “inciting the public to hatred and animosity.” The following cases demonstrate the different perpetrators, grounds and mechanisms of censorship in Turkey.

Cases

Access to 125 URLs, including news articles, tweets and YouTube videos on the allegations that the high school diploma of Hamza Yerlikaya, the Chief Advisor to the President, was fake was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

Access to content under discussion topics at Ekşi Sözlük website concerning the Bottomless Lake which has been wiped off the map as a result of treasure excavation in Gümüşhane's Taşköprü Plateau was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

Access to 125 tweets and 119 news articles on the information shared by CHP Deputy Ali Mahir Başarır about the fee of President Erdoğan's lawyer Ahmet Özel was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

Access to news reports on the access-blocking decisions to the news reports on the access-blocking decisions to the news reports on a friend of Bilal Erdoğan, President Erdoğan's son, winning a construction tender on a land owned by TMSF was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

Actress Nazlı Masatçı was taken into custody as part of an operation against the members and executives of the ESP. (January)

Poet Ahmet Telli was acquitted of the charge of "insulting the president." (January)

Access to news articles published on the websites of *Cumhuriyet*, *İleri Haber*, *T24* and *Odatv* about the allegations concerning President Erdoğan's former lawyer Mustafa Doğan İnal made by *Odatv*'s editor-in-chief Barış Pehlivan and managing editor Barış Terkoğlu in *Cendere*, a book they co-wrote, and about Ahmet Şık, who commented on these allegations were blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

Access to news articles about Menşure Sütüeroğlu, an individual who was

acquitted on the charge of "insult" in a lawsuit filed by AKP Istanbul Deputy Ravza Kavakçı Kan, published in the newspapers *Sabah*, *Akit* and *Takvim*, was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights," upon a request by judge Özlem Yayla, who had presided over Sütüeroğlu's case. (January)

An investigation was launched against TV presenter Öykü Serter on the allegation of "inciting the public to hatred and hostility" for condemning the government's response to the Izmir earthquake. (January)

Access to Twitter account of a law student, who claimed that they were sexually assaulted by lawyer S.K., with whom the student did voluntary legal internship, other accounts and news reports that raised the subject were blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

Access to a news report and YouTube video containing DEVA Party Deputy Chair Mustafa Yeneroğlu's remarks about İrfan Fidan, former Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor who was elected as a member of the Constitutional Court, was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

Access to news reports about the criminal complaint filed by İBB against the officials, including Adil Karaosmanoğlu, the current Minister of Transport and Communications, who was formerly the Deputy Secretary General of the municipality when it was run by the AKP, regarding the corruption and irregularities that took place in the AKP period, was previously blocked. Access to news reports about the access-blocking decisions to the news reports on the subject was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

The Van Governor's Office extended a blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province, which had been in effect for 1,519 days, on the grounds of "public health and order." (January)

Artist Ali Zülfikar filed a complaint against Linz mayor, Mayor Hans Georg Faust over the censorship of his artwork, entitled *Made in Turkey*, which critically depicts President Erdoğan, in an exhibition he opened in the Austrian city two years ago. (January)

Access to a news article by *Yeniçağ* columnist Murat Ağirel, in which he stated that the scandals of 2019 were the underlying cause of *Millî Gazete*'s "BİM disclosure" and covered several allegations against the Bursa-based meat company ETTAT, was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

Access to news articles that quoted the allegations of Ali Mahir Başarır, CHP Istanbul Deputy and a member of the Constitutional Committee of the TBMM, concerning President Erdoğan's lawyer Ahmet Özel was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (January)

The content of IFÖD, where they announced that the news about online ban on the news about the allegations against the president's former lawyer, Mustafa Doğan İnal that was mentioned in Odatv News Director Barış Terkoğlu and Editor-in-Chief Barış Pehlivan's new book, *Cendere*, was also blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights". (January)

In the protests that began at the Boğaziçi University when President Erdoğan appointed Melih Bulu as the rector, the police confiscated students' artworks on the campus. (January)

Stand-up comedian Emre Günsal was sentenced to 3 years and 5 months in prison on the allegation of "defaming Atatürk, Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi, Shams Tabrizi, the city of Konya and its residents" over his remarks in a show. Günsal was previously arrested and kept in custody for 11 days before he was released pending trial. (January)

The Şanlıurfa Governor's Office announced a 30-day ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province, except for "the events deemed appropriate by the governor's and district governor's offices." (January)

In respect of the planned demonstrations at Boğaziçi University by a number of NGOs, the Istanbul Governor's Office released a statement with an emphasis that all meetings, demonstration marches and press statements had been prohibited in Beşiktaş and Sarıyer districts for 30 days. (February)

Access to discussion topics and news reports about access-blocking orders to the discussion topics on the Ekşi Sözlük website about Alp Erkin, General Manager at Berg Electricity who shot his neighbor's dog, was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (February)

Access to news reports about wushu athlete Elif Akyüz, whose father is the Vice President of the Turkish Wushu Federation and whose mother is the national team manager, was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (February)

Access to a news report by *Yeniçağ* columnist Murat Ağirel, titled "TRT'nin harcamaları denetimden çıkarılmış" (TRT's expenditures are not audited), was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (February)

In a press conference held at the TBMM, TİP Chair and Istanbul MP Erkan Baş stated that a rainbow flag sent to him was seized at the entrance of the Parliament. (February)

The Hakkari Governor's Office extended a blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province for another 15 days on the grounds of "national security, public order and Covid-19 measures." (February)

Seven students, two of whom were being detained, faced charges one to three years imprisonment as the result of an investigation regarding the inclusion of an image with the Kaaba on it in a student art exhibition at Boğaziçi University. (February)

The Kadıköy District Governor's Office announced a ban on all public meetings and demonstration marches across the district for a week, after the Labor, Peace and Democracy Forces announced that they would hold a protest on 2 February in Kadıköy. (February)

On 5 February, businessperson and human rights defender Osman Kavala, who had been jailed pending trial for more than three years despite the ECtHR judgment which held that Turkey was to secure his immediate release, appeared before a judge on the charges of "espionage" and "attempting to

overthrow the government.” The competent court ruled to merge the case file with the Gezi Park trial. (February)

The governor’s offices in Çanakkale and Hatay announced a fifteen-day ban on all public events and demonstrations in their respective provinces due to Covid-19, one day apart. In particular, the reasons for the ban in Çanakkale reinforced the idea that “measures” were being taken against any public demonstrations or statements in support of Boğaziçi University protests. (February)

Access to a news article about Ufuk Yengin, the President of 15 July Equity Hearths association, who was called in for questioning after criticizing Deputy Minister of Treasury and Finance Nurettin Nebati; the Chief Advisor to the President İsrail Kışla and President of Religious Affairs Ali Erbaş was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to news articles about Fatih Başçı, a friend of President Erdoğan’s sons Burak and Bilal Erdoğan, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” Access to latest news articles on the same subject was blocked by another judgeship for the same reason. Access to a news article on five public tenders that Başçı had received from the Gaziantep Metropolitan Municipality to the amount of 26,442,247 Turkish liras was blocked. Access to a news article about the access-blocking decision to that article was also blocked. (February)

Access to the website of *Gazete Alinteri* was blocked. The newspaper announced the decision as follows: “The Diyarbakır 3rd Criminal Judgeship of Peace rendered a decision to close our website.” (February)

BTK blocked access to 331 websites. The statement issued by the governor’s office read, “Diyarbakır Provincial Gendarmerie Command, the Cyber Crimes Unit have identified, 205 foreign websites committing crimes and (126) URL from the USA and Germany that ‘made propaganda for a terrorist organization.’” (February)

The Eskişehir Governor’s Office declared a 15-day ban on the press conferences

and public gatherings across the province, including the provincial area under the control of the gendarmerie. The ban excluded the political party conventions. On 15 February, when the ban was still in effect, the AKP Provincial Congress was held in the province. (February)

The Denizli Governor’s Office declared a 30-day ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province due to “Covid-19 measures.” The ban covered the International Working Women’s Day on 8 March. (February)

An event to mark “World Greek Language Day,” which was to be held online with the cooperation of Ankara, Istanbul and Trakya Universities and the Greek Embassy, was canceled after it was targeted by *Yeni Akit* and other pro-government newspapers. (February)

The Ankara Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office launched an investigation against the social media posts about the discovery of the bodies of 13 Turkish nationals in the Garê region of northern Iraq, a training base for Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), which the office described as “provocative.” Among those under investigation are HDP MPs Hüda Kaya and Ömer Faruk Gergerlioğlu. (February)

The Hakkari Governor’s Office announced a ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province on the grounds of “national security, public order and Covid-19 measures” for 15 days. (February)

Access to news articles about an individual who was reported by citizens to President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan during his visit to Elazığ province, who allegedly said, “I am the state. I am the man of the Presidency. I’ll do everything,” and practiced usury, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to news reports and content about Taha Hülagü, the son of the Kocaeli University Rector Sadettin Hülagü, who, after graduating from Kocaeli University, was first appointed as the SEKA Museum Director and then as the Private Secretary in the AKP-run Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality without exam qualifications, following which he was assigned as a “public

servant” at the Presidency’s Public Diplomacy Coordination Board, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to news reports that the public tender for Kayseri Anafartalar – City Hospital – YHT Station Tram Line Project was awarded to Kolin İnşaat and Uzka İnşaat, of which President Erdoğan’s son Bilal Erdoğan’s father-in-law Orhan Uzuner is a board member, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to a tweet shared by CHP MP Yıldırım Kaya, in which he commented on the Zehra Foundation, was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to a news report about the “Boğaziçi University Women+ Solidarity” group published on *BirGün* newspaper and a number of tweets on the same subject was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

The second hearing in the trial of veteran actors Müjdat Gezen and Metin Akpınar on the charge of “insulting the president” over their remarks during the talk show *Halk Arenası (Public Arena)* that aired in December 2018 on Halk TV, hosted by journalist Uğur DüNDAR, was held. The trial prosecutor asked the court to sentence Gezen and Akpınar to four years and eight months in prison. (February)

The Hatay Governor’s Office announced that all public events, such as gatherings, demonstration marches, press statements, conferences or panels were banned across the province for 15 days. (February)

Access to news reports critical of former Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak, over the US\$ 130 billion loss in Central Bank’s FX reserves was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to news reports about the posters of CHP Youth Branch concerning the former Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to a tweet by Faik Öztrak, CHP Spokesperson and Tekirdağ MP, concerning the National Space Program and former Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak, President Erdoğan’s son-in-law, and relevant news articles was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to news reports about a tweet shared by an academic at Gazi University Faculty of Law, who sat on the seat behind CHP MP Sezgin Tanrikulu on a plane, that read, “I am sitting behind Sezgin Tanrikulu on the plane... Fav this if you say finish him off with a choker sling and we’ll look after you in prison,” was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to news reports about the allegations that the Supreme Court of Appeals member Ömer Faruk Aydın, former MİT member Mehmet Ali Bal and Nizameddin Karamanoğlu, who was in prison for drug trafficking, formed a gang and attempted to overtake the shares and wealth of a business woman, and the dismissal of the complaint against Ömer Faruk Aydın was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Between 2 and 16 February, 2021, access to ten news portals was blocked due to national security and protection of public order. The news portals are: *Umut* newspaper, Raperin TV, Yeni Demokrat Gençlik, Yeni Demokrasi, Nüçe Ciwan, *Ahval*, Partizan Mlm, *Gazete Alinteri*. (February)

Access to news reports about the court decision to cancel the urban renewal project of sixteen neighborhoods in the district of Üsküdar on the grounds that it failed to comply with the laws in terms of urban planning principles, planning techniques and the public interest, and the relevant content on the website of the Istanbul Büyükkent Branch of the Chamber of Architects, which filed the lawsuit to cancel the project, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

In order to draw attention to the pressures on Kurdish language in Turkey, HDP Deputy Dersim Dağ gave a speech in Kurdish at the General Assembly of the Parliament. Dağ’s speech was reported in the parliamentary minutes under an “X” sign. (February)

The 2018 asylum application of Kurdish poet Mervan Nasim in the Republic of Cyprus due to the pressure he faced in Turkey was rejected on the grounds that “there are not enough reasons to conclude that you will be personally at risk in the foreseeable future in Turkey.” (February)

The Şanlıurfa Governor’s Office announced a 30-day blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province without citing any reasons. (February)

Access to the websites of Nerina Azad and MA was blocked by different courts on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (February)

Access to ten news articles published on Odatv that mentioned Sakarya Metropolitan Municipality Mayor Ekrem Yüce was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to 120 different news articles was blocked by ESB on the grounds that they were similar to the news reports about Alp Erkin, who killed his neighbor’s dog with a gun, access to which was previously blocked. (February)

Access to news reports which claimed that TKİ’s hair removal and wrinkle creams, promoted by former Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak, were distributed as gifts to ministries and public institutions was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to several discussion topics on the Ekşi Sözlük website concerning former Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to a news article which mentioned a secret witness who was once close to former public prosecutor Zekeriya Öz who is a fugitive and on trial for FETÖ; a businessperson from Ordu province, and İrfan Fidan, who was Deputy Public Prosecutor responsible for Terrorism and Organized Crimes Investigation Bureau at the time was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

Access to news reports about farmers who were tracked through general attachment proceedings over their debts to Limak Energy after the state-run PTT failed to deliver a payment summons for 64 days was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (February)

The Hakkari Governor’s Office extended a blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province on the grounds of “the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation, public order and Covid-19 measures” for 15 days. (March)

Students in Hasanhan village in the city of Iğdır set up a library that took months to build to prepare for the university entrance exam and read books. The district governor’s office and the gendarmerie command shut down the library without any justification. (March)

The Batman Governor’s Office announced a ban on all public events across the province, except for those that will be held by public institutions and organizations for 15 days. (March)

The Mardin Governor’s Office declared a fifteen-day ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province. The ban cited the reason as follows: “Any events that will take place in public areas in March could be targeted by terrorist organizations.” (March)

Access to ETHA’s and MA’s websites was blocked on the grounds of “national security.” (March)

The Van Governor’s Office extended a blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations, that had been in effect since 21 November, 2016, for another fifteen days. The Governor’s Office cited Article 17 of Law No. 2911 on Meetings And Demonstrations, which gives the administration the authority to postpone or ban a specific meeting for up to one month, as the reason for the ban. (March)

A total of 93 artworks were lost in an attack carried out by unidentified individuals against the exhibition “Melekleri Öldürmeyin” (Don’t Kill Angels),

organized in memory of victims of violence against women by the Mersin University Plastic Arts Group, which featured the artworks of 194 artists from various countries. (March)

Access to news reports about the allegations that the Supreme Court of Appeals member Ömer Faruk Aydın, former MİT member Mehmet Ali Bal and Nizameddin Karamanoğlu, who was in prison for drug trafficking, formed a gang and attempted to overtake the shares and wealth of a business woman, and the dismissal of the complaint against Ömer Faruk Aydın had previously been blocked. Access to news articles and content on the same subject was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." All related content was deleted. (March)

Access to news reports about the allegations that ETTAT Meat, a company that supplies meat to supermarket chains such as A101, BİM and Migros, was selling the meat it bought from the Meat and Milk Institution to the market at higher prices was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." All relevant content was deleted. (March)

Access to news articles about the appointment of an academic, who was previously accused of harassment against women students at the Rize Recep Tayyip Erdoğan University, as the head of the department at the same university was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (March)

Access to a number of tweets about former Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak and the Turkish Central Bank's net FX reserves shared by the official Twitter account of the CHP was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (March)

Access to a number of tweets about the Turkish Central Bank's net FX reserves, shared by Lütfü Türkkan of the İYİ Party and Özgür Özel, Engin Özkoç and Aykut Erdoğan of the CHP, was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (March)

Access to a news report titled "'Görevden aldığı ismin yerine eşini getirdi' haberine erişim engeli" (Access-blocking order to the news story 'He

appointed his wife to replace the person he dismissed') on the website of the Speak Up Platform was blocked. (March)

Access to a news article on the website of the Speak Up Platform, titled "Albayrak'tan Evrensel'e tazminat davası" (Albayrak files a compensation case against Evrensel) was blocked; the article was deleted. (March)

The Osmaniye Governor's Office announced a ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province for 15 days as part of the Covid-19 measures. (March)

The governor's offices in Hakkari and Van extended the bans on all public events and demonstrations in their respective provinces. While the Hakkari Governor's Office stressed "the prevention of potential provocations" in its statement, the Van Governor's Office stated the reason for the ban was "to eliminate the plans of terrorist organizations." (March)

Kurdish writer, activist and politician Mahmut Alınak was acquitted at the end of a trial, in which he was charged with "insulting the president" over a Facebook post he shared in 2017. (March)

The poet Ahmet Telli was listed among the names to be imposed with a political ban in the indictment issued by the Chief Public Prosecutor's Office of the Supreme Court of Appeals, concerning the closure case of the HDP. (March)

İHD Co-Chair Öztürk Türkdoğan, who was verbally targeted by Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu following the Garê operation, a military operation carried out by the Turkish Armed Forces in the Garê region in Iraqi Kurdistan, was arrested on March 19. (March)

The statue of journalist and writer Bekir Coşkun, who died in 2020, erected in a 4,000 meter park in the Menderes Neighborhood by the Buca Municipality of Izmir was vandalized by unidentified persons. (March)

Access to the news articles about the trial of journalist Pelin Ünker who was prosecuted over her news report on "Paradise Papers" upon the complaint

of the then Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak; his elder brother Serhat Albayrak, and Çalık Holding was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” The articles were deleted. The competent court also, as part of the same judgment, decided to apply the same procedure to other news articles in various news outlets that mentioned Serhat Albayrak. (March)

Access to a news article which included the remarks of economist Ali Bilge on the trial of state-owned lender Halkbank in the USA for conspiring to violate U.S. sanctions law, bank fraud, and money laundering was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (March)

In the Derik district of Mardin province, the district governor's office prohibited the HDP's flyers for Newroz festivities, citing the ongoing closure case against the pro-Kurdish party. (March)

As part of the investigation launched on the grounds that the renewed layout of a children's playground in Istanbul's Küçükçekmece district resembled PKK symbols, three defendants were charged with “making propaganda for a terrorist organization,” which carries a penalty of imprisonment for a term of up to 7 years and 6 months each. (March)

The Ministry of the Interior launched an investigation against Bilecik Mayor Semih Şahin and relevant officials over the posters published by the Bilecik Municipality, that read, “Istanbul Sözleşmesi Kimden Korur?” (From Whom the Istanbul Convention Protects?). (March)

Access to a news article which mentioned a secret witness who was once close to former public prosecutor Zekeriya Öz; a businessperson from Ordu province, and İrfan Fidan, who was Deputy Public Prosecutor responsible for TÖSSB at the time, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” Access to other news articles that allegedly had similar content to the news article in question was also blocked. (March)

Access to a news article about an industrial accident which took place at the İskele Leather Factory in the Istanbul Leather Organized Industrial Zone

in Tuzla, and the prevention of union organization in the said factory was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (March)

Access to a news article about the dismissal of Ahmet Kürşat Köhle, one of President Erdoğan's lawyers, and Gürkan Kütük, Deputy Public Prosecutor responsible for prisons who paid an informal visit to a prisoner in Antalya L-Type Prison, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (March)

Access to news articles about access-blocking decisions to news articles about the suspicious death of Kyrgyz journalist Yeldana Kaharman was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (March)

The Şanlıurfa Governor's Office announced a ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations across the province, except for “the events deemed appropriate by the governor's office and the district governor's office” for 15 days. (March)

Kurdish writer Adil Başaran, who was detained on 20 March, was jailed pending trial over the activities of the DTK and the press statements he attended in 2015 and 2019. (March)

Veteran actress Nilüfer Aydan was sentenced to 11 months and 20 days in prison on the charge of “insulting the president” over her social media posts. The court deferred the announcement of the sentence. (March)

In a press statement dated 31 March, the Kadıköy District Governor's Office announced that all public meetings and demonstration marches were banned across the district due to “Covid-19.” (April)

Access to news reports about the allegation that Sas Electricity Energy Distribution Consultancy and Sas Petrol Electricity Energy Inc.'s activities constituted a pyramid scheme was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (April)

Access to social media posts about Ömer Faruk Işık, the cousin of and advisor to AKP Adıyaman MP Ahmet Aydın, was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (April)

Access to content on İFÖD's website was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." The content was deleted. (April)

Access to news reports about Naval Supply Commander Rear Admiral Mehmet Sarı, who was photographed wearing a turban and robe [clerical garb] over his military uniform in a the house of a religious order, was blocked. (April)

Access to news reports about former CHP Osmangazi District Head Mete Akyolcular, who was accused of sexual harassment, was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (April)

During dawn raids on several locations in the city of Diyarbakır, including the Rosa Women's Association, 22 women, including musician Ruken Bekalp, were taken into custody. (April)

The Mardin Governor's Office announced a 30-day ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations across the province. Among the reasons for the ban was listed the possibility that there could be events to commemorate the death anniversary of communist revolutionary Mahir Çayan and his friends, who were killed by the military forces in Kızıltepe in 1972. (April)

In the Silvan district of Diyarbakır, Turkish-language "welcome" signposts were positioned in place of the multilingual ones, which had been removed during the run of the previous government-appointed district governor, upon the instruction of Murat Öztürk, the third government-appointed district governor in less than a year. (April)

While the Boğaziçi University protests against the government-appointed rector continued, a piece of artwork and the stairs, previously painted in rainbow colors, were painted over by the administration. (April)

Access to a number of YouTube videos which allegedly showed 21 people receiving a total of 90 million Turkish liras in bribes during the expropriation of the Ilisu Dam, which flooded the ancient town of Hasankeyf, was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (April)

Access to the domain name of *JinNews* was blocked on the grounds of "national security and protection of public order." (April)

Access to news articles about the foreclosure on the Gököl Municipality in the Erbaa district of Tokat province due to debts left over from the period when the municipality was run by the AKP, and the remarks of Mayor Osman Akbulut who said that the attachment execution was executed by a company belonging to the family of Mesut Er, a member of the Provincial Council, was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (April)

Access to news articles and social media posts about the access-blocking orders to the news articles about the trial of journalist Pelin Ünker who was prosecuted over her news report on "Paradise Papers" upon the complaint of the then Minister of Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak; his elder brother Serhat Albayrak, and Çalık Holding was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." All relevant content was deleted. (April)

Access to the content on Engelliweb, a website run by İFÖD, about the access-blocking orders to news articles about the tenders awarded to Fatih Başçı, a friend of President Erdoğan's sons Burak and Bilal Erdoğan, was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (April)

In Karaman, the governor's office declared a one-month ban on activities and events on the grounds of a "pandemic". (April)

Hakkari Governor's Office declared a fifteen-day ban on activities and events on the grounds of "national security" and "prevention of the spread of the coronavirus epidemic." (April)

Access to news reports about singer Ebru Gündeş filing for divorce against businessperson Reza Zarrab, who stood trial in the USA on the charge of conspiring to evade the U.S. sanctions against Iran, was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (April)

Access to the domain names of MA was blocked on the grounds of "national security and protection of public order." (April)

Access to news reports about Taha Hülügü, the son of the Kocaeli University Rector Sadettin Hülügü, who, after graduating from Kocaeli University, was employed by the municipality without any exams, before he was assigned as a “public servant” at the Presidency’s Public Diplomacy Coordination Board was blocked in February. Access to other news reports about the persons in question was also blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (April)

Access to news articles about a counselor at Bursa Nilüfer İMKB Science High School who celebrated the termination of the Istanbul Convention in social media posts was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (April)

The governor’s offices in Istanbul, Kocaeli and Denizli banned all public events and demonstrations in their respective provinces due to Covid-19 measures for 30 days. All three bans covered the May Day demonstrations. (April)

Veteran theater actor Genco Erkal was called in for questioning on the allegation of “insulting the president” over a number of posts he shared on social media since 2016. (April)

The governor’s offices in the cities of Kırklareli and Trabzon banned a number of events and demonstrations across their respective provinces due to “Covid-19 measures.” The 30-day ban in Kırklareli covered the May Day, and the six-day ban in Trabzon covered the trial of police officers over the death of Metin Lokumcu in 2011 after he was subjected to tear gas in a protest. (April)

Access to news articles that Mustafa Aysan Öztaylan, son of former AKP Balıkesir MP Mehmet Cemal Öztaylan, gave a statement to the police because 500 grams of cannabis was found in 2014 in a shoe-box sent to him by bus from the city of Mardin was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (April)

Access to the domain names of *JinNews*, *Umut* newspaper and *Yeni Demokrasi* was blocked on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (April)

The trial against seven “Gezi Park case” defendants whose files were previously

separated because they resided abroad, including actors Memet Ali Alabora and Ayşe Pınar Alabora, writer Handan Meltem Arıkan and exiled journalist Can Dünder, was merged with the main Gezi Park trial. (April)

Access to the domain names of *JinNews* was blocked four times in the last two weeks of April. (April)

The Van Governor’s Office extended a ban on all public events and demonstrations, that had been in effect for the past five years, for fifteen days on the grounds of “elimination of the plans of terrorist organizations, and in this context, preservation of national security, protection of public health and order, prevention of crime.” (May)

Access to the websites of *JinNews* and MA was blocked, and hence, the website of *JinNews* was blocked for the 6th time in fifteen days. (May)

Access to social media posts shared by Ahmet Şık, TİP MP and journalist, about President Erdoğan’s former lawyer Mustafa Doğan İnal was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” Access to news reports and social media posts on the subject had previously been blocked. Access to the content of İFÖD concerning the subject had been blocked in January 2021. (May)

The Mardin Governor’s Office declared a 30-day ban on all public events and demonstrations on the grounds of “protection of public health, preservation of public order and safety, prevention of crime and violence.” (May)

While the local protests against a quarry to be constructed in the region by pro-government Cengiz İnşaat continued in the İkizdere district of the city of Rize, the Governor’s Office declared a fifteen-day ban on all public events and demonstrations across the district as of 17 May. (May)

Access to four news articles published on the website of the Zonguldak-based *Halkın Sesi* newspaper concerning the relations between Zonguldak Mayor and organized crime boss Sedat Peker was blocked upon the complaint of Alan. The news article in question claimed that Alan had become a mayor after being referred by Peker. (May)

Access to Kızıl Bayrak website was blocked. In a statement, the website administration announced that access to the website was blocked twice since 20 April. (May)

Access to the website "sedatpeker.com," owned by fugitive organized crime boss Sedat Peker, was blocked on the grounds of "national security and protection of public order." (May)

While the local protests against a quarry to be constructed in the Evciler village of Kırklareli's Pınarhisar district continued, the Governor's Office declared a fifteen-day ban on all public events and demonstrations due to "Covid-19 measures." (May)

Access to the website of *JinNews* was blocked by the Diyarbakır 2nd Criminal Court of Peace upon a request by the BTK. Access to the website was also blocked in April on multiple occasions. (May)

Serhat Albayrak filed a lawsuit against Prof. Yaman Akdeniz for announcing the access-blocking orders to news reports about a lawsuit Albayrak filed concerning the Paradise Papers which was rejected by a relevant court, seeking 100,000 Turkish Liras in respect of non-pecuniary damage. Access to news reports about Paradise Papers was previously blocked while the trial in question was still ongoing. Then, a compensation lawsuit filed by Serhat Albayrak over Paradise Papers was rejected. Upon the complaint of Albayrak, access to news articles on the subject was blocked. Akdeniz had posted about the access-blocking orders in question on social media. (May)

Access to news reports about the allegations that Sarıyahşi District Mayor Fatih Ünsal in the city of Aksaray availed himself of the facilities provided by the municipality was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (May)

Access to news articles on the allegation that Agit Demirkan, a child development expert at the Şerif Onat Social Services Center which operates under the remit of the City of Van Directorate of Family and Social Policies, was beaten and detained by bodyguards because he did not stand up in the presence of İpekyolu District Governor Sinan Aslan was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (May)

Access to news articles about organized crime boss Sedat Peker's tweet concerning the questions he wanted Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu to answer, shortly before a live broadcast which Soylu was scheduled to attend, and the allegations about MHP MYK member Ali Uçak was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (May)

Access to news reports regarding the detection of the former Intelligence Section Chief of the Istanbul Provincial Directorate of Security, had covered up the file of Ahmet Taçyıldız, the Chairman of Çalık Real Estate, a subsidiary of the pro-government Çalık Holding, establishing his ties with the Fethullah Gülen Community, in exchange for "a mansion overlooking the Bosphorus" was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." All relevant content was deleted. In addition, it was decided by the ESB to delete 80 different news items, 59 tweets, and Facebook posts. (May)

In January, *Yeniçağ* columnist Murat Ağirel penned an article, which claimed that Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality's Culture Inc. had allocated significant funds to a number of musicians, through a foundation run by a friend of Bilal Erdoğan, President Erdoğan's son, and Bozdağ Film, run by pro-government Mehmet Bozdağ as part of the concert tenders when the municipality was run by the AKP. Access to Ağirel's article in question was blocked. (May)

The Van Governor's Office declared a ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province on the grounds of "elimination of the plans of terrorist organizations, and in this context, preservation of national security, protection of public health and order" for fifteen days. (May)

The Beyoğlu District Governor's Office announced that a planned commemoration of the Gezi Park protests of 2013 on İpek Street on 31 May at 7 PM would not be allowed due to "Covid-19 measures." Additionally, the Istanbul Governor's Office announced that Taksim metro was closed for the day. (May)

The Bitlis Governor's Office announced a ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations across the province as part of the "Covid-19 measures" for fifteen days. (June)

A lawsuit was filed against actress Ezgi Mola on the charge of “insult” over a social media post, in which she commented on the release of Musa Orhan, a special sergeant who is accused of sexually harassing İpek Er and causing her suicide in 2020 in the city of Batman. (June)

The Hakkari Governor’s Office announced a ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations across the city for fifteen days as part of the “Covid-19 measures.” (June)

Access to news reports and other content about Manolya Demirören Tekin, pro-government businessperson Yıldırım Demirören’s niece and AKP Istanbul Provincial Women’s Branch Vice President, Head of Economic Affairs and Deputy Mayor of Beykoz, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (June)

Access to news reports about the public tenders won by Efor Interaction Center Management Systems Inc., where Hakan Arol, a member of the AKP Provincial Executive Board, was the deputy general manager, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (June)

In a statement, the Rize Governor’s Office announced that local protests against a planned quarry in the İkizdere region were banned for fifteen days on the grounds that “there would be attempts by various terrorist organizations and marginal groups to turn them into propaganda tools.” (June)

The lawyer of Musa Orhan, a specialist sergeant who is charged with sexual harassment, announced that they filed a criminal complaint against 16 celebrities, who supported actress Ezgi Mola, claiming they shared insulting posts on social media. (June)

Access to a number of tweets shared by journalist Erk Acarer, in which he disclosed the relations between Metro Turizm owner Galip Öztürk, former Minister of the Interior Mehmet Ağar and General Arif Çetin, was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (June)

In addition to the second and third parts of organized crime boss Sedat Peker’s video allegations of corruption among top officials, posted on YouTube,

access to a number of his tweets in which he responded to the General Commander of Gendarmerie, who made a statement regarding the suspicious death of Yeldana Kaharman, a Kyrgyz journalist in Turkey who was found dead in her home in 2019 in the province of Elazığ, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (June)

Access to news reports about businessperson Doğan Çelik, who was detained in August 2020 and later released by a Criminal Judge of Peace, Eren Şen, when the investigating prosecutor was on leave, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (June)

Access to news reports about the allegations of a large spill of boric acid, a chemical substance, on the coastal part of the Delta Hotel in Bodrum’s Yalıkavak neighborhood was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (June)

MA published a news story, titled “Valilik patates izdihamında halkı suçladı: Provokasyon” (Governor’s Office blames the public for the stampede during potato distribution: Provocation) about the crowd surge during the free potato distribution facilitated by the government in Diyarbakır’s Bağlar district, also including the written statement of the governor’s office. Due to the fact that the governor’s office was disturbed by the news story, the Diyarbakır Provincial Gendarmerie Command had access to the agency’s website blocked seven times in a row. In the ensuing proceedings, the court concluded that the story in question included “heavy criticism,” and was “contrary to the protection of public order.” (June)

Following the 2020 Elazığ earthquake, Prof. Bedri Gencer, a faculty member of YTÜ Faculty of Arts and Sciences Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, had claimed that the disasters occurred as a result of “decriminalization of adultery” and “criminalization of child marriages.” Access to news reports about Gencer was blocked by ESB. (June)

The trial of actress Ezgi Mola on the allegation of insulting Musa Orhan, a specialist sergeant who is on trial for sexual assault, will be held in accordance with the “simple trial procedure,” with no public courtroom hearings. (June)

Access to nine tweets in which organized crime boss Sedat Peker voiced his allegations regarding Esat Toklu, the Ankara Regional Administrative Court Chief Judge, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (June)

Access to thirteen tweets shared by organized crime boss Sedat Peker was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (June)

Access to news reports about the allegations that two religious culture and moral knowledge teachers raped nine women living in the houses affiliated with the Bitlis branch of the pro-government Ensar Foundation by blackmail and coercion was blocked. (June)

Actor Levent Üzümcü announced that he was called in for questioning at the financial crimes unit upon a criminal complaint against him on the allegation of “raising the value of the dollar” against the lira in a social media post he shared three years ago. (June)

BÜFOK was granted permission by the Inter-Clubs Committee to put on the “Pride” exhibition of Ateş Alpar’s photos on 11 June, but the exhibition was blocked by the government-appointed rector Melih Bulu. Boğaziçi Direnişi, Resist Boğaziçi, account and Ateş Alpar, the artist, announced the ban on social media. (June)

The Bitlis Governor’s Office announced that the ban on all public events and demonstrations was extended for fifteen days, during which all public gatherings would be subject to the permission of the local civil administration. (June)

The Van Governor’s Office extended a blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province, which had been in effect since 2016, for another fifteen days due to “preservation of national security and protection of public order and health.” (June)

The Hakkari Governor’s Office announced a ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province on the grounds of “national security, public order and Covid-19 measures” for fifteen days. (June)

The Muş Governor’s Office declared a ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province for fifteen days on the grounds that they could “turn into propaganda for terrorist organizations.” (June)

The Şişli District Governor’s Office in Istanbul announced that a planned communal picnic at Şişli Maçka Park on 22 June as part of the Pride Week was banned. In a statement issued on Twitter, the Pride Week Committee stated that the district governor’s office banned all public events across the district for 30 days on the grounds of “national security, public order, prevention of crime,” in addition to the communal picnic. (June)

The Pride Week Committee announced that the Istanbul Governor’s Office banned the Pride Parade, which was scheduled to take place on June 26 in the rally area in Maltepe district, on the grounds of “potential provocative protests and incidents.” (June)

The police blockaded an area on Kıbrıs Şehitleri Street in the city of İzmir, where LGBTIQ+ activists gathered to march for the Pride Parade, and prevented the march. (June)

In January, *Cumhuriyet* daily published a news report which claimed that the parliamentary questions about the SADAT International Defense Consultancy Inc., a military consultancy company founded by Adnan Tanrıverdi, a retired general and former chief advisor to President Erdoğan, were left unanswered. Access to the news article in question was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (June)

Access to various news reports and tweets about the İHH was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (June)

Journalist Erk Acarer had quoted a tweet posted by Prof. Yaman Akdeniz, one of the founders of İFÖD, which criticized the access-blocking orders to news articles and tweets about the İHH, and shared information about the foundation on Twitter. Access to Acarer’s tweet in question was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (June)

Access to *JinNews*' domain names was blocked on the grounds of "national security and protection of public order." (June)

Access to organized crime boss Sedat Peker's YouTube channel, some of his videos, and Twitter and Instagram accounts were blocked on the grounds of "national security and protection of public order." Although the platforms in question had representatives in Turkey, the decision was not yet implemented. (June)

Access to tweets about the remarks of Sezgin Baran Korkmaz, a businessperson currently detained in Austria on the charges of conspiring to commit money laundering and wire fraud, about Salim Arda Ermut, the then-President of the Republic of Turkey Prime Ministry Investment Support and Promotion Agency and the current Chair of the Turkey Wealth Fund, in an interview broadcast on Bloomberg in 2016 was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (June)

Access to news reports and tweets about the allegation that the Balçova Thermal Hotel, which was frequented by Onur Gencer, the murder suspect who killed Deniz Poyraz in an armed attack on the provincial building of HDP in the western province of Izmir, was owned by the Izmir Provincial Special Administration and managed by the Izmir Governor's Office was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." Among the blocked tweets was one post by Ahmet Şık, a journalist and TİP Deputy. (June)

In a news report, titled "Tekkedeki Gizemli Apolet" (The Mysterious Epaulette in the Islamic Monastery) and dated March 2021, the news portal *Veryansın TV* published the photos of an admiral of the Turkish Armed Forces anonymously and without showing his face. Erdem Atay, a columnist for *Veryansın TV*, stated that access to the news story was blocked on 31 March, and that they appealed against the decision. (June)

Access to ETHA's website was blocked. Similarly, access to the website of *Umut* newspaper was also blocked. (June)

In a statement that read, "It has been determined that various public calls were made to hold a gathering on 28.06.2021 in the Istanbul Çağlayan Courthouse Square and its surroundings," the Kağıthane District Governor's Office declared that all events and demonstrations in the vicinity of the courthouse were banned on the date in question. (June)

Photographer Murat Kahya, one of the individuals who were violently detained during police violence against the 19th Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride, was released after giving his statement. (June)

A lawsuit was filed against Berhan Şimşek, actor and former opposition MP, over his televised remarks, that said, "The governor is militant, the district governor is militant, the judges are militants," in a TV program on the charge of "publicly degrading the state of the Republic of Turkey and the judicial bodies of the state," seeking a penalty of imprisonment for a term of up to two years. (July)

The Van Governor's Office extended a blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province, which had been in effect for 1685 days, for another fifteen days, between 3 and 17 July 2021. (July)

Access to news reports regarding the allegation that Ömer Yahşi, İzmir Provincial Director of National Education, had an event at İzmir Atatürk High School where writer and poet Haydar Ergülen was scheduled to appear canceled was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (July)

Access to news reports about a written reprimand given to Ömer Yahşi, İzmir Provincial Director of National Education, by MEB for going on vacation funded by a GSM operator's donation of 400,000 Turkish liras to the institution was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (July)

Access to a news article in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper about the arrest of Refik Yakıt, former Head of AKP Selçuk Youth Branch, for sexually assaulting his child was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (July)

Access to news articles about the photos of Sezgin Baran Korkmaz, a businessperson currently detained in Austria on the charges of conspiring to

commit money laundering and wire fraud, having dinner with Tekman Savaş, a member of the Supreme Court of Appeals, was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (July)

The Diyarbakır 5th Criminal Judgeship of Peace blocked access to “etha19.com,” the website of ETHA, on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (July)

The Diyarbakır 4th Criminal Judgeship of Peace blocked access to “kizilbayrak51.net,” the website of *Kızıl Bayrak*, on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (July)

The Diyarbakır 4th Criminal Judgeship of Peace blocked access to “umutgazetesi29.org,” the website of *Umut* newspaper, on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (July)

The students and academics who wanted to show solidarity with the Boğaziçi University protests against the government-appointed rector were denied entry to the campus. The police barricaded the entrances, and the campus doors were locked. (July)

After the villagers in Aydın province prevented a ÇED meeting on the planned feldspar mine in the region, the governor’s office banned all public events and demonstrations across the province, except for those deemed appropriate by the local civil administration, for five days in order to “maintain public order and peace.” (July)

Access to news reports about the public tenders awarded to the companies Invamed and RD Global, affiliated with Mehmet Soylu, the Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu’s cousin, was blocked. (July)

Access to a column by Mine Kırıkkanat, a columnist for *Cumhuriyet* daily, about the allegation that the Minister of National Education Ziya Selçuk had ties to cult leader Adnan Oktar and related news reports were blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (July)

Access to a news article in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper about the allegation that the cousin of the Minister of the Interior was selling medical supplies to public hospitals was blocked. (July)

The Muş Governor’s Office declared a ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province on the grounds of “the domestic and cross-border operations carried out by the security forces, and to prevent any events or demonstrations that would be held for that reason” for fifteen days. (July)

A blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations that had been in effect across the Hakkari province since 2016 was extended for another fifteen days. (July)

Access to the *Kızıl Bayrak* website was blocked on 1, 12 and 27 July on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (August)

Access to the website of *Umut* newspaper was blocked on 12 and 27 July on grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (August)

The Eskişehir 3rd Criminal Judgeship of Peace blocked access to the website of *Nupel Haber*. Journalist Günay Arslan of *Nupel Haber* stated that they would soon launch “a new domain” for their readers in Turkey. (August)

Access to kizilbayrak54.net, the website of *Kızıl Bayrak* newspaper, was once again blocked on 6 August 2021. (August)

Access to 141 news articles published by the Bianet news portal on various topics, including male violence; journalist trials; December 17-25 operations; lands purchased by Berat Albayrak; city hospitals and workers was blocked. (August)

Access to a news report by *Kronos* website, titled “İhraç Yargıtay Hakimi: Bylock kullanmamı makamında Bekir Bozdağ istedi” (Dismissed Supreme Court Judge: Bekir Bozdağ asked me to use Bylock) was blocked due to “violation of personal rights” upon a complaint by former Justice Minister Bekir Bozdağ. (August)

Access to Hornet, dating app for gay men, was blocked in Turkey by the Ankara 8th Criminal Court of Peace. (August)

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine on KRT TV due the remarks of Erol Mütercimler, Serdar Akinan, Barış Yarkadaş, Barış Doster and Uğur Dündar about recent wildfires, which allegedly "targeted the Minister of Agriculture and Forestry, and was defamatory." (August)

In an individual application lodged with the court on behalf of Oğuz Demirkaya, a university student who was sentenced to one year and two months in prison and banned from public office over his comments on a news article published on the Internet, the AYM held that Demirkaya's freedom of expression was violated. (August)

The Hakkari Governor's Office declared a fifteen-day ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province on such grounds as "the fundamental characteristics of the Republic, the indivisible integrity of the state with its territory and nation, national security, public order, prevention of crime." (August)

Access to some news articles about the public tenders awarded to Fethi Tamince, a pro-government businessperson, was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (August)

Access to "etha21.com", the website of ETHA, was blocked by the BTK. (August)

Access to "jinnews30.xyz," the website of *JinNews*, was blocked. Thus, the agency's website was blocked for the 32nd time. (August)

The Van Governor's Office declared a ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province between 17-31 August 2021 on such grounds as "ensuring the fundamental rights and freedoms of others and the continuation of public peace." (August)

In a written statement to the AYM, the Ministry of Justice responded to the questions regarding the detentions as part of an ongoing investigation into an

artwork depicting Kaaba, the most sacred site in Islam, in an exhibition set up on the Boğaziçi University campus during the protests against the government-appointed rector. In its statement, the Ministry stated that "homosexuality was haram, according to Islam," and "detentions were lawful." (August)

An indictment was prepared against veteran actor Genco Erkal on the allegation of "insulting President Erdoğan on social media," seeking a penalty of imprisonment for a term of one year and two months to four years and eight months. (August)

The Mardin Governor's Office announced a fifteen-day ban on all public events and demonstrations due to "the provocation attempts aimed at causing ethnic and sectarian conflict and creating chaos throughout the country due to the wildfires in the country." (August)

A criminal lawsuit was filed against writer Yavuz Ekinci for his social media posts about the Newroz celebrations in the city of Diyarbakır, and a joint statement he signed with other writers to express support for Kobani, a Kurdish-majority Syrian town which was attacked by ISIS. (August)

The Hakkari Governor's Office extended a blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations to include 1 September the World Peace Day on the grounds of "protection of public health and prevention of potential provocations." The ban covered flying wish lanterns/balloons or drones, festivities, theater plays, sketches, cinevision screenings and pantomime. (September)

The Eskişehir Governor's Office declared a ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province, preventing many human rights organizations, professional organizations, trade unions, associations and political parties from planning a joint march and an event on the occasion of 1 September the World Peace Day. (September)

The Bitlis Governor's Office issued a decision that all public events and demonstrations across the province would be subject to the permission of the local civil administration for fifteen days, including 1 September the World Peace Day. (September)

A rally planned by the Istanbul Forces of Labor, Peace and Democracy on the occasion of September 1st the World Peace Day was banned. The police dispersed a group of people gathered in the Taksim Square to protest against the ban; many individuals were detained. (September)

The AYM rejected the individual application of poet İlhan Sami Çomak, who had been in prison for 27 years, concerning his prolonged detention and violation of right to a fair trial, on the grounds that "There was no lack of fair trial." (September)

On the stairs of 125. Yıl Secondary School located in the Onur Neighborhood of Adana's Seyhan district, where the majority of the population is Kurdish, various threatening statements were plastered, including the sentence, "Ya Türkçe konuş ya da sus!" (Either speak Turkish or shut up!). (September)

Stage actor Orhan Aydın was physically attacked in an Istanbul cafe after attending a TKP rally, of which he is a member. (September)

The Mardin Governor's Office extended a ban on all public meetings and demonstrations across the province for fifteen days in order to "protect public order," citing the commemorations planned on the anniversary of journalist and writer Musa Anter's killing. (September)

Access to several news articles about Sabri Çelebi, an individual who was investigated on the charge of "starting a gang and forcing foreign women to prostitution," and was known for attacking the protesters with a machete during the Gezi Park protests of 2013, was blocked. (September)

On a TV program titled *Gerçeğin İzinde (On the Trail of Truth)*, businessperson Sezgin Baran Korkmaz was asked whether he texted with AYM member İrfan Fidan while he was considered a fugitive. Access to the YouTube video of the program and news articles on the subject were blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (September)

In the trial of Kurdish PEN member, writer and poet Meral Şimşek on the charges of "membership in a terrorist organization" and "making

propaganda for a terrorist organization," which carries a penalty of imprisonment for a term of up to 22 years and six months, the competent court decided to wait for the submission of the expert translations of the inscription on two award plaques. (September)

Access to news reports published on the website of *soL* newspaper about a luxury hotel built on the Usuluk Bay in Bodrum, which used to be a public bay, and the involvement of Turan Avcı, a relative of Fettah Tamince, a pro-government businessperson known for his closeness to President Erdoğan, with the hotel was blocked. (September)

Access to news reports about President Erdoğan's son Bilal Erdoğan's high school friend winning a public tender put out by the TMSF had been blocked. Then, access to news reports about the access-blocking orders was blocked. Lastly, access to news reports about the access-blocking orders to the news reports in question was blocked. (September)

Access to <http://ozgurgelecek24.net>, the website of *Özgür Gelecek* newspaper, was blocked by the Diyarbakır 3rd Criminal Judgeship of Peace. (September)

Access to the websites <https://www.jinnews36.xyz> and <https://www.jinnews37.xyz>, the websites of *JinNews*, was blocked due to "national security and protection of public order." (September)

Access to news reports on the websites of *Diken*, *Hürriyet* and *Sendika.org* about Dilek Doğan, who was killed by the police, was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (September)

Access to news reports on the websites www.cumhuriyet.com.tr and <https://t24.com.tr> concerning a column penned by journalist Barış Terkoğlu was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (September)

The Hakkari Governor's Office extended a blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province for fifteen days on such grounds as "prevention of crime." The ban covered all activities such as flying

wish lanterns/balloons or drones, concerts, festivities, theater, sketches, cinevision screenings and pantomime. (September)

Actress Ezgi Mola had imposed a judicial fine of 5,300 Turkish liras for “sharing insulting posts on social media” about Musa Orhan, a special sergeant who is currently on trial on the charge of sexual assault. (October)

Access to a news article by *bianet*, titled “Dilek Doğan'ın vurulmasını kameraya çeken polis: ‘Özel Harekat yanlışlıkla vurdu’” (Police officer who filmed the shooting of Dilek Doğan: ‘Special Operations officer shot her by mistake’), was blocked upon a complaint by the General Directorate of Security of the Ministry of the Interior. (October)

Access to news articles on the websites of *Cumhuriyet*, TELE 1, *Gazete Duvar*, *Sözcü* and *BirGün* about the allegation that a member of the municipal council at İBB, also an AKP member, received several tenders from the AKP-run municipalities and public institutions was blocked. (October)

A criminal complaint was filed against actress Farah Zeynep Abdullah for supporting actress Ezgi Mola, who was handed down a judicial fine for allegedly insulting Musa Orhan, a special sergeant who is accused of sexual assault. (October)

The Istanbul Governor's Office banned a planned rally by the Istanbul Family Medicine Platform in protest against the Family Medicine Contract and Payment Regulation, introduced by the Ministry of Health. Previously, the governor's office had granted permission to anti-vaccine protesters to hold a rally in Istanbul's Maltepe district. (October)

The Mardin Governor's Office declared a ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province for fifteen days on the grounds of “preservation of national security and protection of public order and health.” It was also stated that all events and demonstrations would be monitored and recorded by the law enforcement. (October)

Photographer and poet Mehmet Özer was sentenced to one year and three

months in prison on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over his social media posts, in which he shared his photos taken at the exhibition 12 Eylül Utanç Müzesi (The 12 September Museum of Shame) and various protests. (October)

Access to news articles published on the websites of *Cumhuriyet*, *Gazete Duvar* and *BirGün* about the allegations of bribery involving the Istanbul Police Chief and some police officers was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” (October)

Access to news articles published on the websites of *Cumhuriyet*, *Gazete Duvar*, *BirGün*, *Diken* and *Odatv* about the company which initiated the attachment execution against the İBB was blocked on the grounds of “violation of personal rights.” (October)

A news report published on the website of the Speak Up Platform titled, “İBB'ye haksız haciz hakkındaki haberlere erişim engeli” (Access blocking order to news reports about undue attachment proceeding against İBB), was blocked due to “violation of personal rights.” As the Speak Up Platform, we filed an appeal against the decision. (October)

An investigation was launched against the commemoration event organized by the HDP İdil District Organization in memory of Miraç Miroğlu, a seven-year-old who was killed when he was struck by an armored police vehicle while riding his bike in Şırnak, a southeastern city of Turkey. (October)

Writer and poet Meral Şimşek was acquitted of the charge of “membership in a terrorist organization,” but was sentenced to one year and three months on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization.” (October)

Access to a news article by MA about the suspicious death of Havva Nur Çalışkan, a student at Antalya Bilim University Law Faculty, in a hotel room was blocked. (October)

Access to news articles published on the websites of *Cumhuriyet*, *Gazete Duvar* and *BirGün* about the bribery allegations against the Istanbul Police

Chief and some police officers was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (October)

Access to news reports about the access-blocking orders to the news articles about the bribery allegations against the Istanbul Police Chief and some police officers was blocked. (October)

Access to a news report on the website of *BirGün* newspaper about a fatal traffic accident involving the Çemişgezek District Governor and related social media posts was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (October)

The Diyarbakır 2nd Criminal Judgeship of Peace blocked access to the domain name *ozgurgelecek26.net* of *Özgür Gelecek* news portal. (October)

Access to a news article on the *Kronos* website, titled "Türkiye Gençlik Vakfı'nın (TÜGVA) torpil listesinden jet yükselme" (A swift ascent to power from the Turkish Youth Foundation's the favoritism list), and other news reports about TÜGVA was blocked upon the request of Muhsin Kadir Yılmaz, a judge who was listed among the names on the list in question. (October)

The letters of jailed academic and activist Nuriye Gülmen, which included the sentence, "Öğrenci bursundan bahsetmek istiyorum" (I'd like to talk about student grants), was deemed objectionable by the prison administration on the grounds of "creating an agenda by targeting individuals and institutions." (October)

The Tunceli Governor's Office declared a fifteen-day ban on all public events and demonstrations across the province due to Covid-19 pandemic. The ban covered concerts, festivities, distribution of brochures, putting up banners and posters, lighting and carrying torches, conferences, panels and cinevision screenings. (October)

Access to a news article by Fatih Polat, editor-in-chief of *Evrensel* newspaper, regarding the book *Yaralı Yonca* (*The Wounded Clover*) titled, "Dağın öteki yüzündeki gerçeği gösteren kitap" (The book that reveals the truth on the other side of the mountain), was blocked on the grounds of "national security." (November)

Access to news articles published on *Evrensel* newspaper about the funeral of twelve YPG members killed by ISIS and the destruction of PKK members' graveyards was blocked. (November)

Access to news reports about the parliamentary question submitted by MP Ahmet Şık regarding the allegations that "the debtors who were granted undue credits from the Ziraat Bank's Bosnia and Herzegovina subsidiary were protected due to their ties to certain sects, and a 'parallel administration' affiliated with Berat Albayrak was established at the bank" was blocked. (November)

Access to news reports that Nedim Malkoç, who was appointed as the General Secretary to the Boğaziçi University during the term of the government-appointed rector, was involved in plagiarism was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (November)

Access to news reports in TELE 1 and various outlets that a number of public tenders from Gaziantep Water and Sewerage Administration, a subsidiary of the AKP-run Şahinbey Municipality, to Cebir Technology Industry Trade Inc., where the son of Şahinbey Mayor is on the board of directors, was blocked. (November)

Access to <https://www.etha25.com>, the website of ETHA, was blocked on the grounds of "national security and protection of public order." (November)

Access to news articles on *BirGün*, Halk TV and *Kronos* websites about a news report by journalist Timur Soykan on TÜGVA was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (November)

Access to news articles published on the websites of *Cumhuriyet*, *Gerçek Gündem* and *Artı Gerçek* concerning a relative of cult leader Ahmet Mahmut Ünlü, more commonly known as "Cübbeli Ahmet Hoca," was blocked on the grounds of "violation of personal rights." (November)

The Private Security Unit at Marmara University attacked the stand of the Women's Rights Club over their posters, which included the phrase "LGBTIQ+A+." The

Department of Health, Culture and Sports threatened to close the club unless the posters, which were described by the department as “immoral and not compatible with our family structure,” were removed. (November)

Writer and poet Yılmaz Odabaşı was sentenced to eleven months and 20 days in prison on the charge of “insulting the president” over a post he shared on Twitter, which read, “Türkiye sadece Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’ın başka dünyaya ve muhaliflerine ben diktatör değilim, halk iradesiyle seçildim diyebilmesini sağlamak için seçime gidiyor” (Turkey is calling an election just so Recep Tayyip Erdoğan can say, I am not a dictator, I was elected by the will of the people). (November)

Erdal Yıldırım, a writer and former executive of the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association, was sentenced to one year six months and 22 days in prison on the charge of “making propaganda for a terrorist organization” over his social media posts. (November)

The music festival KeçiFest volunteers applied to the Department of Health, Culture and Sports to hang festival posters at Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University. In response, the department censored the festival slogan, “Biat değil inat” (Not obedience, but persistence) before returning the festival posters and telling the volunteers they could hang the censored posters. (November)

An investigation was launched against Hifzullah Kutum, a research assistant at Elazığ Fırat University Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences Department of Finance, over his remarks “Yaşasın Kürdistan” (Long Live Kurdistan) in his social media posts by the faculty dean. Kutum was also briefly detained. (November)

Access to a news report published in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, titled “Ensar, TÜRGEV, TUGVA paralel terör örgütü gibi” (Ensar, TÜRGEV, TUGVA are similar to a parallel terrorist organization), which quoted a former TUGVA member, was blocked. (November)

A gag order was imposed on news articles about a woman who was killed by Can Göktaş Boz, because they could “cause outrage in society.” (November)

The Tunceli Governor’s Office prevented the Dersim Yenigün Women’s Solidarity Association opening a stand for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November, first by asking about the content of their brochures and then citing the Covid-19 pandemic. (November)

The Tunceli Governor’s Office decided that all public events and demonstrations across the province had to get permission from the civil administration in advance for fifteen days. Thus, only the public events and demonstrations deemed appropriate by the governor’s office could be held. (November)

Private security guards at Ankara University prevented the Faculty of Political Sciences students from hanging a banner, that read, “Bir kişi daha eksilmeye tahammülümüz yok” (We cannot afford to lose one more person) for the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on 25 November. (November)

The Hakkari Governor’s Office extended a blanket ban on all public events and demonstrations for fifteen days. The ban covered activities such as public gatherings; flying lanterns/ balloons or drones; pitching a tent; concerts; festivities; theater; sketches; cinevision, pantomime etc. (November)

The Van Governor’s Office announced a ban on all public gatherings and demonstrations across the province for fifteen days on the grounds of “preservation of national security and protection of public health and order.” (November)

Access to <https://www.etha26.com>, the website of ETHA, was blocked on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (December)

Access to <https://umutgazetesi36.org>, the website of *Umut* newspaper, was blocked on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (December)

Access to <https://kizilbayrak57.net>, the website of *Kızıl Bayrak* newspaper, was blocked on the grounds of “national security and protection of public order.” (December)

Access to a news report on *Diken*'s website, which quoted CHP Chair Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (December)

Access to a news article in *BirGün* newspaper and two news articles in *Cumhuriyet* newspaper concerning President Erdoğan was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (December)

Access to various news reports on the websites of *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, TELE 1 and Halk TV concerning Kastamonu University Rector Ahmet Hamdi Topal was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (December)

Access to a news report on the Odatv website about İBB's evacuation of certain venues previously allocated to a number of foundations was blocked due to "violation of personal rights." (December)

Access to news reports on the websites <https://rizenabiz.com/> and <https://kuzeytv.org/> concerning the lawsuits filed against the news portals by ÇGD Rize Branch Head Genççağa Karafazlı over the news articles that mentioned him and the ensuing access-blocking orders was blocked. (December)

What Has the Speak Up Platform Done in 2021?

- In February, we conducted an online meeting with 90 participants, including artists, journalists, academics, civil society representatives and people from other fields to share the highlights of our annual Censorship and Self-Censorship in Turkey report. At the event, we shared our year-long observations on the cases of censorship in the fields of culture, arts, media and Internet broadcasting, and made an assessment of the past year in terms of censorship with our participants.
- In March, we conducted an open forum event, where we discussed the culture and arts scene in the province of Eskişehir, attended by writer Emel İrtem; Osman Şişman, the founder of Yort Publishing House, and artist Nejdet Metin. Previously held in Batman and Ankara provinces, these events provided us with an opportunity to bring together cultural and artistic communities in the cities to discuss local problems and alternative ways to counter them. In Eskişehir, we discussed the positive and negative developments in the field of arts in the past 10 years in the city; how the Covid-19 pandemic affected the cultural sphere, and the opportunities and challenges the cultural workers in the city faced.
- In the webinar we held in April, titled "Freedom of artistic expression: What happened to the canary in the coal mine?", we refreshed our basic knowledge on freedom of artistic expression. The webinar brought together Banu Karaca, co-founder of Siyah Bant, a research platform that documents censorship in the arts across Turkey, who works on cultural policies; Ole Reitov, global human rights defender, journalist and independent consultant on freedom of artistic expression, and Sara Whyatt, who has worked with freedom of expression organizations, such as PEN International, Amnesty International, UNESCO, Freemuse, Culture Action Europe and International Freedom of Expression Exchange. Together with our guests, we discussed which rights and freedoms fell within freedom of artistic expression, and by what means and which actors it was prevented, as well as relevant domestic and international laws and mechanisms.
- In May, we organized a conference titled "Freedom of expression of LGBTQI+ individuals and censorship" in collaboration with Kaos GL Association. In the conference, spanning three sessions, we discussed the censorship of LGBTQI+ individuals in media, publishing and arts and other violations

of freedom of expression experienced by LGBTQI+ individuals in Turkey, as well as the ways to counter them. Kaos GL's Yıldız Tar addressed the representation of LGBTQI+ individuals in the media, while the Speak Up Platform's Alican Acanerler shared the highlights concerning LGBTQI+ individuals from our annual reports on censorship and self-censorship.

- In the session dedicated to the media, Lawyer Kerem Dikmen, the Legal Coordinator of Kaos GL, shared examples of censorship in the fields of media and law. Dr. İdil Engindeniz from Galatasaray University, on the other hand, discussed how hate speech in the media affected freedom of expression of LGBTQI+ individuals.
- In the session on the publishing industry in Turkey, Oya Burcu Ersoy, one of the editors of the book set *Aşkın L* Hali (The L* Case of Love)*, talked about both the book set and the spaces opened by Kaos GL's own Women to Women Short Story Contest from past to present. Hatice Kapusuz provided details about censorship of children's books in Turkey and the history and operational aspect of the Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications. The session was moderated by Umut Güven, the editor of *Kaos GL* magazine.
- In the session titled "Freedom of expression in the arts and censorship," Ayline Aslı Demir from Kaos GL Ankara Queer Art Program; Özgür Can Taşçı from TAPA (Transformative Art Project for Activists), and Arya Zencefil from Pembe Hayat KuirFest Queer Artists Solidarity Network discussed the prospects of solidarity against censorship in the field of arts. The session was moderated by Kültigin Kağan Akbulut of the Argonotlar website and the Speak Up Platform.
- In April, we organized a Wikimarathon workshop, as a digital activism event, to prepare the missing article on freedom of artistic expression on Wikipedia, the Turkish language edition of Wikipedia. The workshop brought together 15 persons from the field of culture and arts and the Turkey representatives of the Wikimedia Foundation, where we discussed in groups about the different subtopics of freedom of artistic expression. At the end of the workshop, we created the freedom of artistic expression page on Wikipedi. With this page, we have taken an important step to promoting the concept of "freedom of artistic expression," about which was produced valuable information, but which is unfortunately not used very often by various actors such as the general public, media, artists, rights defenders, legal experts or politicians, in Turkey.

- In July, we organized a forum titled "Documentary Films Resist Censorship" in cooperation with Documentarist, where we talked about the documentaries that were blocked or censored in film festivals, or the directors of which were prosecuted, together with directors, producers and viewers. In the forum moderated by Elif Ergezen, we discussed the censorship of *Bakur (North, 2015)*, directed by Çayan Demirel and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu; *Yeryüzü Aşkın Oluncaya Dek (Love Will Change the World, 2014)*, directed by Reyhan Tuvi; *Sessiz Ölüm (Silent Death, 2001)*, directed by Hüseyin Karabey, *Nû Jîn (New Life, 2015)*, directed by Weysî Altay, and *Bîra Mi' Têtin (I Remember, 2015)*, directed by Selim Yıldız, and the methods to resist censorship.
- As the Speak Up Platform, we attended the panel titled "Art Under Pressure" on 24 September 2021 as part of the Göteborg Book Fair and discussed our work within the scope of freedom of artistic expression in Turkey. Sonay Ban of the Speak Up Platform talked about the effects of the atmosphere of fear and arbitrary practices in Turkey on the fields of media, culture and arts, and the judicial processes experienced by those who produced work in the fields of culture and arts through recent cases.
- In our video series titled "Kamusal Alanda Türkçe" ("Kurdish in the Public Space"), we discussed the crackdown on the Kurdish language in all areas pertaining to the public life, as well as in the media, culture and arts, with artists, journalists, academics, writers and poets. In the videos prepared by Özkan Küçük, the Diyarbakır representative of the Speak Up Platform, musician Yekbûn; Asst. Dr. Bülent Küçük, an academic; poet and translator Rêdûr Dîjle; journalist Mahmut Bozarlan and stage actor Barış Işık recounted their personal and professional experiences concerning the suppression of Kurdish.
- In our video series titled "Muzır Kitaplar" ("Obscene Books"), we talked about the books that were declared as obscene publications in Turkey or whose publishers, writers or translators were prosecuted on the charge of obscenity and we read excerpts from the books in question. In the videos prepared by the Speak Up Platform's Sumru Tamer, we discussed the book *Hanene Ay Doğacak (The Future Looks Bright)* which was censored at the time of its publication with its author Şebnem İşigüzel; the novel *Yumuşak Makine*, the Turkish translation of *The Soft Machine* by William Burroughs, over which he was prosecuted with translator Süha Sertabiboğlu; the graphic novel series *Kalp Çarpıntısı (Heartstopper)*, which was declared

an obscene publication, with Ece Çavuşlu, the editor-in-chief of Yabancı Publishing House, and the book *On Bir Bin Kırbaç*, the Turkish translation of *The Eleven Thousand Rods* by Guillaume Apollinaire, originally published in 1999, over which he was prosecuted with Rahmi Akdaş, the publisher of Hades Publishing House.

- In 2021, we held meetings with lawmakers as part of our advocacy effort and shared our findings and recommendations with them. As a result of our efforts, parliamentary questions were submitted to the TBMM. Deputy Sera Kadıgil submitted a parliamentary question about the recently launched hotline as part of the Fight Against Obscene Publication project by the Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications, addressed to the Minister of Family, Labor and Social Services. In addition, Deputy Kadıgil submitted parliamentary questions concerning the allegations that the RTÜK applied to have radio stations broadcasting online shut down and that the Supreme Council interfered with certain TV scripts on such grounds as “public morality” before those shows were produced. The written answer to the parliamentary question concerning the Board for the Protection of Minors from Obscene Publications was analyzed under the section “Publishing Industry” in this report. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has yet to answer the other two parliamentary questions.

Abbreviations

AA: Anatolian Agency	İHA: İhlas News Agency
AKP: Justice and Development Party	İHD: Human Rights Association
AYM: The Constitutional Court	İHH: The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief
BiK: The Press Advertising Agency	KHK: Statutory Decree
BTK: Information and Communication Technologies Authority	MA: Mezopotamya News Agency
CHP: Republican People's Party	MEB: Ministry of National Education
ÇİMER: The Presidency's Communication Center	MHP: Nationalist Movement Party
DHA: Doğan News Agency	MİT: National Intelligence Organization
DTK: Democratic Society Congress	MKM: Mezopotamya Cultural Center
DW: Deutsche Welle	PTT: The National Post and Telegraph Directorate of Turkey
ECHR: European Convention on Human Rights	RTÜK: Radio and Television Supreme Council
ECTHR: The European Court of Human Rights	SoE: State of Emergency
EGM: The General Directorate of Security	TBMM: The Grand National Assembly of Turkey
ESB: Access Providers Association	TCK: Turkish Criminal Code
ESP: Socialist Party of the Oppressed	TİP: Workers' Party of Turkey
ETHA: Etkin News Agency	TKP: Communist Party of Turkey
FETÖ: Fethullah Gülen Terrorist Organization	TMK: The Anti-Terror Law
GBT: General Information Gathering System	TMSF: Saving Deposit Insurance Fund
HDP: Peoples' Democratic Party	TRT: Turkish Radio and Television Corporation
İBB: The Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality	TSK: Turkish Armed Forces
İFÖD: Freedom of Expression Association	TÜGVA: Turkish Youth Foundation

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