

Censorship and Self-censorship in Turkey:

December 2017

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Foreword

This report covers incidents of censorship and self-censorship from the period December 2017 to December 2018. During the first seven-and-a-half months of this reporting period Turkey was under emergency rule (SoE). The state of emergency lasted for 729 days and was extended seven times in three-month intervals before it was finally lifted on 19 July 2018. However, the powers to censor and control which government assumed under the SoE were made *de facto*, through [Law number 7145](#) which came onto the statute book on 31 July 2018. This has had the effect of installing emergency rule as the norm.

Media

It is the opinion here that the majority of acts of censorship affecting Turkish media during the reporting period were a result of the practices honed during the SoE and the “normalized SoE” that followed, or they were the result of the environment of intimidation created through these practices. Self-censorship in media, which has now reached a historical peak, is yet another direct outcome of this environment.

In assessing the censorship and self-censorship currently affecting media in Turkey, one needs primarily to take into account the journalists and media workers who are deprived of their liberty solely because of their journalistic output. According to a [list](#) compiled by P24, as of 31 December 2018, at least 161 journalists and media workers were in prison in Turkey. Practices such as associating journalistic activity with coup and/or terrorism-related charges; arrest, long periods of pre-trial detention without legally adequate evidence to substantiate the charges (hence the reality of journalists and media workers imprisoned for years without a conviction), have become methods of media censorship and the impetus for self-censorship. According to [data](#) compiled by Bianet, as of the end of September 2018, a total of 247 journalists faced a combined total of 46 aggravated life sentences, 1 life sentence, 2,855 years and 6 months in prison, as well as TL 30,000 in fines. These totals did not include sentences sought for journalists prosecuted for “insult” and “insulting the president.”

Another effective censorship method during the SoE was the closure of media companies and rendering their employees unable to seek reinstatement or compensation for their rights. Statutory decrees (known by the Turkish acronym KHK) issued throughout the two-year SoE took a particularly heavy [toll](#): 15 news agencies, 20 television stations, 25 radio stations, 70 newspapers, 20 magazines and 29 publishers were closed overnight; their assets have been seized; some of their employees have been arrested and jailed; almost all their employees have been condemned to unemployment.

The most recent incident in this wave of media closures was the KHK number 701 published on 8 July 2018 in the Official Gazette, which [shut down](#) the newspapers *Özgürlükçü Demokrasi*, *Halkın Nabzı* and *Welat*, and the TV station Avantaj TV. This decree was the pinnacle of the increasing pressure and censorship targeting Kurdish media throughout the SoE, and

particularly in the period covered by this report. On 28 March 2018, the head office of *Özgürlükçü Demokrasi* in Istanbul and its printing house, Gün Matbaa, were raided by police; numerous employees of the newspaper and the printing house were taken into custody and later jailed pending trial; both companies were appointed trustees by the government in the next 24 hours; and *Welat*, which was also printed by Gün Matbaa, could only be distributed as photocopies. [Calls](#) by international free expression organizations for the companies to be returned to their owners and for the release of their employees yielded no results. While major Kurdish news agencies DİHA and JİNHA have already been closed down in 2016, access to the website of Mezopotamya news agency was [banned](#) numerous times by the Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) through successive court orders.

In fact, there was not even a single day when the Internet was not subject to censorship in Turkey throughout the period covered in this report, for the [access ban on Wikipedia](#), in place since 29 April 2017, continued despite numerous appeals filed by Wikipedia and third parties, including Susma, before Turkish courts. VPN servers, a method of bypassing access bans, were also targeted by censorship: in March 2018, access was banned to [20 VPN servers](#), including Tor Project, Hotspot Shield, Zenmate and TunnelBear.

Censorship targeting media (and the self-censorship it triggered) peaked in periods the governing authority regarded as politically critical and in relation to topics it deemed to be “risky.” Turkey’s 24 June 2018 presidential and parliamentary elections came on the heels of what was perhaps the most censored election campaign period in the country’s history. In a report issued immediately prior to the election, experts from the Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) stated that the public broadcaster TRT Haber had violated the principles of impartiality and accuracy, set out by the Supreme Electoral Council (YSK). According to the [report](#), TRT gave too little screen time to election campaigns by political parties other than AKP and CHP, while HDP was given no screen time at all.

The Turkish Armed Forces’ operation on the Syrian city of Afrin, and the meltdown of Turkish Lira were other topics fuelling a cycle of censorship and self-censorship. The mainstream media’s blatant adoption of the government’s official discourse to report the Afrin operation was itself newsworthy as far as some western media outlets were concerned as was

more than suggested by the *The Economist* [article](#) "Muzzling the media" and subtitled "No one in Turkey dares report accurately on the war in Syria." The plummeting Turkish Lira was an equally sensitive topic as numerous news articles, broadcasts and news posts became subject to investigations. As the decline in the Turkish Lira against the US Dollar hit a record low on 12 August 2018, the government issued a warning, after which mainstream TV channels and a large number of websites stopped [displaying exchange rates](#) in real-time on the crawler at the bottom of the screen.

The expectation of media to be in full compliance with the stance put forward by the political authority and demands fueled by this expectation influenced the Doğan Media Group to change hands. Its principal shareholder, Aydın Doğan, sold the entirety of his media outlets including Hürriyet, CNN Türk and Doğan News Agency to Demirören Holding, whose relationship with the government was much smoother than his own -- thus removing his parent company, Doğan Holding, from the media business. Following the acquisition, announced in March 2018, [censorship](#) within these media institutions intensified, and employees who failed to adapt -- managers, journalists, anchors -- were subsequently [sacked](#).

The *Cumhuriyet* daily went through another kind of [transformation](#), from an active opposition paper to one with a much tamer editorial line. The paper was already under pressure with many of its leading columnists, reporters and executives in pre-trial detention. Though 13 persons were convicted they were freed pending appeal. However their return to work was short lived after a court battle forced changes in the administration of the foundation which controlled the paper and they were either dismissed or forced to resign.

A different aspect of the political pressure newspapers faced was revealed recently, on 12 November, when the daily *Karar*, a once pro-government newspaper that recently turned more critical, issued a public [statement](#) complaining that not only state-owned enterprises but also private companies were being forbidden from purchasing ad space in the newspaper. We note that an embargo on advertising aimed at punishing media outlets who are not supportive of the government, when combined with the steadily rising printing paper, printing and distribution costs, is at the end of the day a measure forcing the press into eventual bankruptcy/closure, and is, therefore, a form of censorship.

In such an environment, Internet media, despite widespread ban on access to numerous websites, seemingly continues to be a field where independent journalism is still possible. However, after the 19 September enactment of a new bill, we can expect censorship even here to become more structural. Under this new [law](#), RTÜK is now entitled to impose bans on content broadcast on Internet and those seeking to broadcast radio/TV content online are required to obtain a broadcast and transmission license from RTÜK.

It is currently impossible to speak of journalism in Turkey without mentioning censorship. The small number of independent newspapers, radio stations, magazines and online news outlets and TV channels striving to run on extremely tight budgets are only able to survive by the judicious application of self-censorship. Mainstream media, on the other hand, is made up of media outlets that are under the influence of the government. Perhaps the best phrase to summarize the current situation in Turkey's media was a Twitter user's post on 7 August 2018, which read: "If you need a break from the news, go out and buy a newspaper."

Social Media

In 2018, countless people in Turkey faced criminal investigations, had their homes raided, were arrested and faced jail terms or fines for their social media posts.

The most frequent grounds for interference by authorities in freedom of expression was the validation of the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) which lists offenses such as “insulting the president” (Article 299); “aspersing the sovereignty of the state” (Article 300); and “insulting the Turkish nation, the State of the Turkish Republic, the organs and institutions of the state” (Article 301); and the offense of “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization” in Article 7/2 of Turkey’s anti-terror law.

Turkey has a core of legislative measures that restrict freedom of expression, but one of these in particular, the Law on the Fight Against Terror, has of late become the “most fashionable.” Countless judicial investigations are launched against people for the popular practice of sharing posts on social media platforms. Those who make the original posting even face arrest. The most common charge resulting from these investigations is “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization.”

Turkey’s military operation on Syria’s Afrin, launched in January, and Turkish Lira’s decline against the US Dollar during the year were among top topics in social media in Turkey. These topics were so popular that not only social media users, but the country’s law enforcement and judiciary also took an interest in them: [According to official figures announced by Turkey’s Interior Ministry](#), between December 2017 and December 2018, a total of 42,406 social media accounts were investigated for disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization, praising terrorist organizations, openly stating their connection with terrorist organizations, inciting the public to hatred and animosity, insulting state officials, attempting to destroy the unity of the state and the security of the public, involving hate speech. Legal action was launched against a total of 18,376 individuals.

There has been a surge in the number of investigations targeting social media accounts following the launch on 20 January 2018 of Turkey’s Afrin operation -- a.k.a. “Operation Olive Branch.” The Interior Ministry also listed these under a different category and announced that a total of 3,205 individuals who participated in demonstrations or tweeted against the Afrin

operation were taken into custody.

A similar development was the legal action **launched** against 346 individuals who tweeted about the US Dollar's rise against the Turkish Lira, when the US Dollar hit a record high of TL 7.20.

These two examples, in which the right to freedom of expression is exercised in text, verbally, or through other visual material, are sufficient to illustrate that in Turkey, there is no guaranteed right to free expression. The country is going through a period in which any act of expression that is critical of the country's official policies regarding financial matters or foreign policy matters risks being deemed an offense. The right to "freedom of assembly," which is a form of freedom of expression, has been obstructed by bans on assembly for the past few years and under SoE, it ceased to exist.

Legal action targeting social media users, journalists, authors, artists, human rights defenders, members of parliament and businesspeople **served** as a "deterrent" and intimidated others from expressing their views in public discussions.

Towards the end of 2018, the Constitutional Court issued a statistical report on individual application. The report covered the six-year period between September 2012 and September 2018. According to the report, 6,667 (about 2 percent) of the total 324,620 individual applications lodged with the top court during the reporting period claimed that the applicant's right to freedom of expression had been violated. The court however, found a violation of the right to freedom of expression in only 94 of the 6,667 applications. The statistics did not include information as to how many applications were still pending before the court, or how many applications have been rejected. However, even this much information is enough to suggest the bigger picture.

To sum up, articles in the Turkish Penal Code and the anti-terror law have been used in such a way as to conflict with the universal principles of law and thus posed the major obstacle to freedom of expression faced in Turkey in 2018. The list of charges so abused include disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization, praising crime or criminals, and insulting the Turkish nation, the State of the Turkish Republic, the organs and institutions of the state. For these laws to be amended to comply with criteria for freedom of expression in the European Convention on Human Rights and other similar international pacts would be a big step in the right direction.

Publishing Industry

In regards to Turkey's publishing industry, the year 2018 went down in history with the closure of 30 publishing houses and numerous books being either banned and pulled off the shelves, or subject to investigation, even after the end of a 729-day state of emergency.

In 2017, Albert Camus and Baruch Spinoza were labeled as "terrorist group members" in an indictment for a criminal case. This year, two additional culprits were added to the list: *The Little Prince* and *Peter Pan*. The two books were sent to an inmate in a prison but were denied entry by the prison management on the grounds that the titles "could jeopardize security in the institution [the prison]."

There were numerous other examples, albeit less overtly ludicrous, of restrictive and oppressive bans. Furthermore, the ending of emergency rule made little difference to the frequency of such restrictions. Examples include the banning of posters advertising certain books, preventing authors and publishers from attending book fairs and the cancellation of book signing events found to be objectionable. Worst of all, such restrictions have become routine.

The biggest obstruction in the publishing industry concerned books in the Kurdish language -- so much so that one could be justified in drawing the conclusion that publishing books in Kurdish or writing books about Kurdish history constituted a criminal offense. Those who are incriminated usually face the charge of "inciting the public to hatred and animosity." Oddly, the writers of these books are often not even Kurdish. Among books banned in 2018 was a Turkish translation of *The Kurdish National Movement*, written by the French journalist and researcher known under the pen name Chris Kutschera, and first published in 2001. An excerpt from the ban order concerning the book reads as follows: "It has been decided that the printing, publishing, distribution and sales of this book be banned and its existing copies be pulled off the shelves with the presumption that it may fall under the offense of inciting the public to hatred and animosity and may potentially lead to irreversible damage in the future."

Abdullah Keskin, the editor-in-chief of the publishing company Avesta, described 2018 as "the worst year in our 23-year history in the publishing business," adding: "A total of 13 titles we published were banned this year. Three

different court orders respectively banned nine, one and three of our books. We appealed all three decisions but we haven't seen any results yet. We have not been delivered a formal notice for the ban order issued for one of our books. We found out about the ban indirectly, through other [court] orders."

The situation with Aram Publishing House, another publisher of Kurdish language books, was no different. A 2003 book titled *Tufanda 33 Gün (33 days in the flood)* was among the titles that were banned during the year, but the book had already been banned and pulled off the shelves before -- right after it was first published in 2003. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) ruled in April 2018 that Turkey pay an approximate sum of 8,000 euros to Fatih Taş (the editor-in-chief of Aram during the time of the initial ban) in non-pecuniary damages in compensation for the 2003 ruling. However, the Mersin Chief Public Prosecutor's Office filed a new case against the same book in 2018 and got a court to issue a ban order, i.e. Turkey insisted on banning a book -- an act for which it was ordered by the ECtHR to pay compensation. From the spring of 2016 until the time of the drafting of this report, 89 books published by Aram Publishing have been banned. The publishing house is currently unable to market its books directly to bookstores. Before 2016, the company used to release an average of five books each month, but currently this number stands at two books a month. In the past they printed 2,000 copies of each book they published while currently they can only afford 500 copies. Any book featuring the Aram Publishing logo -- regardless of a ban being in place for that specific publication or not -- is confiscated during house raids, prison searches, checkpoint controls, or in the event it is found in a bookstore. The reason why they faced less bans this year compared to the previous years is painfully simple because in 2018, the company was unable to publish as many books as they did in the previous years.

The obstacles faced by Kurdish language books in Turkey was not only limited to bans or judicial investigations. Kurdish was removed from the posters advertising the sixth edition of the Diyarbakır Book Fair, which had resumed in 2018 after a four-year hiatus. The news did not make headlines because Kurdish was removed from the posters alongside English, however, this went down in history as "the first action taken" by the government-appointed trustees of the Diyarbakır Municipality with regard to the city's book fair.

So, in the face of all these developments, what was the reaction from professional unions, publishing industry professionals or writers' associations such as PEN Turkey? How much media coverage did these incidents get? What kind of solidarity acts were they shown by their industry peers? There is a short and simple answer to each of these questions: No reaction, no media coverage, no solidarity.

Instead of standing up for publishing companies that were being closed down, their industry peers attempted to sign contracts with those companies' authors and translators. Only two publishing companies issued public statements in solidarity with Avesta Publications when nine of their books were banned on a single day. Other than a couple of MPs submitting parliamentary questions, neither the media nor the professional unions in the publishing industry took notice of the fact that 89 books by Aram Publishing House were banned. So when it came to Kurdish language, most professional unions and writers associations in Turkey remained silent. This year, the country's publishing industry once again failed the solidarity test.

Cinema Industry

To make an assessment of censorship in Turkey's cinema industry in the past year, we need to take into account the developments leading up to the current situation as a whole, noting that by the end of 2017 censorship incidents affecting the country's movie industry had already become standard practice. By that time, almost all film festivals in Turkey had started requiring the submission of the much-debated Commercial Screening License from the makers of the films they were showing.

One of the two earliest occurrences of the current wave of censorship on cinema in Turkey was in 2014, when the Antalya Film Festival committee censored the documentary *Yeryüzü Aşkın Yüzü Oluncaya Dek (Love Will Change the Earth)*. The second occurrence was in April 2015, when the Istanbul Film Festival committee asked the makers of the documentary *Bakur (North)* for a Commercial Screening License and later removed the production from the festival program.

Around two years later, in February 2017, when the makers of the short film *Son Şnitzel (The Last Schnitzel)*, an absurd comedy, applied to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism to obtain a Commercial Screening License for their film to be shown at that year's If Istanbul Independent Film Festival, they were told by ministry officials that they "needed to cut certain scenes" from the film for the license to be issued. This was the first such move in a very long time by the Culture and Tourism Ministry's General Directorate of Cinema and Copyright, which we had long come to see as a "committee tasked with the evaluation and classification of movies."

The Commercial Screening License being made mandatory for all festival screenings dealt a huge blow to the independence of film festivals. Through this implementation, film festivals have in a way been turned into the initial step of a censorship committee. The license document was previously only required for productions to be distributed in cinemas to be screened commercially. When the ministry made this document mandatory for any film production submitted to any film festival, non-commercial short films and documentaries too had to undergo examination by the "evaluation" committee. The Evaluation and Classification Board under the Ministry has since signed off on some striking cases of censorship comparable with those of the notorious and bygone Censorship Committee of Turkish cinema's "Yeşilçam era."

As filmmakers were busy pondering ways to fight back this newfound method of censorship, two developments took place in December 2017 that were set to dominate topics of discussion in Turkey's movie industry throughout the following year.

The first was the criminal lawsuit filed against Ertuğrul Mavioğlu and Çayan Demirel, the co-directors of the documentary *Bakur*, a much talked about film documenting the "peace process" from the viewpoint of militants. The trial is still under way with the next hearing in the case set for February 2019.

The second was the Diyarbakır Governor's Office banning the Diyarbakır screenings of the *Which Human Rights? Film Festival*.

These developments were followed in January 2018 by a lawsuit filed against Veysi Altay for his documentary feature *Nû Jîn (New Life)*, which recounts the story of guerilla women fighting against Daesh in Kobani. Just like the lawsuit against *Bakur*, the case against *Nû Jîn* was also filed after the film's showings at the Batman Yılmaz Güney Movie Theatre. Interestingly enough, the municipal movie theatre, which hosted screenings of the Yılmaz Güney Kurdish Short Film Festival for many years as well as other film festivals and alternative cinema, burned down in January 2017 in a suspicious fire after remaining defunct for months under the city's government-appointed trustees.

Therefore, 2018 began as a year where bans were now affecting not only films, but also film festivals, with filmmakers facing criminal charges for their work.

Throughout the year, other film professionals also faced prosecution. Yunus Ozan Korkut, the director of a documentary titled *Benim Varoş Hikâyem (My ghetto story)*, about the backstreets of the Ceyhan district in Adana, and five actors from the film's cast were charged with "praising crime and criminals" and "inciting drug use" in the film.

Ali Avcı, the director of the movie *Uyanış (Awakening)*, was arrested and jailed pending trial because of footage depicting President Erdoğan being held at gunpoint in the movie's trailer. Avcı was convicted of "membership in FETÖ" in September 2018 by the court and sentenced to 6 years and 3 months in prison. This was a striking development in that Avcı became the first filmmaker in Turkey to be imprisoned because of his film.

Kutbettin Cebe, the director of the documentary *Roza - İki Nehrin Ülkesi (Roza: The Country of Two Rivers)*, which recounts the resistance against Daesh and the commune in Rojava, is charged with “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization” in his documentary.

These three developments referred to above demonstrate that we are currently going through a stage in the cinema industry where dissident or simply unorthodox points of view can lead to prosecution.

That Nejla Demirci and her crew were arrested in Bodrum while filming a documentary about those who were dismissed through statutory decrees, and Özkan Küçük was denied permission by local authorities in Diyarbakır to film a documentary about child waste pickers were examples of restrictions faced by filmmakers during the year.

Another important development was the 18-year video archive of Oktay İnce, a member of the video activist collective Seyri Sokak, which was confiscated by police during a raid on İnce's home.

Some of the most striking examples of restrictions in the field of cinema in 2018 targeted LGBTI+ films. The bans initially imposed by the Governor's Office of Ankara later spread to other provinces. For instance, a screening program titled Queer Shorts that was scheduled to take place in January at the Pera Museum in Istanbul, was banned by the District Governor's Office of Beyoğlu on the grounds of “ensuring public peace.”

In 2018, censorship and self-censorship in the world of film became standard practice. It even took to the skies when the Turkish subtitles for the comedy series *Modern Family* on Turkish Airlines (THY) flights replaced the word “eşcinsel” (Turkish for “homosexual”) with “sapkın” and “tuhaf” (Turkish words for “perverse” and “weird”).

Theatre

It may be the very nature of theatre -- an extrovert, collective, and reflexive art form -- to be relatively more outspoken and reactive in the face of restrictions and censorship compared to the other fine arts.

Turkey is home to numerous theatre companies who are the descendants of a line of theatre artists who were capable of rapidly organizing in the face of political pressure; incorporating the political agenda into their onstage work; and more openly showing their dissent.

Thanks to the Actors' Union of Turkey, theatre circles are capable of organized action in the fight for their rights. Censorship of theatre in Turkey has become an issue in private companies largely because the State Theatres (DT) and Municipal Theatres (ŞT) are already inundated with censorship.

This was confirmed by several developments during the course of 2018:

Towards the end of the state of emergency (SoE), a decree was issued as part of the transition from a parliamentary to a more centralized presidential system of governance which modified the laws establishing the founding principles of DT and State Opera and Ballet (DOB). Amid confusion as to whether this amounted to these institutions ceasing to exist as legal entities, a new decree this time transformed both institutions into bodies under the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

The changes introduced to legislation governing DT and ŞT, the interventions in their repertoires, resignations (the General Director of DT, Celal Kadri Kınoğlu, resigned in February because a play had been removed from the company's repertoire) and dismissals were all developments linked to censorship. At the same time, the political pressure on those who remained within these institutions lead to self-censorship.

To illustrate the above: In March, female actors in an oratorio to be performed by the DT in the Turkish Parliament were prevented from appearing on the stage under orders from İsmail Kahraman, the Speaker of the Parliament at the time. Though a number of anonymous DT employees made this incident public, they were unable to protest further. Instead, the reaction to this inexplicable incident came from independent theatre companies. One of the largest protests in response to this incident was a performance titled *100 Kadın 100 Replik (100 women 100 lines)*, put together on an open call from the Actors' Union of Turkey with the participation of women from different

walks of life, particularly female actors.

The pressure of censorship is more intense and clear when it comes to private theatres.

Although SoE was lifted in July, on day 729, i.e. a few days short of its second anniversary, the restrictive powers which the authorities enjoyed under the SoE were enshrined in the newly enacted Law number 7145 (see above). Thus, there was no practical difference in regards to the censorship of theatrical performances from the beginning of 2018 and the latter half when the SoE was lifted.

In this regard, we note that companies producing Kurdish language plays face harsher conditions and often get less peer support. Venues where Kurdish theatre companies performed were closed down through statutory decrees. These companies have been trying to come up with solutions to this problem on their own. The Diyarbakır Municipal Theatre became defunct after its actors were dismissed and the Amed Municipal Theatre, born from the defunct company's ashes, continued to perform plays in Kurdish and labored to maintain the city's theatre festival.

The Istanbul-based theatre company Şermola Performans continued in a similar vein, albeit without a theatre of its own, but smaller Kurdish theatre companies or those that are not as institutionalized have been battling an invisible kind of censorship due to a lack of venues to perform in, alongside their financial troubles.

Children's theatre texts that promoted "ecology" and "peace" became subject to arbitrary bans throughout the year. The only explanation for this is (as reflected in the wave of arrests and investigations targeting individuals who protested Turkey's military operation on Afrin on social media) "peace" had become a politically contentious word.

Actor Barış Atay was singled out for a countrywide ban on his solo performance *Sadece Diktatör (Only a dictator)*. The play was first banned in Artvin. This was followed by bans in the Kadıköy district of Istanbul and then in all venues across Ankara, İzmir and Istanbul. This censorship was overcome by a nationwide readers' theatre performance of the play, initiated on 29 January by the Kadıköy Theatre Platform. Those who participated in the readers' theatre performances of *Diktatörü Okuyoruz (Reading the Dictator)* across Turkey shared numerous videos of the event on Twitter, proving that there is a way to collectively stand up against censorship.

It must be noted at this point that, thanks to the efforts of the Kadıköy Municipality, theatre companies based in Istanbul's Asian side are highly capable of acting in solidarity with each other.

The Kadıköy Theatre Platform, formed by Kadıköy-based theatre companies with support from the Kadıköy Municipality, dedicated the third edition of its annual Kadıköy Theatre Festival this year to imprisoned stage actor Cenk Dost Verdi. Verdi has been imprisoned since 17 August 2018 as per a 10-month prison sentence on the charge of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization" in his social media posts.

Last but not least, a new initiative aimed at bringing to the public's attention and solving the various problems faced by private theatres in Turkey has been in the works. Thirty-nine theatre companies have so far signed up for the theatre cooperative initiative, which aims to be formally established in the coming months. Current members of the initiative include Oyun Atölyesi, Duru Tiyatro, Moda Sahnesi, DasDas, Semaver Kumpanya and Baba Sahne, as well as numerous alternative and/or independent theatres.

Music

The year 2018 was a year when the field of music suffered the same widespread censorship and restrictions of freedom of expression experienced elsewhere in the arts and in media. These restrictions at times amounted to even arrests and imprisonment.

Numerous musicians faced criminal charges, particularly in the form of “insult” and “inciting the public to hatred and animosity” stemming from social media posts or public remarks.

Musicians whose concerts were cancelled because of their political stance were lucky compared to fellow musicians who were arrested or jailed because of their political views. Ferhat Tunç is standing trial on the charge of “inciting the public to hatred and animosity” and facing a prison sentence for his comments in a social media post in relation to Turkey’s 16 April 2017 constitutional referendum. Zuhâl Olcay was sentenced to a prison term of one year on the charge of “insulting the president.” Suavi was also handed down a prison sentence of 11 months and 20 days for “insulting Erdoğan,” although his sentence was commuted to a TL 14,000 fine.

By contrast, other musicians in Turkey landed high-paying positions as presidential advisors in the Council of Cultural and Art Policies.

Another major area in music that was subject to heavy restrictions of freedom of expression throughout the year was Kurdish music. Musicians who perform songs with lyrics in Kurdish in particular faced a kind of censorship that some of us thought only existed in movies. A scene from the 2006 film *Beynelmîlêl (International)*, set in the aftermath of Turkey’s 1980 military coup, in which singers in an eastern Anatolian town were performing a silent version of the folk song “Lorke” during a wedding because it was banned at the time, is still relevant in present-day Turkey.

Among the incidents we chronicled throughout the year was a wedding singer called Mecit Özlü who is being prosecuted on “propaganda” charges for a Kurdish language song he performed in a wedding in the Seyhan district of Adana province. A wedding party in Narlıdere, Izmir, was raided by the police because of Kurdish language songs played during the party. Dozens of similar incidents, from Kurdish language

songs being deemed terrorism propaganda to Kurdish musicians' concerts being cancelled, beg the question how songs, simply by being in a certain language, could become the target of bans.

Homophobia and transphobia also gave rise to censorship in the field of music throughout the past year. We need to make a reference at this point to new amendments in legislation which made broadcasts via the Internet subject to monitoring by RTÜK, thus introducing a new censorship mechanism. The law, with the new amendments that came into force on 27 March 2018, may lead to more censorship of musical entertainment on the grounds of "obscurity" or "elements of homosexuality."

A recent example was a development on 13 September 2018, where RTÜK fined a TV station for "dance numbers of homosexual nature." RTÜK was reported to have fined a local television channel for broadcasting the video for the song "Secrets" by Pink. The state-run Anatolia News Agency reported that the grounds for the fine for AS TV were that "the video included erotic dance figures of a homosexual nature," that it was "broadcast during hours when children and young people could watch," and that they could be "negatively influenced."

A statement along the same lines by İbrahim Eren, the general director of the Turkish state broadcaster TRT, as to why Turkey pulled out of the Eurovision Song Contest, was a further indication that no content featuring homosexuality would be allowed in the field of music. "One of our reasons is the voting system. Also, as a public broadcaster, we cannot broadcast live, at 9 pm, when children are still watching, someone like the Austrian winner of the contest who was wearing a beard and a skirt, who refuses genders, who doesn't identify himself as belonging to one gender, and who says he is both a man and a woman," Eren was reported as having said.

Rappers including Ezhel constituted the most talked about group in 2018 in facing bans and restrictions. There was huge reaction when Ezhel stood trial on the charge of "publicly inciting drug use" through his lyrics. The offending song "Şehrimin Tadı" or the "Taste of the City" was a YouTube sensation (receiving an initial 31 million hits but which rose closer to 60 million) which may have resulted in his acquittal at the first hearing. Rappers Khontkar Onur Dinç and Young Bego were prosecuted on the same charge and were given prison sentences.

2018 was a year when musicians were censored, banned or arrested for singing in Kurdish, for homosexual content, or for criticizing the president.

But there were also weirder incidents which gave new meaning to absurdity:

One of these was the judicial investigation into singer Mabel Matiz launched upon the allegation that he "supported FETÖ through the use of footage featuring 1 US dollar bills in his music video *Ya Bu İşler Ne?*" [F series one-dollar bill of which there are several billion in circulation were alleged to be the calling card of the failed July 2016 coup plotters]. In an example, not of actual censorship but of growing intolerance in which censorship is encouraged were the leaflets distributed in Istanbul Technical University campus which described music as incompatible with religious faith. Such incidents suggest that the tide is turning against music being free of the restrictions which other branches of the arts in Turkey endure.

Visual Arts

The recent history of censorship of visual arts in Turkey is best explained with reference to the measures taken by the state and its security forces in the aftermath of the coup of 1980. Such repression gained momentum during the late 1990s and early 2000s -- albeit in a different guise.

These were years when contemporary art was gaining in popularity and the Turkish art world began to become more international as a result of diverse dynamics -- from the ending of the Turkish isolation with the collapse of the Cold War and globalization in general. This was also a time of greater freedom when the old wisdoms and conventions began to be critiqued and attitudes about state and political authority, social gender, migration, Turkishness, nationalism, and the Kurdish and Armenian issues began to shift. New private museums and art galleries encouraged new work and increased production. Yet this provoked its own backlash among an invisible set of censors eager to restore the old red lines. Those who imposed or helped impose censorship -- mostly in the form of the charge of "degrading Turkishness, the Republic of Turkey and state institutions" -- were either the police, local organizations, or individuals who filed complaints.

It was certainly not by coincidence that this period of heightened artistic production provoked more ambitious censorship. Parties other than the state -- including cultural institutions, patrons and professional unions -- began to violate artistic freedom of expression in the name of restoring the state's legitimacy. It became clear that many were entirely untutored in the hazards of censoring the arts or in the rights of the artists.

With an eye to addressing these problems, in 2011 *Siyah Bant*, an initiative that documents all censorship incidents in all fields of the arts in Turkey; and *Oyuncular Sendikası* (Actors' Union of Turkey), aimed at defending the professional rights of stage, screen and voice actors in the country, were founded.

This process, during which the contemporary art scene, assuming an active political stance, made frequent use of the public sphere, reached its pinnacle with the Gezi Park protests of 2013. During those years, up until the Gezi protests, the Istanbul Biennial had begun displaying its exhibitions in various locations across the city. Right now, contemporary art in Turkey does not have such privileges; it is rather encased in "white cubes" or a

limited number of alternative art venues.

Although the variety and frequency of censorship increased in the aftermath of the Gezi Park protests and again during the SoE, this situation is seemingly undetectable in the contemporary art scene. This is principally due to the distanced relationship between visual arts and the state and its institutions. Repression results not in more censorship, but in either self-censorship or a type of artistic production that can get under the censorship radar. Most art venues, particularly cultural institutions, impose their own censorship rules.

There is an intense schedule in the field of visual arts with international exhibitions, artist-in-residence programs, exhibitions and series of interviews often held indoors and more focused on art itself. Other than several substantial incidents (such as the works that were pulled from the Istanbul Art Fair on the sidelines of the TÜYAP Book Fair, or those that were displayed with an 18+ warning sign) it is not possible to come across publicly debated incidents of censorship. So much so that when the Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul hosted a solo exhibition by the Chinese dissident artist Ai Weiwei, whose troubled relationship with censorship is well-known and who often depicts in his work the censorship he faces in China, both the museum and the artist largely managed to circumvent the issue of censorship in the exhibition -- which was being hosted in a country under SoE. It is this kind of a self-censorship we are dealing with.

One could also take on a more optimistic outlook and assume that the equilibrium between visual arts and censorship is more slanted towards the arts. However, first of all, it may be too early to make this assumption, and secondly, there are still other mechanisms of censorship/oppression to be talked about. For these new methods of censorship have now turned into new methods of silencing.

This does not mean that some recent artworks and exhibitions were uninfluenced by the gloomy environment. The exhibitions "Days" by Ahmet Doğu İpek, "Days Heap Upon Us" by Nermin Er, "An Internal Garden" by Sibel Horada, "What Helps with Death?" by Alp Sime and İhsan Oturmak, and "No Man's Land" by Deniz Aktaş, were only some of the shows that tackled or revealed the distress we have been going through. We should also note the various protests staged by artists and

others in art circles in protest of the ongoing pre-trial detention of Osman Kavala, one of the founders of art institutions, venues and initiatives such as Anadolu Kültür, Depo and Kültür için Alan (Spaces of Culture).

If we were to turn our focus to more obvious incidents of censorship affecting the arts, we could say that sculptures and cartoons were the leading target of censorship. The first incidents that come to mind are the destruction of sculptures and monuments in Kurdish provinces where trustees were appointed by the government to replace elected mayors to run the cities. Almost all statues and monuments in Turkey stand as the embodiment of vandalism and intolerance in this country, regardless of their aesthetic quality, their content or their message. They are either obscene, political, a monstrosity or provocative.

On the cartoonists front, Seyfi Şahin was given a prison sentence of 1 year and 15 days for “publicly insulting religious values held by a part of the society”; the daily *Evrensel* and its cartoonist Sefer Selvi were fined TL 10,000 for a cartoon themed around the “Paradise Papers” leaks, depicting former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and his son Erkam Yıldırım; and Nuri Kurtcebe was handed down a prison sentence in a case where he was accused of “insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan” in his cartoons.

In 2018, even a group of students from Ankara's Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) had their share of the expansionist censorship practice in Turkey when they were jailed pending trial for a month for carrying a banner that featured a cartoon titled “Tayyip Alemi” (The Tayyip Kingdom) during the school's graduation ceremony.

Regions

Ankara

Throughout 2018, bans, interventions and censorship targeting cultural events, art performances and public demonstrations in Ankara reflected a sexist tendency.

This past year, as in the previous year, LGBTI+ faced the harshest prohibitions.

The government pressure that began in November 2017 only got worse in the months that followed with a ban imposed by the governor's office on all kinds of "LGBT and LGBTI" activities across the Ankara province. Following the ban, numerous attempts to hold such events were prevented by police raids. Likewise, attempts by other associations and unions aiming to make room for activities by dysfunctionalized LGBTI+ associations were also banned. Although LGBTI+ activities in other provinces have faced certain bans, the fact that the ban in Ankara, the country's capital, to have no predefined time limit appeared as a direct dictum by the heterosexist government.

Artistic events and performances that featured government criticism and satire were also targeted by bans. The most significant among them was the indefinite ban imposed by the Governor's Office of Ankara on a solo stage performance by actor Barış Atay titled *Sadece Diktatör (Only a dictator)*. We could draw the conclusion that the "indefinite" bans are meant to symbolize the infinitude of the new anti-democratic regime, which has brought permanent restrictions on freedom of expression, and the unlawful statutory decrees and other legislation in violation of basic rights and freedoms. In its public statement concerning its ban on the play *Sadece Diktatör*, the Ankara Governor's Office stated that the ban did not only cover the stage play itself, but also the actor Barış Atay, who was referred in the statement as "the said person," which could be seen as a direct method of the practice of stigmatization and dysfunctionalization.

Yet another ban targeted female actors in an oratorio depicting the Battle of Çanakkale, put on by the State Theatre (DT), on 28 March 2018 as part of a series titled *Meclis Sohbetleri* in the Parliament building (see above). This too was an example of the sexist approach behind the bans imposed on art performances.

It should be noted that during our research focusing on the above mentioned sexist stage ban in the Parliament, we also came across self-censoring among stage actors employed by the Turkish State Theatres on subjects such as investigation, termination of contract and suppression [within the company]. The Actors' Union of Turkey also hesitated to share information with us. Overall, we could argue that the increased pressure by the government institutions towards their employees has been forcing employees of such institutions, as well as professional unions, to increasingly practice self-censorship.

Universities too imposed self-censorship on events they organized during this period. Students at the Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) were under pressure from restrictions and bans imposed by the school's rector in concert with the governorship. Numerous students were subject to investigations for their part in the Pride Parade. The governorship banned three days of ODTÜ's four-day spring festival, an annual event that has nurtured the school's free spirit throughout its history. On the other hand, another spring festival aimed at university students, *Koç Fest*, which had been on hold for the past 12 years, was able to proceed with its 2018 program without facing any restrictions. This double standard policy by the governor's office demonstrates that the political authority preferred the festival put together by the corporate group over the one put together by the school because it deemed the former to be more manageable.

Four ODTÜ students who were arrested and jailed pending trial for carrying a banner featuring a cartoon titled *Tayyipier Âlemi* during the school's graduation ceremony were eventually released from detention, but their arrest figured in the atmosphere of intimidation at the university.

A roadway constructed during former Ankara Mayor Melih Gökçek's time in office that passed right through the ODTÜ campus, and the allocation of 10 acres of land from the school campus to the Higher Education Student Loans and Dormitories Institution for 49 years last September, was seen as an attack on the spirit and traditions of the institution as much as a plundering of ODTÜ's property.

Throughout 2018, labor demonstrations, rallies, strikes, and particularly May Day demonstrations, have either been banned or faced harsh police

intervention. Police used force while quelling demonstrations in Ankara that aimed to bring to the public's attention the inhumane working conditions faced by laborers in the construction of the third airport in Istanbul.

The Ankara Governor's Office banned the 2018 edition of *Mamak Kömür Deposu Buluşması*, an annual gathering organized in a former coal depot in Tepecik, a neighborhood in the Mamak district whose population is mainly made up of Alevis, dissidents and leftists. The simultaneous bans on gatherings and festivals that mainly attract the opposition and those of a leftist worldview seems to have been aimed at isolating these segments of the society.

The same intention was also behind the cordoning off of the Human Rights Monument on Yüksel Street for a year and closing this part of the street to rallies and public demonstrations. This monument had become a meeting place for civil servants dismissed from their posts through statutory decrees and had come to signify the solidarity among them.

Diyarbakır

In the early days of 2018, Diyarbakır's cultural circles were striving to defend against a crisis affecting the city's art venues following the replacement of the elected municipality and appointment of trustees by the government at the time of Turkey's two-year SoE. The sites of this resistance were the numerous cafés and various other small venues which hosted cultural activities in the city. Concerts and film screenings have since been taking place in cafés or small halls.

This new practice has led to a noticeable regression of the Kurdish language from public space. Indeed, when TÜYAP Book Fair was returning to the city in late 2018 after a four-year hiatus, the absence of Kurdish on the posters advertising the fair was almost regarded as normal.

Diyarbakır and its neighboring provinces welcomed 2018 under government-appointed trustees who were now running these cities for the second year in a row, and in a more institutionalized manner. The trustees' first years in office were marked with numerous incidents of knocking down statues and monuments in the cities. This practice continued in 2018 with the destruction of the few remaining monuments. To cite a few examples: the city knocked down the Newroz Monument in Nusaybin and announced that it would build a clock tower in its former spot; a plate inscribed with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was removed from the Monument of Human Rights in Diyarbakır; in Tuzluca, a district of Iğdır, the Human Rights Monument, a two-piece sculpture depicting two female figures, that featured the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was torn down under orders from District Governor Abdullah Kadioğlu, who had been appointed to the city as trustee.

Various social and cultural endeavors launched by the cities were also discontinued under trustee administration.

Trustees appointed to the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality shut down Sesli Kütüphane (Speaking Library), which offered disabled children with resources and information in their native language. Contracts of its employees were terminated and access to the recordings was banned. In Mardin, the Ş. Elî Temel Cultural Center, which was named after the Kurdish musician Ali Temel, was shut down under orders from Ahmet Odabaşı, the trustee appointed to the local Kızıltepe Municipality.

Numerous media outlets based in Diyarbakır had been closed under statutory decrees issued in 2016. In 2018, those online media outlets aiming to fill the gap created by the closures, frequently faced access bans. Several news stories became subject to investigation or prosecution: The Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into the news platform 1HaberVar on the grounds that it "disseminated propaganda for the PKK through the press." Commentary by guests appearing on 1HaberVar programs were cited as evidence of the alleged propaganda.

Numerous journalists working in the region have been standing trial on charges stemming from either their reporting or sharing news stories on social media. A news photo taken by journalist Sertaç Kayar at the March 8 International Women's Day march became the subject of a court case filed by police officers who were seen in Kayar's photo. Editors of the shuttered news agency DİHA appeared on a trial that also began this year. They are accused because of sharing on social media a news story dispatched by DİHA.

During the drafting of this report, news arrived that journalist Sedat Sur was being sent to prison for a news report, an example of the ongoing targeting of the right to freedom of expression.

Numerous police raids took place in Diyarbakır in 2018: Columnist and author Nurcan Baysal was taken into custody in her Diyarbakır home during a raid when police broke down the door to her apartment. The Aram Publishing House and Jin News also faced police raids during which their doors were broken.

Diyarbakır attempted during the past year to break the siege of the government-appointed trustees and the SoE through a broad array of cultural events from filmmaking and theatre workshops, literature festivals and a book fair through to Kurdish theatre performances, dance and children's fairy tale events.

Public events continued to encounter bans from the Governor's Office. For example, a concert by musician Mem Ararat, who performs in Kurdish, was cancelled without explanation. The Diyarbakır program of the film festival "Which Human Rights?" was also cancelled despite the fact that the event's main leg in Istanbul faced no obstacles.

Songs or other onstage performances that had long been subject to criminal lawsuits increasingly became grounds for arrest. Koma Rosîda lead

vocalist Jiyan was arrested and jailed following an onstage performance during a rally in Patnos on the grounds that the lyrics of a song during the performance included the word “Kurdistan.”

Evidence of the hidden “irritation” with Kurdish was that RTÜK imposed a fine on the Kurdish children’s TV station Zarok over two Kurdish songs it aired on the grounds that they “served the objectives of a terrorist group.” The TV station had been shut down through a statutory decree, but the government later rescinded that order.

We could also argue that during this reporting period, the use of Kurdish in public space, which surged in the past through the encouragement of the region’s elected municipalities, began to subside. In addition to bans and efforts by the government to reshape the cultural environment of the region through the use of trustee administrators, we remark a perceptible increase in self-censorship as a result of the current situation.

İzmir

Seen as a safe haven amidst Turkey's often tense political atmosphere, the İzmir province has recently been receiving quite a large amount of "educated" migration. Artists, journalists, authors, human rights defenders have increasingly been relocating in İzmir, which they deem to be freer than most other Turkish provinces. The city has in a way turned into an alternative destination for those who are unable -- or unwilling -- to move to European locations.

The metropolitan and local municipalities in İzmir run by the main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) host art events in accordance with the city's cultural identity year-round. The Mediterranean Academy, founded by the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, has been working in cooperation with professionals from the field of arts and culture to transform the city into a cultural hub. The İzmir Cultural Platform Initiative, launched as part of the Academy, has been working to create a buzz around the work of local artists. Artists requesting to use the exhibition halls or performance halls for their work often receive affirmative response so long as the city has the resources. As long as there is no pressure from the central government, artists' work are not subject to any kind of control mechanism by the municipal administrations.

Restrictions targeting arts and culture in the city are often seen in implementations by either the central government or local municipalities run by the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), or those by university rectors. Among examples of these restrictions was the AKP-run Selçuk Municipality refusing to designate a venue for a performance of the play *Latmos'a Rahmet Geldi*, which is about ecological problems, on the grounds that the play was "objectionable." Other examples were the indefinite ban imposed by the İzmir Governor's Office on the play *Sadece Diktatör*. An event titled LGBTİ+ Temel Kavramlar (LGBTİ+ Basic Concepts), to be hosted at the 9 Eylül University, had to be cancelled.

The restrictions in universities range from the bans on a variety of grounds on publications and the exhibition of student graduation projects; academics refusing to participate in events organized by institutions that are known to be critical of the government; and academics from İzmir universities refusing to attend academic symposia where academics who have been dismissed through statutory decrees are among the speakers.

Sadly, in Izmir too, people are taken into custody or jailed on account of their social media posts; or rallies, demonstrations and other gatherings by political parties, professional unions, civil society organizations or women's platforms that are critical of the government are banned. Such bans, exercises of censorship and political pressure have become routine. For this reason, public events other than regular election campaign rallies by the People's Democratic Party (HDP) in Izmir are organized either at the party's local branches or in other indoor venues.

An extraordinary development this year was the brief arrest of Izmir-based video activist Oktay İnce from the Seyri Sokak Video Collective and the unlawful confiscation of his 18-year video archive during a police raid on his house on the grounds of his social media posts.

We have also been witnessing incidents of censorship and self-censorship in local media in Izmir due to pressure from both the central government and local municipalities. Examples include a journalist taken into custody for a news story critical of the AKP or the President; or a local newspaper that covered a misconduct by a CHP mayor to be punished by being denied advertising. Although they often deny this, some local newspapers have been doing "embedded" journalism for local mayors in order to survive.

Certainly the fact that art and other cultural activities in Izmir are relatively free from restrictions in comparison to other cities is not solely due to the importance CHP-run municipalities attach to art. The city also has a long history of local initiatives working in the fields of arts and culture. The AKP government's outlook on Izmir is also a little different than its approach to other cities; the AKP has been building control over Izmir, where it has never been able to win in elections, through different ways. Pro-AKP construction companies have been sponsoring art events put together by local municipalities in Izmir or undertaking joint projects with these municipalities in the fields of arts and culture. However, it should be noted that this cooperation has been tampering with the city's identity. Major construction companies have been opening art galleries in the city where they host events they think would be ideologically convenient for the city's population.

In conclusion, although it is seen by individuals weary of the political oppression and the increasingly conservative cities in Turkey as "the city to live in," Izmir is not entirely immune to the censorship and bans currently afflicting the rest of the country.

Cases

December 2017

Sesli Kütüphane (Speaking Library), which was launched by the Diyarbakır Metropolitan Municipality to present disabled children with sources of information in their native language, was shut down by the trustees appointed to the city. Employee contracts were terminated and access to the recordings was banned.

Martyn Blundell Aim, a photographer from New Zealand, was taken into custody in Turkey. Lawyers who spoke to the photographer during his detention at the Anti-Terror branch of the police department said Aim was not given his regular medication and his basic needs were not met.

A Chief Public Prosecutor launched an investigation into the 1HaberVar platform on the allegation that it “disseminated propaganda for the PKK through the press.” The prosecutor cited commentary made by guests during programs broadcasted by 1HaberVar as evidence.

The Diyarbakır Governor's Office banned without reason the planned Diyarbakır screenings of the film festival “Which Human Rights?” put together by the organizers of the Documentarist film festival.

Unidentified persons in Eskişehir vandalized sculptures made in September, during the 11th International Terra Cotta Symposium of Eskişehir.

The Ş. Elî Temel Cultural Center in Mardin, which was named after the Kurdish musician Ali Temel, was shut down under orders from Ahmet Odabaşı, the trustee appointed to the local Kızıltepe Municipality.

Brazilian cartoonist Carlos Latuff announced that lawyers representing President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had filed for an access ban on Twitter because of the cartoons he posts on his Twitter account. Additionally, access was banned to Latuff's website <http://latuffcartoons.wordpress.com>.

The Batman Chief Public Prosecutor's Office filed charges against Çayan Demirel and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu, the co-directors of the documentary *Bakur* (North), two years after the film was shown in numerous provinces across Turkey during the country's peace process. Demirel and Mavioğlu are accused of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization."

The Siyah Beyaz Publishing House was banned from participating in book fairs organized by CNR Expo.

A play by Duygu Şahlar, a former pre-school teacher in Hatay who was dismissed through an emergency decree, was banned in five districts of the province of Muğla.

A statue in Yalova depicting Hayrettin Karaca, the founder of Turkey's TEMA Foundation, was destroyed by a group of unidentified persons. The statue had been vandalized twice before.

The Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into the executives of TÜYAP on the grounds that they hosted meetings, fairs and congresses organized by TUSKON. The allegations are "attempting to forcibly prevent the Turkish government from functioning, membership in FETÖ, aiding and abetting FETÖ."

The Little Prince, *Peter Pan* and *Robinson Crusoe* were among books that were sent to an inmate in the Diyarbakır D Type Prison but were not allowed by the prison management on the grounds that they could "jeopardize security in the institution."

The Constitutional Court held that the sentence imposed on İrfan Sancı for publishing William S. Burroughs' novel *The Soft Machine* was in violation of the "rights to freedom of expression, art and the press."

A screening program titled *Queer Shorts* that was scheduled to take place on 25 November at the Pera Museum in Istanbul was initially postponed by

the District Governor's Office of Beyoğlu to 12 December on the grounds that the event may be "against the constitutional order" and "a disorderly conduct." The District Governor's Office later banned the event on the grounds of "ensuring public peace."

January 2018

Access was banned to the websites of the Mezopotamya news agency, the Özgürlükçü Demokrasi newspaper, and the online news outlets 1HaberVar and Demokrat Haber.

Access was banned to main opposition CHP Istanbul MP Barış Yarkadaş's monthly reports about censorship and violations of freedom of the press.

Turkish Airlines substituted the Turkish translation of the word "gay" with the Turkish words for "perverse" and "weird" in the subtitles during its in-flight screening of the TV comedy series *Modern Family*.

A prosecutor pressed charges against film director Veysi Altay for his documentary *Nû Jîn*, which depicts the fight in Kobanî against the IS, and against Dicle Anter, the manager of the Yılmaz Güney Movie Theatre in Batman, which screened Altay's documentary, accusing both of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization."

The play *Sadece Diktatör* (Only a dictator) by stage actor-director Barış Atay was banned across the Artvin province on the grounds that the Provincial Administration of Artvin found the play to be "unsuitable."

The stations Hatay Güney Radio TV and Prestij Medya were closed down through a statutory decree, the 31st since the institution of the SoE.

It was revealed that, under orders from the Istanbul Police Department, police had been coercing theatres in the Kadıköy district into not hosting performances of the play *Sadece Diktatör*.

The Mersin Governor's Office did not green-light a panel discussion about the institution of prison uniforms in Turkey's prisons. The panel discussion was to be put together by the Mersin branch of the Human Rights Association.

Turkey's status declined from "partly free" to "not free" in the 2018 edition of the annual Freedom in the World report issued by Freedom House.

Nejla Demirci and her film crew were taken into custody in the southwestern town of Bodrum while filming a documentary about those who were dismissed from public service through statutory decrees.

The play *Sadece Diktatör* by Barış Atay was banned in all indoor and outdoor venues and theatres across the Kadıköy district.

Following the launch of Turkey's military operation on Syria's Afrin, at least 150 individuals were taken into custody and 22 among them were jailed pending trial on account of their social media posts critical of the operation.

Large banners advertising books by authors Soner Yalçın and Yılmaz Özdil that were hanging outside the Kırmızı Kedi Publishing House in the Kartal district were taken down upon persistent pressure from the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality.

The play *Sadece Diktatör* was banned indefinitely in İzmir.

February 2018

Musician Cevahir Canpolat from the Pir Sultan Abdal Cultural Association, Ali Erol from Kaos GL, documentary director Sibel Tekin from Seyri Sokak, and author Emek Erez, a member of Student Collectives, were taken into custody.

Access was banned for a second time to the website of the 1HaberVar Platform.

The Information and Communication Technologies Authority (BTK) banned access to the websites direnisteyiz.org, Mezopotamya news agency and kizilbayrak.net.

The Akhisar District Directorate of National Education banned a children's theatre play called *Çevreci Afacanlar* (environmentalist rascals) on the grounds that the play was "anti-war and anti-violence."

Istanbul State Theatre (DT) General Director Celal Kadri Kınoğlu resigned from his post following the removal of a play titled *Avrupa* (Europe) from the company's February 2018 program upon a complaint filed with the Prime Ministry Communication Center (BİMER).

The Karabük University cancelled a concert by Kemal Dinç that was scheduled to take place on the school campus on the grounds of "anti-war" social media posts by the musician.

Journalist İbrahim Gezici was taken into custody at Sabiha Gökçen Airport in Istanbul upon his arrival from Germany.

Boğaziçi University cancelled a panel discussion about prisons and prison resistance in Turkey from the 1990s to the present-day, which was scheduled to take place on 15 February and where Veli Saçılık was a speaker.

The 10 Ekim Barış ve Dayanışma Derneği (October 10 association for peace and solidarity) was closed down on the grounds of "technical shortcomings in the association's charter."

The rector's office of Ankara University banned activities put together by the student clubs under the Faculty of Political Science (SBF).

A lawsuit was filed against musician Ferhat Tunç on the charge of "openly inciting the public to hatred and animosity" on social media.

Musician İbrahim Rojhilat was arrested on the accusation that he "disseminated propaganda for a terrorist group" through onstage remarks.

Six members of the band Grup Yorum were listed on the Interior Ministry's "wanted terrorists" list.

Police confiscated several books they found at the Aram Publishing House in Diyarbakır during a raid. The police broke down the door to the publishing house, which was located in the same building as Kurdî-Der.

The Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) fined Show TV TL 260,000 on the grounds of a kissing scene in the drama series *Çukur* (the pit).

The BTK banned access to the website direnisteyiz.org once again.

Objections filed against the indefinite bans on LGBTI themed activities planned in Ankara by Kaos GL and Pembe Hayat were rejected.

RTÜK imposed on Yaşam TV a TL 13,000 fine and a five-episode ban on the *Cevdet Gülbay ile Govend Show* on the grounds of the Kurdish expressions in the salutation and songs performed on the show by a program guest were "not official translations."

Imprisoned journalist Nedim Türfent was not given a book by Nurcan Baysal titled *Ezidiler: 73. Ferman Katliam ve Kurtuluş* (The Yazidis: 73rd edict: massacre and salvation) and Ahmet Altan's novel *Ölmek Kolaydır Sevmekten* (Dying is Easier than Loving) by the Van Maximum Security Prison administration on the grounds that the books were "inappropriate."

The Diyarbakır Governor's Office refused to grant permission to the Diyarbakır

Women's Platform for an outdoor public event to mark the March 8 International Women's Day. The Van Governor's Office also imposed a month-long ban on public events and demonstrations throughout the province.

It was revealed that the Turkish public broadcaster TRT had banned 142 songs in Turkish, and 66 others in Kurdish in 2016. Songs by Sila, Nazan Öncel, Demet Akalın, Civan Haco, Rojda were among the banned titles.

March 2018

İhsan Eliaçık was prohibited from participating in the Isparta Book Fair.

The BTK banned access to the online news portal Ahval.

The Antalya Governor's Office banned a press statement by local women's associations on the occasion of March 8 International Women's Day for security reasons.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism suspended the Executive Board of the Musical Work Owners Society of Turkey (MESAM).

Copies of a book titled *Bohçadaki Sırlar* (Secrets in a bundle) that were handed out to school children in two districts in the Kayseri province were pulled under orders from the Governor's Office for "age inappropriate content."

The Muğla University administration censored a performance of the play *Joko'nun Doğum Günü* (Joko's birthday), staged by the school's theatre club. When the theatre club refused to comply, the rector's office closed down the club.

Two book-signing events where CNN Türk anchorwoman Büşra Sanay was to sign copies of her book *Kardeşini Doğurmak* (giving birth to one's sibling) were cancelled on the grounds that the events were deemed to be "unsuitable."

Bariş Yarkadaş revealed that access to a press statement he made about "favoritism in zoning" was banned on 22 news websites, including one that was affiliated with the main opposition CHP, under orders from the Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım.

The headquarters of TV52, a local TV station in Ordu that had been on air for 25 years, was locked and sealed by municipal police.

The Interior Ministry stated on its website that during the week of 5-12 March,

a total of 635 social media accounts were subjected to scrutiny and investigations were launched into 290 social media users on the allegation of “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist group.”

Kubilay Çelik, the responsible managing editor of the journal *Antropolog*, was jailed pending trial on charges stemming from his social media posts.

Access was banned to a total of 20 VPN servers including Tor Project, Hotspot Shield, Zenmate and TunnelBear.

Newroz celebrations in Mardin were limited to the participation of high-level officials. Public celebrations of Newroz were not allowed on the grounds that there was “no need for a second round of celebration.”

A screening of the film *Yeva* as part of the 16th Filmmor International Women’s Film Festival on Wheels was cancelled by the Istanbul Governor’s Office at the request of the Azerbaijan government.

Concerning a TV drama series called *Avlu* (the courtyard), about imprisoned women, the Ministry of Justice demanded that RTÜK “take the necessary measures before the series is aired.”

A Turkish court gave actress and singer Zuhale Olcay a prison sentence of 10 months on the charge of “insulting the president.”

The Parliament enacted a new legislation that grants RTÜK and BTK “authority for supervision of online visual and audio content.”

A performance of the standard repertory Turkish musical *Lüküs Hayat* (Luxurious Life) by the theatre club of the Samsun 19 Mayıs Anadolu High School was censored by the İlkadım District Directorate of National Education on the grounds of “obscenity.”

A prosecutor sought that musician Ferhat Tunç be given a prison sentence of up to 9 years and 4 months on the charge of “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist group.”

A metal plate inscribed with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was part of the Human Rights Monument in Diyarbakır was vandalized.

A prosecutor sought that author İhsan Eliaçık be given up to 7 years and 6 months in prison on the charge of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist group."

The local municipality of Nusaybin, which knocked down the Newroz Monument in the district, announced that the monument would be replaced with a clock tower.

Under orders from the Speaker of the Parliament İsmail Kahraman, female State Theatre (DT) performers were excluded from an oratorio that was to be staged at the Turkish Parliament as part of an event marking the 103rd anniversary of the Çanakkale victory.

The government appointed trustees to the *Özgürlükçü Demokrasi* newspaper and the company that printed the newspaper, Gün Press. As a result, the *Azadiya Welat* newspaper, which was also printed by Gün, could not be printed.

April 2018

Police raided an outdoor wedding party in Izmir and detained the wedding singers on the grounds that they gave a “victory sign” and sang songs “in Kurdish.”

An investigation was launched into 36 individuals who travelled on a bus from Diyarbakır to Ankara to attend the ordinary convention of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) on account of a Kurdish song they sang on the bus on their way to Ankara.

The word “şarap” (wine) was censored in the lyrics of a song written by Mehmet Güreli based on quatrains by Omar Khayyam that was featured in the soundtrack of *Çukur* (the pit), a series aired on Show TV.

P24 founding president and T24 columnist Hasan Cemal was sentenced to 3 months and 22 days in prison at his retrial for his 2013 article series *Çekilme Günlüğü* (chronicles of retreat).

A total of 129 cases have been filed against Eren Keskin on account of her time as the co-editor-in-chief of the daily *Özgür Gündem*. Forty-seven of those cases are still under way.

Latif Demirci quit the daily *Hürriyet*. The newspaper did not print Demirci's final cartoon.

A court ordered the last three issues of the Kurdish language daily *Azadiya Welat*, which had to discontinue its print edition after a trustee was appointed to the Gün Press, to be removed from newsstands.

A letter sent by Şükriye Erden, an imprisoned lawyer who was among the team of lawyers who represented Nuriye Gülmen and Semih Özakça, was censored by the prison management on the grounds that the letter was “inappropriate.”

Selçuk Municipality in Izmir declined to provide a venue for the environmentally

themed stage play titled *Latmos'a Rahmet Geldi* on the grounds that the play was "inappropriate."

Musician Suavi was given a prison sentence of 11 months and 20 days on the charge of "insulting the president." His sentence was commuted to a fine of TL 14,000.

Theologian İhsan Eliaçık was given a prison sentence of 6 years and 3 months on the charge of "disseminating propaganda for an armed terrorist organization" in a case where the accusation stemmed from a lecture he delivered during a seminar.

Historian and columnist Ayşe Hür was given a prison sentence of 1 year and 3 months on the charge of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization" on social media.

The Ankara Governor's Office refused to grant permission for a trade union May Day rally.

According to a report titled *İnternet Çağında İnternete Erişim Sorunu-Türkiye'nin Sansürle İmtihanı* (problems with accessing the internet in the age of internet -- Turkey's censorship trouble), between 1 January and 9 April, a total of 10,250 social media accounts were subjected to scrutiny.

School teacher Ayşe Çelik was sent to prison to serve a 15-month sentence for "propaganda" after making remarks during a live phone-in television talk show *Beyaz Show*.

The Ankara Governor's Office imposed a ban on three of the four-day program of events scheduled for the 32nd edition of the Middle East Technical University's (ODTÜ) annual Spring Festival.

District Governors' permission was made mandatory for all kinds of public events to be held in Mardin for three months.

A concert performance by the Cumhuriyet Kadınları Korosu (Republican

women's choir) during the Thrace Promotion Days was cut short. The program was put together by the Edirne, Kırklareli and Tekirdağ Governors' Offices and Trakyalılar Vakfı (Thracians Association).

The Istanbul Governor's Office demanded that the organizers avoid using the words "genocide" or "massacre" during a planned commemoration ceremony in Sultanahmet on the anniversary of the atrocities of 1915. The ceremony was subsequently cancelled.

May 2018

The rector's office of the Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) banned all Pride Week events to be put together by the ODTÜ LGBTI Solidarity group between 7-12 May on the school campus. The indefinite ban imposed on LGBTI events by the Ankara Governor's Office was cited as the grounds for the ban.

A concert by Erdoğan Emir that was scheduled for 5 May at the Aydın Nazilli Alevi Cultural Association was banned by the Police Department and the Governor's Office of Aydın. The explanation provided for the ban read: "This person's name is marked 'in red ink'; you cannot have him appear on stage here."

A conversation with Esra Elönü titled Arafta Sorular (questions in purgatory) as part of the Kocaeli Book Fair, which is organized by the Kocaeli Metropolitan Municipality, was cancelled due to public backlash.

The Executive Board of Turkey's Petroleum Products Employers Union (PÜİS) decided to stop posting news of gasoline price changes on its website.

An event titled LGBTI+ Essential Concepts to be held by the Dokuz Eylül University's Faculty of Law was cancelled by the rector's office on the grounds that the university received threatening phone calls and emails.

-- A segment focusing on oppression targeting the press in Turkey in a video that was put together to be shown during a panel discussion at the United Nations on the occasion of the May 3, World Press Freedom Day, was requested to be cut out. When the censorship request was denied, the panel discussion was cancelled.

The Human Rights Monument in Tuzluca, a district of the eastern province of Iğdır, was torn down upon orders from District Governor Abdullah Kadioğlu, who was appointed as a trustee to the city.

Nine books published by Avesta Publications, a 23-year-old publishing company

that published the first Kurdish titles in Turkey, were ordered to be pulled off the shelves “within the framework of the fight against terror.”

Musician Pınar Aydınlar was arrested and sent to prison after a court upheld a 10-month prison sentence she had been given on the charge of “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization.”

Actor Barış Atay was taken into custody as part of an investigation on the allegation of “inciting the public to hatred and animosity” on account of his reaction on social media to a statement of “apology” by Yusuf Yerkele, a former aide to the Prime Minister, for kicking miner Erdal Kocabıyık during a demonstration in the aftermath of the deadly mining disaster in Soma.

The rector’s office of the Istanbul Technical University cancelled two events to be hosted by the student clubs in the school where Sungur Savran and Mücella Yapıcı were to be featured as guest speakers.

An investigation was launched into dismissed academic Bülent Şık on account of his article series in which he revealed the agricultural products in Turkey that contained traces of carcinogenic pesticides.

Gırgır comic magazine cartoonist Seyfi Şahin was given a prison sentence of 1 year and 15 days on the charge of “insulting religious values held by a segment of the public” for his cartoon titled *Moses Parts the Red Sea and Saves the Israelites*.

The rapper Ezhel (real name, Sercan İpekçioğlu) was arrested on the charge of “inciting drug use in his song lyrics.”

June 2018

Narcotics police took two Izmir-based rappers -- Khontkar and Young Bego -- into custody on the grounds that they incited drug use in their songs. Khontkar was arrested for drug possession and inciting drug use while Young Bego was released under judicial control measures.

Cenk Dost Verdi, a stage actor from the theatre company Yolcu Tiyatro, was given a prison sentence of 2 years and 6 months on the charge of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization" in his social media posts.

It was claimed that some books were taken off the shelves in the D&R Bookstores after Doğan Media Group sold the bookstore chain to Turkuvaz Media Group. Books by İbrahim Kaboğlu, Zeynep Altıok, Orhan Gökdemir, Turan Dursun were among those Turkuvaz allegedly refused to sell.

The Governor's Office of Ankara banned a selection of short films from Turkey themed around LGBTI+, which was to be put together by the Human Rights Center of the Ankara Bar Association, on the grounds of "societal vulnerabilities."

Musician Erdal Güney was given a prison sentence of 11 months and 20 days on the charge of "insulting the president" in a case where the accusation stemmed from the word "babacığım" (daddy) in the lyrics of one of his songs.

The 2nd High Criminal Court of Batman began hearing a trial where the makers of the documentary *Bakur (North)*, Ertuğrul Mavioğlu and Çayan Demirel, are accused of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist group."

Cartoonist Nuri Kurtcebe was taken into custody on 3 June and sent to prison on 4 June after a court upheld a prison sentence he was given on the charge of "insulting the president" for his cartoons. Kurtcebe was released from the Yalova Prison on 5 June on probation.

Sadettin Köse and Birol Tutuş were jailed pending trial on the charge of “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist group” for drawing a “kettle” and writing “HDP,” the initials of the pro-Kurdish Peoples’ Democratic Party, on a wall in Istanbul’s Gazi neighborhood.

The Ministry of Labor and Social Security banned employee access to the newspaper website sozcu.com.tr as of 7 June.

A report which featured statistics about TRT and a number of private TV stations, compiled by RTÜK members İsmet Demirdöğen and İlhan Taşçı, revealed that throughout the month of May, no TV station gave screen time to the HDP as part of their programming featuring campaigning by political parties in the run up to the 24 June elections.

The *Hürriyet* daily, which was acquired in March by the Demirören Group, which also operates in the energy sector, removed a news report about trees that were cut down as part of the TurkStream natural gas pipeline project from its website.

A court case was opened against translator and interpreter Sebla Küçük on the charge of “disseminating propaganda for the PKK armed terrorist organization,” seeking up to 7.5 years in prison for three of her Twitter posts which featured her Turkish translations of posts by foreign news agencies and journalists about Turkey’s military operation on Afrin.

Experts from RTÜK found that the public broadcaster *TRT Haber* violated the principles of independence and accuracy as laid out by the council concerning broadcasts about the general elections.

Jiyan, the lead singer of the Kurdish band Koma Rosîda, was jailed pending trial on the charge of “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist group” for performing a song whose lyrics contained the word “Kurdistan” during an election rally by the HDP in Patnos.

An appellate court upheld a prison sentence of 10 months and 15 days given to stage actor Cenk Dost Verdi for his social media posts.

A news story published by *Milli Gazete* titled “Ahlak ‘Sınır’ı Aşıyor! Sapkınlar İstanbul’da ahlaksızlık kasmaya hazırlanıyor” (“Lines in morality being crossed! Perverts in Istanbul getting ready to spew out immorality”) targeted the LGBTI+ community and the Pride Week and called on the Governor’s Office of Istanbul to cancel the Pride Parade.

A screening of the film *Pride* to be hosted by the group Communist LGBT at the Nâzım Hikmet Cultural Center in Ankara as part of the Pride Week was cancelled by the Governor’s Office of Ankara on the grounds that it “may draw reaction from certain segments based on certain societal sensitivities and lead to provocation.”

The *Yeni Akit* newspaper called for the cancellation of the Istanbul LGBTI+ Pride Parade in a news story titled “Bu sapkın yürüyüşü durdurun!” (stop this perverted parade).

Hozan Cane, a Kurdish artist who holds German citizenship, was taken into custody in Edirne as she was visiting the city to lend her support to HDP’s campaign for the 24 June elections. Cane was jailed pending trial on 26 June on the charge of “membership in a terrorist group.”

The Istanbul Governor’s Office banned the LGBTI+ Pride Parade that was scheduled to take place on 1 July 2018 in Taksim.

July 2018

The Istanbul Anadolu Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into actress Berna Laçın on the allegation of "insulting the religious beliefs of the public" for posting on Twitter a message against capital punishment.

A lawsuit seeking TL 40,000 in damages was filed against *Evrensel* daily's cartoonist Sefer Selvi and former responsible managing editor Çağrı Sarı on account of a Paradise Papers themed cartoon that depicted former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and his son Erkam Yıldırım.

The Istanbul Anadolu Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into Cemil Kılıç for his book *İslam Bu-Muhammedi İslam (this is Islam)*, published by Kırmızı Kedi Publishing House.

The Beşiktaş District Governor's Office cancelled a series of events aimed at commemorating the late musician Kazım Koyuncu, titled *Kâzım İsyandır (Kazım is Rebellion)* and scheduled for 7-8 July at the Beşiktaş Abbasağa Park, on the grounds that "security measures could not be taken."

The Pride Parade set for 7 July in Adana, which was going to be the first ever pride parade to be put together by the Adana LGBTI+ Solidarity Group, was banned by the Adana Governor's Office on the grounds of "public security" and "societal sensitivities."

A concert by Fazıl Say that was set to take place on 14 August at the Harbiye Open-air Theatre was removed from the program by Atlantis Productions.

The legislation concerning Turkey's State Theatre (DT) and State Opera and Ballet (DOB) companies was amended through a number of presidential decrees issued as part of the transition to the Presidential System. The amendments rendered the general directors and provincial directorates of the DT and DOB dysfunctional.

Two separate court cases were filed against actor Orhan Aydın after he was taken into custody on account of his social media posts. Aydın was accused

of being a putschist for his social media posts in which he celebrated theatre and one in which he called for an investigation into the political leg of the coup attempt.

Four students who were taken into custody for carrying a banner featuring a cartoon titled *Tayyipler Âlemi* during the graduation ceremony of the Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) were jailed pending trial on the charge of “insulting the president.”

A new court case was filed against rapper Ezhel on the charge of “publicly inciting drug use,” seeking up to 10 years of imprisonment for the musician.

An appellate court upheld a prison sentence given to actress Zuhâl Olcay on the charge of “insulting the president” and increased the 10-month sentence to 11 months and 20 days. Olcay will have to go to prison in order to apply for probation.

The computers of the women’s news collective Jin News in their Diyarbakır office were confiscated during a police raid.

TV8, a TV station owned by Acun Ilıcalı, blurred a necklace pendant in the form of a Christian cross worn by Selena Gomez during a broadcast.

August 2018

The newspapers *Özgürlükçü Demokrasi*, *Halkın Nabzı* and *Welat*, as well as the TV station Avantaj TV were closed down through the statutory decree no. 701, which was published in the 8 July Sunday issue of the *Official Gazette*.

RTÜK ruled to penalize five TV stations for marketing sexual products, airing misleading commercials and promoting gambling.

Students from ODTÜ who allegedly took part in the LGBTI+ Pride Parade faced a disciplinary investigation at the school. The school also launched another disciplinary investigation into students who allegedly hung rainbow flags on nearby buildings during the parade.

Police raided a wedding party in Seyhan, a district of Adana, and took musician Mecit Özlü, who was singing Kurdish songs during the party, into custody on the allegation that he “disseminated propaganda for a terrorist group.”

Erdal Çoban, an artist who has been performing “living statue” shows across Turkey since 2008, was given a TL 124 fine for violating the Law on Misdemeanors with his performance.

An article by Cansu Çamlıbel, the daily *Hürriyet*'s Washington, D.C. correspondent, about negotiations between Turkey and the United States concerning the Pastor Brunson was removed from the newspaper's website shortly after it was published online.

Poll Production, which is owned by Polat Yağcı, announced that it terminated its contract with singer İntizar after news broke that she had a lesbian relationship with the ex-wife of singer Mustafa Ceceli.

Raci Şaşmaz, the producer of the ATV drama series *Eşkiya Dünyaya Hükümdar Olmaz*, removed actress Deniz Çakır from the series' cast “because he was disturbed by photos of the actress showing her drinking alcoholic beverages that appeared in media.”

The Ministry of Youth and Sports' Education and Culture Research Directorate General targeted the shows *Friends*, *The Simpsons*, *South Park*, *Anahit*, *The West Wing* as "Islamophobic" and "insulting values" in its project titled *Farkındayız* (we are aware), in which they determine foreign productions such as cartoons, series, plays and music videos that are "not suitable for national values."

The spike in foreign exchange rates that came after the US threatened Turkey with sanctions was given either too little or no coverage in mainstream media.

After the US Dollar hit a historical high of TL 7 and up, TC stations and news websites in mainstream media stopped showing live exchange rates.

After the spike in the US dollar, the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office launched a joint investigation with the Capital Markets Board and the Police Department into "those who produced news, made broadcasts or posted social media posts or took part in actions that served the interests of the financial attacks."

The newspapers *Yeni Yaşam* and *Yeni Özgür Politika* censored parts of an article penned by Selahattin Demirtaş in the aftermath of the June 24 elections, in which the jailed former co-chairman of the People's Democratic Party (HDP) directed criticism at the HDP.

The 18th edition of the Munzur Culture and Nature Festival, which was to be organized between 26-29 July by the Federation of Dersim Associations was banned by the Tunceli Governor's Office on the allegation that the festival was aimed at "financing the PKK and recruiting militants to the group."

A Judgeship of Peace in Ayvalık banned the book *Kürdistan Tarihi* (The history of Kurdistan), published by Avesta Books.

Yunus Ozan Korkut, the director of a documentary titled *Benim Varoş Hikâyem* (My ghetto story), which is set in the backstreets of Adana,

and five actors from the film's cast were indicted for "praising crime and criminals" and "inciting drug use" through the film.

Zarok TV, the first children's TV channel in Turkey to broadcast in Kurdish, was fined by the RTÜK on the grounds that two songs in Kurdish aired on the channel "served the interests of a terrorist organization."

The Artvin Governor's Office refused to grant permission for the Artvin get-together for Cerattepe, which was to be organized by the Artvin Environmental Platform, on the grounds that the "event coincided with a [religious] holiday and public order needed to be protected during that period because a crowded [group of visitors] was expected in the city."

A concert scheduled for 2 September in Diyarbakır by musician Mem Ararat was cancelled by the governor's office without justification.

A sculpture depicting a girl reading a book that was on Cumhuriyet Street in Bursa was removed by the Metropolitan Municipality, which said it removed the sculpture because it was to be repaired for previous damages and that after the repair it would be re-erected in front of the municipal library.

Actor Cenk Dost Verdi, who was given a 10 month, 15 day prison sentence on the charge of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization" has been in the Kocaeli No 2 F Type Closed Prison since 17 August.

Uğur Gürses, a financial columnist, resigned from *Hürriyet* on 18 July because the newspaper did not publish his column. He said his column was censored for reporting that the Capital Markets Board had displayed favoritism during the purchase by the Demirören Group of the newspaper from its previous owner.

The Beyoğlu District Governor's Office banned the 700th weekend demonstration by the Saturday Mothers, a group of relatives of the "Disappeared," who have been gathering every Saturday at Istanbul's Galatasaray Square since 27 May 1995.

Banu Torun, an employee of the Photography and Cinema Laborers at the İdil Cultural Center, which was making preparations for a documentary about the “Yüksel resistance,” was arrested on the charge of “membership in a terrorist organization”

The Information Technologies and Communication Authority (BTK) banned access to the website of the Mezopotamya News Agency mezopotamyaajansi13.com.

September 2018

The governor's offices of Diyarbakır and Batman banned demonstrations by relatives of disappeared persons in support of the banned demonstration by Saturday Mothers in Istanbul on grounds of "public order" and "security."

The 3rd Istanbul Criminal Judgeship of Peace ordered that flyers for a rally in Bakırköy by the HDP on the occasion of 1 September, celebrated in Turkey as "International Peace Day," be recalled because the flyers "contained expressions that could incite the public to hatred and animosity."

The newly elected executive board of the Cumhuriyet Foundation dismissed *Cumhuriyet's* editor-in-chief Murat Sabuncu and managing editors Bülent Özdoğan and Faruk Eren. Sabuncu's farewell column was not published in the online edition, while columnist Ahmet İnsel's column was not published at all.

An Istanbul court ruled to keep in place a formal request for an Interpol red notice for the arrest of author and publisher Ragıp Zarakolu as part of a case in which he is charged with "aiding and abetting a terrorist organization" for a speech he made in 2011 at a Political Academy seminar organized by the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP).

Author Hamide Yiğit was given a five-month prison sentence on the charge of "publicly insulting the Turkish government, judiciary, military or security forces" per Article 301 of the Turkish Criminal Code (TCK) for a book she had written about ISIS. Her sentence was commuted to a fine of TL 3,000.

-- The word "Kurdistan" in the film *Backstabbing for Beginners* was translated as "Northern Iraq" in the Turkish subtitles for the movie's screenings in Turkey.

-- A Criminal Judgeship of Peace in Bakırköy ordered access bans on 10 news stories published in 2015 about the assets of İsmet Yıldırım, the general manager of the Istanbul Residence Development Plan Industry and Trade Inc. (KİPTAŞ) since 1999, on the grounds of "defamation."

Fashion designer Barbaros Şansal, who was verbally harassed by the chairman of the National Unity Party of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, Buray Büsküvütçü, cancelled his show in Izmir on the grounds that he has no security or freedom of expression.

The Ankara Governor's Office banned the sixth edition of Mamak Kömür Deposu Buluşması, an annual gathering organized in a former coal depot in Mamak, that was planned for 19 September by the Community Centers.

The 36th High Criminal Court of Istanbul gave Ali Avcı, the director of the movie *Uyanış (Awakening)*, who was jailed pending trial on the charge of "membership in FETÖ" because of footage in the film that depicted President Erdoğan at gunpoint, a prison sentence of 6 years and 3 months.

An investigation was launched into singer Mabel Matiz following a complaint filed by a citizen concerning a video for his song titled *Ya Bu İşler Ne?* on the allegation that he "supported FETÖ through the use of footage featuring one dollar bills in his video."

The TV channel ATV censored the line "the dollar has hit 4 TL" in a 2017 Turkish movie by Ali Atay called *Ölümlü Dünya*.

RTÜK fined the local TV station AS TV for airing the video for the song "Secrets" by Pink on the grounds that "the video included erotic dance figures of a homosexual nature," that it was "broadcast during hours when children and young people could watch," and that they could be "negatively influenced."

The newspaper *Yeni Akit* called on the Culture and Tourism Ministry to censor two books published by Yapı Kredi Publishing about children's rights in its news story headlined "Koç'un kitaplarını çocuklardan uzak tutun" (keep Koç's books away from children).

A criminal investigation was launched into FOX TV anchor Fatih Portakal on the allegation that he "insulted the president" in a social media post in which he commented on the bans on the play *Sadece Diktatör* by actor and HDP MP Barış Atay.

In the latest wave of termination of contracts following Demirören Group's acquisition of media companies under Doğan Media Group in March, *Hürriyet* daily terminated the regular long featured columns by Taha Akyol and Mehmet Y. Yılmaz.

Police intervening in demonstrations in Istanbul and Ankara protesting of unsafe working conditions of construction workers on the site of the third airport in Istanbul took AFP photojournalist Bülent Kılıç into custody.

It became evident that the Demirören Media Group had a news story titled "Demirören'e suçlama: Rum işadamı Arşimidis'i öldürdü!" (accusation against Demirören: Demirören murdered Greek businessman Arşimidis), which was published in the now-defunct *Radikal* daily on 20 May 2014, removed from the archives after its acquisition of media companies under the Doğan Media Group. *Radikal* had ended its print edition in 2014 and it was closed down in 2016.

The posters advertising the sixth edition of TÜYAP's Diyarbakır Book Fair, which was set for 25-30 September, did not feature Kurdish language. The posters for the fair's previous editions included Kurdish text.

The Eighth Culture and Watermelon Festival of Diyarbakır, which was scheduled for 18-23 September, was cancelled as part of austerity measures. The festival was to be organized by the municipality, which is run by a government-appointed trustee.

A proposed regulation giving RTÜK the authority to monitor and supervise online radio and TV broadcast content was passed.

Binali Erdoğan, a former camera operator with the Izmir branch of the public broadcaster TRT, who was initially dismissed by the TRT and later jailed pending trial by a court on the charge of "insulting the president" on account of his critical comments on social media, was given a prison sentence of 10 months on the same charge.

A Criminal Judgeship of Peace in Çukurca banned three books about

Kurdish history and the Kurdish national movement published by Avesta Publications on the grounds that all three titles “could fall within the scope of the offense of inciting the public to hatred and animosity.”

Kutbettin Cebe, the director of the documentary *Roza - İki Nehrin Ülkesi (Roza: The Country of Two Rivers)*, which recounts the resistance against Daesh, and the commune in Rojava, was indicted for “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization” in his documentary.

Musician Ferhat Tunç was given a prison sentence of 1 year, 11 months and 12 days on the charge of “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization.” The sentence was not deferred.

An article by Associate Professor Gül Köksal in the book *Kültürel Miras Yönetimi* (cultural heritage management), published by Anadolu University's Faculty of Open Education, was removed in the latest edition of the book after Köksal was dismissed from her post as an academic with the Kocaeli University through statutory decree.

After the Pride Week in ODTÜ was cancelled, an investigation was launched into more than 20 students from the school who carried the rainbow flag during the school's graduation ceremony.

October 2018

Following the enactment of RTÜK internet supervision bill, scenes featuring cigarettes on the Netflix animated show *Over the Garden Wall* were censored.

The district directorates of national education in Manisa sent notifications to school principals advising they not provide school students transportation to the 2nd Manisa Book Fair, which was scheduled for 28 September-7 October, on the grounds that "the fair was a one-sided" organization.

Poet Fadıl Öztürk was given a prison sentence of 1 year and 10 months for "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization" in his social media posts and his online articles. The court deferred the sentence for five years.

Giyasettin Şehir, a stage director and cinema professional who won the award for Best Artistic Director in 2011 at the 48th Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival for his work on the film *Meş (Walking)* was jailed pending trial on the charge of "membership in a terrorist group."

The newspaper *Yeni Özgür Politika*, terminated the columns by Yusuf Serhat Bucak, without publishing his final column.

Journalists Abdurrahman Gök, Kibriye Evren, Esra Solin Dal and Semiha Alankuş and Figen Aras, a contributor to the website Jineoloji, were taken into custody during police raids on their homes as part of a criminal investigation launched in Diyarbakır and targeting journalists and politicians.

-- Author Temel Demirer, who was taken into custody on the grounds that he attended a press conference in protest of curfews in Diyarbakır in November 2016 and was accused of terrorism-related charges, was released under judicial control measures.

An indefinite ban issued by the Ankara Governor's Office in November 2017 on all LGBTI+ events in the city on the grounds of the State of Emergency was extended on 3 October 2018 through a notice the Governor's Office sent to the Ankara Police Department.

The word “evrim” (evolution) on the information boards in the Natural History Museum of Ankara were covered with tape and replaced by the word “gelişim” (development). The museum is run by the General Directorate of Mineral Research and Exploration under the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources.

A prosecutor requested that Kurdish musician Hozan Cane (Saide İnaç), who was arrested in June on the charge of “membership in a terrorist group” as she was visiting Edirne in support of HDP’s campaign for the 24 June elections, be convicted of “insulting Atatürk” and “membership in an armed terrorist group.”

The director of DocLisboa International Film Festival, Cintia Gil revealed that the Turkish Embassy in Lisbon requested that the festival censor the phrase “Kürtlerin yok edilmesi” (destruction of the Kurds) in the festival booklet’s section about the film *Yol (The Road)* by Şerif Gören, which was to be shown at the festival.

A literature teacher who recommended his students read the novel *The Museum of Innocence* by Orhan Pamuk faced an investigation on the grounds that he “made students read obscene material” upon a complaint filed by a parent.

Police confiscated 18 hard drives that contained the video archive of Oktay İnce, a video activist from the Seyri Sokak collective, during a raid on his home on the allegations that İnce “praised terror and a terrorist organization via his social media posts.”

A figure in the logo of the Diyarbakır Museum, inspired by the image of a fantastic creature engraved in stone, was destroyed because it “looked like a religious icon.”

Nuray Mert’s regular column in Hürriyet Daily News was terminated after the newspaper’s acquisition by Demirören Holding.

November 2018

The website of the Akil news agency, where students from Akdeniz University's Faculty of Communications do their internships, removed interviews conducted with journalist İsmail Saymaz and former MP Barış Yarkadaş. The interviews were allegedly removed upon orders from the dean of the Faculty of Communications, Ahmet Ayhan. The development prompted some academics to quit the agency.

Fox TV anchor Fatih Portakal said that the TV channel refrained from broadcasting a speech by Cihangir İslam, a Saadet (Felicity) Party MP from Istanbul, for which he faced a criminal investigation. Portakal admitted that this was self-censorship.

Columnist Ayşe Baykal announced that she quit Hürriyet Digital, where she has written for more than four years, because she could not fight against censorship.

The Instagram accounts of MPs Serpil Kemalbay and Ayşe Acar Başaran were shut down after they both shared a picture that was aimed at marking the second-year anniversary of the day when 11 MPs from the HDP, including former co-chairpersons Selahattin Demirtaş and Figen Yüksekdağ, were taken into custody. The picture was removed from MP Ebru Günay's Instagram account.

A portrait of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan by artist Ali Zülfikar that depicted the president through a critical point of view was removed from an exhibition in the German city of Linz after Turkey requested that the portrait be censored. The portrait was later reintroduced into the show after the artist protested the censorship.

A court ordered that Evrensel daily pay TL 10,000 in non-pecuniary damages to Parliament Speaker Binali Yıldırım and his son Erkam Yıldırım in a case where the Yıldırıms claimed that a cartoon themed around the Paradise Papers leaks by cartoonist Sefer Selvi violated their personal rights.

The *Karar* newspaper issued an online statement on its website in which it announced that it had been facing intense and regular pressure in various different ways.

Responding to a Parliamentary question about the access ban on Wikipedia in Turkey that has been in place since 29 April 2017, the Minister of Transport and Infrastructure Cahit Turhan said the ban would continue “because the content that constitute the grounds for the ban have not been adequately amended.”

Singer Atilla Taş was sent to the Metris Prison in Istanbul to serve the remainder of the sentence delivered at a trial alleging he was “part of the media leg of FETÖ.”

A conference in the Ardeşen district of Rize where Saadet Party MP Cihangir İslam was set to attend as a speaker could not take place when the Artvin Mayor Hakan Gültekin cancelled the reservation for the conference hall.

Musician Apolas Lermi received threats and insult messages from owners of businesses in the Black Sea town of Uzungöl in Trabzon after Lermi made a song about the destruction of nature in Uzungöl titled *Uzungöl Şerah* available online.

Akit newspaper targeted the TÜYAP Book Fair and the LGBTI+ in a column headlined “Milli Eğitim, TÜYAP’a öğrenci taşımamalı!” (National Education should not transport students to the fair!) and a news story headlined “Sapkınlar TÜYAP kitap fuarında” (perverts at the TÜYAP book fair) and called on authorities to act.

Journalist Sedat Sur, a reporter for *ozguruz.org*, was given a prison sentence of 11 months and 20 days in a trial where the charges stemmed from his coverage of corruption allegations surrounding the trustees appointed to the Mardin Municipality.

The Information Technologies and Communication Authority (BTK) banned access to the website *Siyasihaber3.org* on the grounds of “administrative measure.”

TV8 censored the word “gay” in a line from the comedy series *Jet Sosyete* (the jet set).

Thirteen people, including professors Betül Tanbay and Turgut Tarhanlı, Anadolu Kültür employees Yiğit Ekmekçi, Ali Hakan Altınay, Asena Günal and Meltem Aslan, were arrested. The Istanbul Police Department said the operation targeting a civil society organization and academics was conducted on the grounds that those who were arrested “cooperated with Osman Kavala, who allegedly planned and financed the Gezi Park protests.” Twelve people were released after giving their statements while human rights defender Yiğit Aksakoğlu was jailed pending trial.

The *Hürriyet* newspaper refused to publish an interview its representative in Washington, D.C. Cansu Çamlıbel made with US Pastor Andrew Brunson after his release from prison in Turkey.

Police quelling a demonstration by the members of the Media, Communication and Postal Employees Union (Haber-Sen) in front of the TRT General Directorate on the occasion of the World Television Day took Haber-Sen Secretary General Burak Ustaoglu into custody and blocked a live broadcast by Yol TV.

Turkey’s Internet Access Providers Association banned access to the online newspaper *Duvar’s* coverage of the discussions that broke in a Parliamentary commission concerning President Erdoğan’s son-in-law Selçuk Bayraktar selling drones to the Turkish army during budget talks for the Ministry of Defense.

Artists from the Adana branch of the Mezopotamya Cultural Center (MKM), which was closed down in 2016 through a statutory decree, were taken into custody.

Filmmaker Kazım Öz was taken into custody in Dersim (Tunceli) as part of an investigation launched by the Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office on the allegations of “membership in a terrorist group” and “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization.” He was released the next day.

The Yıldız Technical University administration barred filmmaker Emin Alper, who is also an academic and one of the signatories of the 2016 peace petition by the Academics for Peace initiative, from attending a screening of his films and a talk to be hosted by the school's cinema club.

Authorities did not grant permission to women who wanted to hold a rally on 25 November on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women.

The Açık Toplum Vakfı (Open Society Foundation) decided to cease its operations in Turkey after claims as part of the investigation into Osman Kavala that they had funded the Gezi Park protests through foreign donations, and after being targeted by pro-government media.

Authorities imposed a broadcast ban on news about an accident that killed three construction workers in Gebze during the construction of a viaduct as part of the Northern Marmara Highway. Authorities said the ban was imposed "so that no harm is done to public well-being and public morals, the public opinion is not misled, and rescue work is not hampered."

December 2018

Berivan Bila, a student from the Communications Faculty of the Karadeniz Technical University (KTÜ) in Trabzon, was jailed pending trial on the charge of "insulting the president" in an article she wrote and shared on social media that was titled "Gazetecilik bölümü ders 1: Gazetecilik Suç Değildir" (Journalism 101: Journalism is not a crime).

After the arrest in September of Grup Munzur singer Onur Yanardağ, a musicology student at the İstanbul University, on the grounds that he attended the May Day march and the funerals of Berkin Elvan and Aziz Güler, Duygu Kıt, a member of the editorial board at the Sancı Kültür Sanat Edebiyat, a periodical on arts and literature that is published by the Yüz Çiçek Açsın Cultural Center, *Halkın Günlüğü* newspaper employee Mahir Gürz, and Grup Munzur Collective member Berivan Gülen were also jailed pending trial as part of an operation targeting Sosyalist Meclisler Federasyonu (the federation of socialist assemblies).

Iranian-Kurdish musician Yelda Abbasi was taken into custody at İstanbul's Atatürk Airport as she arrived in Turkey to attend the 27th-year anniversary of the founding of the Mezopotamya Cultural Center. Abbasi was arrested as part of an investigation launched in Van on the allegation of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization." She was released after giving her statement before a prosecutor.

-- New legislation introducing amendments to health-related legislation and statutory decrees was published in the Official Gazette. The new legislation bars all tobacco products or footage of tobacco products from being used in movies and series shown on television; productions shown in theatres; on the Internet; and all public places, including social media and the like.

RTÜK imposed on FOX TV an administrative fine on the grounds that the series titled Kadın (woman) was "themed around abnormal relationships" and that this was against "the principle of protecting the society's national and spiritual values, general morals and the family."

Barış Atay's stage play *Sadece Diktatör* (only a dictator), which faced numerous bans before, was banned once again by the Antalya Governor's Office on the grounds of the former ban issued during the SoE.

BTK once again banned access to the online news outlet sendika.org for the 62nd time. The previous ban was in August 2017.

Four separate lawsuits were filed against the latest book titled *İçimde Kalmasın/ Tanıklığımdır* (this is my testimony) by Ahmet Sever, who is a columnist for T24 and former press aide to the 11th President of Turkey Abdullah Gül.

An arrest warrant was issued for actor Memet Ali Alabora on the grounds of "his involvement in the Gezi Park protests." The allegation is that Alabora "attempted to overthrow the government."

Some of the themed sculptures placed on the Atatürk and Işıklar boulevards in Antalya by the city's Metropolitan Municipality were spray-painted or broken.

Inmates in the Elazığ No. 1 Maximum Security Prison sent letters to the Human Rights Association of Turkey (İHD) in which they recounted the rights violations they were being subjected to and complained that the prison administration refused to give inmates their books in Kurdish language on grounds of "security."

Hamide Yiğit was given a 7.5 month prison sentence on the charge of "publicly degrading the Turkish government" where the accusation stemmed from her social media posts. Yiğit's post featuring the cover for the third edition of her book *AKP'nin Suriye Savaşı* (AKP's fight in Syria) was cited among evidence against her.

The clause "engaging in acts that are in conflict with national security and public order or having developed a habit of engaging in such activity" was added among the conditions requiring the cancellation of a press card in the relevant legislation.

The trial where Veysi Altay, the director of the documentary *Nû Jîn* (New Life), which recounts the story of guerilla women fighting against Daesh in Kobani; and Dicle Anter, who had the film shown at the Yılmaz Güney Theatre in Batman, are charged with “conducting propaganda for a terrorist organization,” was adjourned until 15 January.

Academic and newspaper columnist Nuray Mert, who was among academics charged with “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization” for signing the 2016 petition by the Academics for Peace initiative, was convicted by the trial court and given a prison sentence of 1 year and 3 months.

The Soma District Governor’s Office banned the play *Parayla Satılmaz* (not for resale) by the Soma Mekânsızlar Theatre Company, which was founded after the deadly mining accident in Soma, Manisa, on 13 May 2014, in which 301 miners were killed.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who, in his election rallies, has been calling on the judiciary to take action against FOX TV anchor Fatih Portakal, targeted Portakal once again with the words, “The people will give you a smack on your neck.”

The Governor’s Office of Kahramanmaraş imposed a ban on all kinds of assembly and demonstrations to mark the 40th-year anniversary of the Maraş Massacre. The grounds for the ban was “protecting peace and trust, national security and public order.”

Two panel discussions about the Yellow Vests movement and the 19 December massacre that were set to take place in ODTÜ were cancelled after pressure from the police on the grounds of the ban imposed by the Ankara Governor’s Office.

Facebook censored a poster shared by Pir Celal Firat, the head of the Alevi Associations Federation, marking the 40th anniversary of the Maraş Massacre on the grounds of images of violence.

According to a new bill directed at the film industry, domestic or foreign productions that have not been found to be appropriate in terms of evaluation and classification, will not be cleared for distribution and commercial screening.

The Rector's Office of ODTÜ banned all kinds of events to be organized on the campus by institutions other than the university, or by unofficial societies from within the university, until after local elections. It also closed down the ODTÜ Media Society.

Poet Ahmet Telli was subjected to verbal harassment and threats from a group of students as he was speaking as an official guest in a talk about literature, hosted by the Hacettepe Book Club at Hacettepe University's Faculty of Letters.

An investigation was launched into 68 main opposition CHP MPs on the charge of "insulting the president" on the grounds that they shared on social media a cartoon titled *Tayyipler Âlemi* based on a complaint filed by President Erdoğan.

The BTK banned access to the website of the Etkin news agency.

Actors Metin Akpınar and Müjdat Gezen were taken into custody to give statements as part of an investigation on account of their comments during a talk show titled *Halk Arenası* broadcasted on Halk TV. Akpınar and Gezen were both released under judicial control measures and with a ban on traveling abroad.

Hüseyin Aydın, a lawyer representing President Tayyip Erdoğan, filed a complaint with RTÜK, requesting that the watchdog impose an administrative fine on Halk TV on the grounds that the program where Müjdat Gezen and Metin Akpınar appeared as guests violated the articles of the Law on the Establishment of Radio and Television Enterprises and Their Media Services. The lawyer also requested that the program be suspended for five episodes.

Jailed journalist Nazlı Ilıcak was given a prison sentence of 1 year and 2 months on the charge of “insulting the president” in a social media post she shared in 2016.

RTÜK imposed on Halk TV a penalty in the form of suspension of program for five episodes and the maximum administrative fine on the grounds of televised comments by Yılmaz Özdil, Metin Akpınar and Müjdat Gezen concerning President Erdoğan. The watchdog also imposed on FOX TV a maximum administrative fine and three program suspension after Fatih Portakal’s call for “protests.”

The user of the Twitter account nicknamed “Allah C.C.” (which means “God, glory be to him”) was given an 11-month and 20-day prison sentence for “insulting religious values and sharing insults against religion in publications.” The jail term was commuted to a fine of TL 7,000.

The Bakırköy Chief Public Prosecutor’s Office launched a criminal investigation into journalist Fatih Portakal on the allegation of “inciting the public to committing crime” on account of a call he made during his FOX TV prime time news for a peaceful protest against the price hikes in natural gas.

A stage performance by theatre actor Levent Üzümcü titled *Anlatılan Senin Hikâyendir* (this is your story), which was scheduled to take place on 10 January at the conference hall of a private school in the İskenderun district of Hatay, was cancelled after pressure on the school administration.

The Council of State abolished the status of Halkevleri as a “public benefit organization” which had been established in 1961.

Censorship-Self-Censorship Research

Self-censorship: You can run but you cannot hide

"In practice, I face censorship everywhere, from the clothes I wear, to the food I eat." This statement an Internet user shared with us anonymously demonstrates the multiple Hydra-headed faces of censorship in Turkey and reveals its power to infiltrate almost every aspect of our lives.

The Susma Platform conducted an online survey between 15 September and 1 December to evaluate the level of society's awareness of censorship, their outlook on freedom of expression and their tendency to self-censor. A total of 350 anonymous individuals answered the survey. Demographically the respondents consisted of:

53.22 percent female, **44.83** percent male, **1.93** percent other;

47.41 percent university graduates, **31.61** percent postgraduate level, **11.29** percent students, **9.67** percent high school graduates;

34.83 percent aged 30-39; **28.38** percent aged 20-29; **20.32** percent aged 40-49; **11.61** percent aged 50-59; **3.54** percent aged 60 and above; **1.29** percent aged 19 and below.

As the literary figure Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar once wrote, Turkey is a country that denies its citizens the freedom to deal with anything other than the country's own problems, so that when faced with politics' powerful penetration of our lives, the actions of other powerful groups impacting our lives tend to be seen as simple, dismissible matters. When one risks unemployment or becomes subjected to profiling or even risks being put in jail, not being able to access a certain website or to post a tweet seem trivial, right? In fact, no.

The Susma Platform is predicated on an awareness that censorship and self-censorship have reached epidemic proportions and thus we believe such practices are becoming insurmountable barriers to free thought and free expression, no matter the power group that inflicts them. These practices destroy us as a society, something which this survey all too clearly demonstrates. It needs to be pointed out that politics casts a gloomy shadow on this survey, as well.

As part of the questionnaire, we asked respondents to share with us an example in which they became subject to censorship or one in which they self-censored, some of which we will be listing at the end of this section. Each respondent's account demonstrated how much we have internalized self-censorship, to the point of making it a daily routine. But before we move on to the factual results of the survey, we should also note that some respondents admitted to self-censoring while answering our survey. One respondent wrote: "I am self-censoring at this point because, even though I am answering this survey through a VPN server, I can never fully trust that this study is not conducted by the government."

To our question, "Does censorship have a direct effect on your life?" 93.22 percent responded yes, while 6.77 percent said no. The percentage of those who believe censorship on the Internet affects their daily lives was 90.96, while 9.03 percent said it didn't.

Some 94.83 percent of the respondents believe their access to the Internet is being either restricted or blocked in some way while 5.16 percent think there are no restrictions. Those who believe that search engine results are sorted so as to manipulate users made up 64.83 percent of the respondents, while 72.25 percent said they believe content they come across in social networks are manipulative and biased. Some 61.93 percent said they cross-check the relevance and authenticity of news content they come across on social media.

The percentage of respondents who consider freedom of expression to be an absolute human right was 89.67. Only 10.32 percent of the respondents said that freedom of expression may be restricted under certain conditions. Furthermore, 69.03 percent said that persons or groups who hold extremist opinions are entitled to express those opinions. Only 7.41 percent said those who hold extremist opinions should not be allowed to express those opinions, while 23.54 percent responded, "sometimes."

Those who said censorship was unacceptable under any circumstances was 53.54 percent while 46.4 percent said censorship could be acceptable in certain circumstances. Those who believe censorship would be effective in preventing sexual, violent or bias-motivated crimes constituted 12.25 percent while 76.45 percent said censorship was ineffective in preventing crime and 11.29 percent thought it might occasionally be effective.

This somewhat optimistic picture suggests that the society has awareness of freedom of expression, censorship and self-censorship. However, the same group of survey respondents -- 89.67 percent of whom believe freedom of expression is a right that cannot be restricted under any condition, and 53.54 percent of whom think censorship is unacceptable under any condition -- said censorship could be acceptable in certain circumstances: 37.84 percent said violence may be censored; 28.08 percent said discriminatory content may be censored; 8.96 percent said sexual content may be censored; 3.38 percent said religion-related content may be censored. While 5.97 percent said censorship can be acceptable under certain conditions, only 15.73 percent said nothing should be censored, regardless of its content.

Some 78.7 percent said they resorted to self-censorship in their daily lives while 12.09 percent said they didn't and 8.38 percent said they occasionally self-censored.

The conditions under which the respondents said they resorted to self-censorship the most were: when they are with strangers/people they have just met (29.53 percent); on the Internet (23.17 percent); in the workplace (16.02 percent); in their work (12.45 percent); while they are with family (11.52 percent); while they are with friends (5.56 percent).

They resorted to self-censorship the most in relation to: political matters (31.37 percent); topics that could be disturbing for others (19.79 percent); religious matters (18.18 percent); private matters (16.68 percent); family-related matters (8.2 percent); work-related matters (5.71 percent).

Seventy-nine percent of respondents said living in Turkey would be impossible without self-censorship. Sixty-one percent said they would risk unemployment if they didn't self-censor. Fifty-seven percent said they would be isolated if they didn't self-censor. The grounds they gave for self-censorship were as follows: safety concerns (21.98 percent); fear of criminal proceedings or criminal investigations (21.24 percent); fear of professional stigmatization (14.53 percent); fear of threats targeting family or relatives (13.04 percent); fear of threats targeting workplace (9.19 percent); fear of threats targeting place of residence (8.94 percent); fear of retribution (7.7 percent).

“I self-censored my answers in this survey”

We asked the respondents to recount their experience with censorship or self-censorship. The following section is devoted to these accounts, which will demonstrate that the majority of self-censorship incidents took place online and were about political matters. Most respondents say they have either become less active on social media to the level of sharing nothing political, or stopped using social media altogether. The reasons for this kind of behavior, besides the fear of facing criminal proceedings, also include the fear or a threat of getting fired. Additionally there are those who were attacked because they spoke Kurdish, or those whose advisors warned them against mentioning the AKP period in their doctoral thesis.

About censorship:

“I had to remove a line about beer in a poem by Edip Cansever while I was working on a magazine for my company because of pressure from the company’s managers.”

“The management in my previous workplace censored a report I drafted concerning hate crimes because it criticized the government.”

“While I was beginning work on my doctoral thesis, my advisor warned me against content that would disturb the political authority. This was the condition under which I was required to conduct my study and it was implied that I wouldn’t be able to graduate in case I failed to comply.”

“My editor censored some of my photographs that involved violence. The violence [depicted in the photos] was directly taken from real life.”

“My films were banned several times.”

“In fact, I am facing censorship in everything, from the clothes I wear, to the food I eat.”

“Access to my tweets was banned.”

“My friend who is a journalist, who is standing trial, made me delete our photographs together.”

“I am a public worker. At my workplace, I faced censorship even of financial charts.”

“I cannot access the websites I need to use for my research work.”

“I used to work as an editor for a news network. After the station was acquired by the Savings Deposit Insurance Fund and afterwards by a pro-government company, the news director appointed to the station started off by getting

content about Gezi [protests], Ali İsmail Korkmaz, Berkin Elvan, etc. to be removed from our archive."

"I was threatened with termination of contract over my political views."

"My film was shown on Kanal D and about 10 minutes of my movie was cut."

"People attacked me with my friend because we were speaking in Kurdish."

About self-censorship:

"I am self-censoring my answers for this survey."

"I am self-censoring at this point because even though I am answering this survey through a VPN server, I can never fully trust that this study is not conducted by the government."

"When I faced lawsuits seeking up to 40 years of imprisonment for my newspaper columns, I began writing in a more cautious tone."

"Whenever I apply for a permit to film somewhere, I often hand over a different screenplay because I think I will be denied a permit if they see the original screenplay."

"I have been trying not to openly mention matters about the government in my doctoral thesis."

"As publishing house employees our labor is being constantly exploited, but our bosses behave on social media as though they were all amazing human rights defenders. But if we were to talk about this openly, no publishing house would ever hire us."

"I restricted my social media use."

"I did not mention the AKP period in my doctoral thesis. Actually it wasn't a crucial piece of content but my advisor warning me in advance against writing anything about our current government affected my decision."

"When I use social media on my mobile phone in public places I cover the screen with my hand so that others cannot see it."

"I never speak about my political views on social media."

"I deleted all of my previous Facebook posts."

"While talking to my students during class I cannot help but think which [political] side they will assume I am aligned with based on the things I tell them."

"I get my lawyer to read and review my weekly columns in advance."

"We were coerced into self-censoring our performance of a stage play after police officers came to us before the performance and said, 'Hopefully,' we were 'not doing prohibited stuff.'"

"I delete everything that is recorded on my computer and my smartphone whenever I travel abroad."

"I especially pay attention to self-censor on social media."

"I have not been sharing anything with a political content on social media since late 2015."

"There have been times when I toned down certain political or sexual expressions in the texts I translated."

"I have started to self-censor while writing. It has become my routine."

"I never talk about politics in the workplace. If I did I would be fired."

"In Turkey, not even a single day goes by without a rights violation. Sometimes I feel like venting all my frustration by cursing at the government in my social media account, but I refrain from doing so, in order to be able to continue with my life, thinking I could both lose my job and all my academic titles."

"I refrained from making public numerous incidents I filmed because they could put people who appear in the footage at risk."

"Right now I am mulling over whether or not to include a sexually themed section in a piece of work I am currently working on; and if I decide to include it, I need to come up with a way to not let it cause public indignation while at the same time not having to tone it down."

"I refrain from liking or sharing [on social media] articles that are critical of the government [even if] I agree with it."

"I was undecided on whether or not to read a defense statement by an author that was posted online. Eventually I ended up only reading excerpts from the text quoted by [social media] accounts I had already been following."

"During a bus trip around a month ago I was insulted because I was a Kurd. I tried to stand up for myself but I was shushed and I was forced to remain silent."

What Has Susma Platform Done?

Susma Platform Activities

Susma Gatherings

IZMIR: Freedom of Expression and Citizens' Rights in SoE

The first event we put together as part of our efforts to stand united in the face of freedom of expression violations across Turkey, and to stand up altogether against censorship, took place on March 17 in Izmir. We hosted a panel discussion titled *Freedom of Expression and Citizens' Rights in SoE*, which brought together representatives from the arts, publishing industry, media and law circles in three different sessions.

The speakers on the panel in the first session titled *Freedom of Expression in SoE* were Nejla Demirci, who had been arrested while filming a documentary about those dismissed through statutory decrees; Asena Günal, the project coordinator for the cultural centre Depo, and a founder of the anti-censorship initiative Siyah Bant; poet Fadıl Öztürk, who was arrested and later released on account of his writings; and Şevket Uyanık, a communications expert who specializes in digital monitoring and censorship.

The panel speakers highlighted in this session the fact that censorship in the present day is not only imposed by the state, but also by various actors such as professional associations, industry representatives and even curators through various methods. They discussed the main grounds used to justify censorship including "national unity, religious sensitivities, sexuality, the Kurdish issue, the anti-terror law, public unrest, insulting the president."

In the second session titled *Lawyers Recount Journalism Trials*, panelists were defense lawyers in the ongoing media trials Bahri Belen, Ergin Cinmen and Figen Çalığışu. They focused on journalism trials as regards freedom of expression and the consequences of these trials. The headline speaker of the event was Professor Sami Selçuk, the honorary president of the Supreme Court of Appeals, who gave a speech titled *Citizens' Rights and the Law*.

MARDIN: In the Shadow of Censorship: Art as a Strategy for Resistance

We hosted a discussion at the Mardin Cinema Association on 27 May, concurrently with the fourth edition of the Mardin International Biennial. Our guest speaker Ezgi Bakçay, an academic, critic and curator, gave a lecture titled *In the Shadow of Censorship: Art as a Strategy for Resistance*.

In her lecture, Bakçay spoke about censorship incidents from the past, the relationship between art and politics, the obstacles faced in the fight against censorship and gave various examples of how art can duck beneath the censor's radar.

The aesthetic potential in art; its capability of setting a new discourse; setting up brand-new spaces in the public sphere; and establishing new connections between people were also among topics of her lecture. Noting that the wide field of the arts was also highly repressive, hierarchical, capital-dependent, off-putting and sometimes totally devoid of purpose and meaning, Bakçay also drew examples from her personal experience from the past two years as a coordinator for the ARTIST Istanbul International Art Fair, held on the sidelines of the TÜYAP Book Fair. Bakçay explained that events such as the ARTIST Fair, which often have a broad public appeal, are at the same time prone to conflict and controversy. She added that making a venue available to the public was at the same time part of the effort to improve organizational coherence and explained the importance of coming up with a common discourse and tools with which to fight censorship and the ability to implement them.

ANTALYA: Censorship in Cinema: Antalya Film Festival in the Past and Present Day

Susma Platform visited Antalya on 13 October, immediately on the heels of the 55th edition of the city's annual Antalya Film Festival, which of late has become emblematic of censorship in cinema.

There, we put together a discussion titled *Censorship in Cinema: Antalya Film Festival in the Past and Present Day*. With arts journalist and movie critic Şenay Aydemir as its moderator, the discussion hosted filmmaker Reyhan Tuvi, the director of the film *Love Will Change the Earth*, which became the target of censorship during the 2014 edition of the festival; and Tuncer Çetinkaya, a Turkish Film Critics Association member who wrote about the 50-year history of the festival in his book *The Story of the Golden Orange*.

Noting that film festivals have historically been the battleground on which the fight against censorship practices targeting cinema are fought, the speakers underscored the importance of Antalya Film Festival in this regard. They discussed the recent history of censorship in Turkey, from censorship mechanisms instituted by the political authority -- such as the censorship board or the commercial screening license -- or those put into practice using the law, through to institutional censorship -- notably the infamous actions taken by the Antalya Film Festival management in 2014, whose reverberations persist.

Legal Seminars

BATMAN: Defending Free Expression during a State of Emergency

On May 12, we organized a legal seminar in the southeastern province of Batman titled *Defending Free Expression in SoE*. Defense attorneys Bahri Belen and Mahsuni Karaman were the speakers at the seminar, hosted at the Batman Bar Association and moderated by Erkan Şenses, a member of the Executive Board of the Batman Bar Association.

During the seminar, Belen and Karaman recounted their work in freedom of expression cases and provided a clear definition of the boundaries and content of freedom of expression. Providing examples from ongoing court cases, both attorneys analyzed the variety and intensity of the response to current restrictions on freedom of expression.

VAN: Freedom of Expression in Extended SoE

On 15 September, we put together a legal seminar titled *Freedom of Expression in Extended SoE* in the Eastern province of Van with support from the Van Bar Association.

Professor Sibel İnceoğlu and attorney Aynur Tuncel-Yazgan were the speakers at the seminar, which began with a keynote address by Murat Timur, the president of the Van Bar Association.

Professor İnceoğlu's lecture focused on freedom of expression in judgments by the European Court of Human Rights while Tuncel-Yazgan's presentation drew upon examples from various incidents of freedom of expression violations, ranging from the practices of the recurring, lengthy periods of SoE in Turkey during the 1980s and 1990s, to present-day violations.

Other fields Susma focused throughout 2018 included:

Regularly drawing attention on social media to the access ban on Wikipedia in Turkey, in place since 29 April 2017. The legal department of the Susma Platform also lodged a petition with the Constitutional Court concerning this ongoing violation. Since the Constitutional Court has failed to respond to our petition, our legal department will be filing a similar petition with the European Court of Human Rights on the grounds that the Constitutional Court was an ineffective and non-functional domestic remedy in addressing this censorship incident targeting the rights to freedom of expression, information and accessing information.

Regularly reporting on all kinds of bans targeting LGBTI+ events, which began with the ban in Ankara on 18 November 2017 and spread to almost every corner of Turkey. We also stayed in touch with LGBTI+ platforms. This year, Pride Parade was banned for the fourth time in Istanbul. The Susma Platform also hosted an LGBTI-themed art exhibition titled “Sınır/sız” (Bound/less) between 25 June and 8 July on the side-lines of this year’s Istanbul Pride Week, which was put together under the theme Sınır (Boundaries) in an allusion to the restrictions targeting the LGBTI+ movement. KuirFest, also banned in Istanbul, has been facing difficulties in securing venues to host events on its program. Susma will be hosting film screenings and talks from the KuirFest program at the Kiraathane Istanbul Literature House throughout KuirFest, which is scheduled for 25-26-27 January.

In addition to providing legal support to photojournalist Çağdaş Erdoğan in his ongoing trial on terrorism-related charges stemming from his photographic work (Erdoğan remained in pre-trial detention for six months as part of this case before being released pending trial by the trial court on 13 February 2018), the Susma Platform also presented a solo exhibition by Erdoğan titled “Gelecek Uzun Sürer” at the Kiraathane Istanbul Literature House. This was the inaugural exhibition hosted by the literature house, and it remained on display from 1 October until 19 October. During the cocktail reception marking the exhibition’s opening, journalist-author Karin Karakaşlı conducted a live interview with Erdoğan.

We posted columns by Necati Sönmez, a columnist for the shuttered daily *Özgürlükçü Demokrasi*, on our website after the newspaper and its printing house were assigned government-appointed trustees. Sönmez, a documentary maker and the director of Istanbul's Documentarist festival, wrote about censorship incidents targeting art in his column.

Ertuğrul Mavioğlu and Çayan Demirel, the co-directors of the documentary *Bakur (North)*, which focuses on the PKK's withdrawal during Turkey's peace process, appeared before a court in Batman on the charge of "terrorism propaganda" for their film. One lawyer and two editors from the Susma project team monitored the hearing at the Batman 2nd High Criminal Court and submitted an expert opinion on the case, drafted by Article19. Susma reported about the hearing on both its website as well as its social media account, including the defense statements presented before the court by the filmmakers. We will be following the trial's upcoming hearings too and continue campaigning for the filmmakers on social media until the trial's conclusion.

The Susma website has been chronicling legal proceedings faced by artists whose right to freedom of expression was restricted on account of their artistic work. The Susma website has also been keeping track of trials against artists and authors who are standing trial on charges such as "insulting the president," disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization" or "inciting the public to hatred and animosity" on account of their comments on social media or elsewhere.

In the provinces we visited for our legal seminars and other activities, we held meetings with local bar associations to encourage them to launch freedom of expression commissions. We had talks with presidents of bar associations of Batman, Antalya and Diyarbakır in which we focused on the need for such commissions. During talks with the Diyarbakır Bar Association, we reached an agreement as to the reactivation of the association's already existing Human Rights Commission. The association also agreed to the commission in collaboration with Susma. In Batman and Antalya, we reached agreements that work on establishing these commissions would get under way in the upcoming term. During our meeting with the Bar Association of

Van, an agreement has been reached that the association would consider our proposal for a freedom of expression commission to be launched under the bar association.

Expert opinions penned by legal experts concerning freedom of expression violations have been featured in the Susma website. This year we published articles by Susma Legal Department lawyers Figen Albuga Çalığıuşu and Melike Polat in which they wrote about trials on the charge of “insulting the president,” the new Internet law, the indefinite ban imposed on LGBTI activities, the Law No. 7145, which came into effect following the lifting of SoE, and the function of individual applications before the Constitutional Court of Turkey concerning the rights to freedom of the press/freedom of expression.

Legal Expert Interpretation

Susma Platform's report on censorship and self-censorship incidents covering the period between December 2017 and December 2018 demonstrates that we are facing a much deeper problem than simply deficiencies in the constitutional rule of law -- the problem is that rule of law has broken down.

Paradoxically, this state of affairs has been made permanent through newly enacted legislation. A State of Emergency (SoE) was lifted on 19 July 2018 after being extended seven times in a row. In its place, however, has come Law no. 7145, which was published in the Official Gazette on 31 July 2018 and which has enabled the institution of a "continuous SoE." Hence we have entered a period in which arbitrariness has become the rule, or rather in which legal safeguards can be systematically ignored. This is something that would be unthinkable in a state governed by a constitution.

The Turkish Criminal Code (TCK), which was revised in 2004 under principles that govern a democratic society, has almost completely broken down. The objective of the TCK, which has de facto been rendered nonfunctional, was "to safeguard personal rights and liberties, public order and safety, the constitutional state, public health and the environment, public peace, and to prevent crime." With an eye to achieving this goal, the law set out basic principles for criminal responsibility and types of crimes, punishments and security measures to be taken. The law stipulates that "No one can be punished or have imposed upon them a measure for an act which does not explicitly constitute an offense within the definition of the law;" that "Punishments and security measures besides those stipulated by the Law are not allowed;" and that "No criminal punishment may be imposed based on regulatory transactions of administration."

The same mindset which has undermined these basic safeguards has also destroyed freedom of thought and freedom of expression.

Freedom of thought is the most fundamental among basic human rights and freedoms. Freedom of thought, and therefore freedom of expression, are rooted in the right to dignity. Freedom of thought is fundamental to the existence of individuals and of a society that is free.

Societies where ideas are not allowed to flourish or to be expressed freely, are ruled not by individuals engaged in constructive debate but by the robotic dictates of official mindset.

This oppressive mindset has reversed the 2004 modernization of the Turkish Criminal Code. That reform had revised approach from "suspect to evidence." People used to be deprived of their liberty and their basic rights without evidence; evidence used to be collected afterwards. The 2004 amendment put an end to this dated and cruel approach and introduced a system that worked "from evidence to suspect," therefore preventing the imposition of punishment without evidence.

But at present, this key approach that forms the essence of the Turkish Criminal Code is turning anyone with a dissenting opinion or one that the political authority finds inconvenient into a "defendant." People of whom the political authority does not approve of are now being deprived of their liberty and unlawfully punished, in defiance of the objectives and essence of the Turkish Criminal Code.

As a lawyer, I would summarize this period as one in which the legal system works in an arbitrary fashion and "from suspect to evidence." This is a period in which anyone can be crushed by the wheels of the state's power, unprotected by the rule of law.

For prosecutors and judges who have lost their impartiality and have been taken hostage by the political authority, sometimes even one nod of a particular head is enough.

First we have a defendant – one of whom the state does not approve. Then comes the evidence. The evidence, initially, is a statement by that defendant. Then comes the prosecution's appraisal of the defendant's statement. This is, in effect, a punishment of ideas, which, in turn, is based on an assumption -- a willful presumption of guilt.

The end of the rule of law leaves no space for more meaningful or profound assessments and discussions.

In fact, Turkey's criminal law should have nothing to do with the inner world of a defendant – any more than any other criminal law systems. The defendant's statement is evidence of a criminal act; what that statement entails is already taken for granted by the prosecution. And what the statement is assumed to entail is viewed without question as a crime. That crime could range from insulting the president to attempting to overthrow the constitutional order, from staging a coup to disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization.

When a person's thoughts are at issue, there is endless conjecture as to what those thoughts are capable of.

This is the reason why censorship, self-censorship, restrictions of free expression, isolation, smear campaigns and emotional lynching targeting individuals and groups active in the arts and the media have become commonplace.

The year 2018 was a dark year for the rule of law and democracy. We will have to wait and see whether 2019 will bring on change for the better or will make an already gloomy situation even worse.

But we definitely argue that this much oppression and unlawfulness is too much for Turkish society to endure.

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