

# Censorship and

# Self-censorship

# in Turkey:

**JANUARY 2019 — NOVEMBER 2019**



PLATFORM AGAINST  
CENSORSHIP AND  
SELF-CENSORSHIP



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January 2019

November 2019

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## Foreword

*This report covers cases of censorship in arts and media throughout the first 10 months of 2019 (January 2019 - October 2019). It is the third such report prepared by Susma Platform in an effort to build collective memory on violations of freedom of expression.*

*It is evident from the cases covered in the two substantial reports, which we prepared during the State of Emergency (OHAL) and subsequently in the period of "normalized OHAL" following the enactment of the Law No. 7145 (2016-2017 / 2017-2018), that we have been going through an intense and taxing period in terms of freedom of expression.*

*Confiscating books, banning events, banning access to online news reports, censoring news, suspending broadcast of TV shows, public attacks, intimidation, arrests, criminal investigations, prosecution and imprisonment...*

*It seems that this intensity and volume of restrictions do more than just strengthen and extend the scope of censorship practices, which already became systematic at the hands of the state, through various mechanisms, actors and methods; they also normalize self-censorship that hinders free speech like a brick wall. The long and diverse list of cases presented in the report attests to this conclusion.*

## Media

### Melike Polat

It will not, after all, be wrong to say that a free media was not in the cards in 2019 either. Throughout the year, we saw countless cases of political pressure, censorship, access to online content being blocked, broadcasts of television programs being suspended and members of the media being arrested. The number of journalists still behind bars in Turkey as of the final days of 2019 is 118. No comprehensive data exists as to how many journalists are on trial.

The arrests of actors Metin Akpınar and Müjdat Gezen in the early days of 2019 for “insulting the president” and “inciting people to armed rebellion against the government” over remarks they made during a program on Halk TV made the news for quite a while. The fact that Akpınar and Gezen were arrested at their homes and were later released with a travel ban after President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s remarks declaring that they would “pay the price before the judiciary” for what they said was a telling example of how the judiciary is the most significant “deterrent” against the exercise of freedom of expression.

According to the cases we as the Susma Platform documented, the following methods of censorship/self-censorship and crackdown were most frequently used throughout 2019: Arrests and prosecution of journalists; sanctions in the form of blocking access to online news content, temporary suspension of broadcasting, and administrative fines; programs being pulled off air; firings of journalists; media blackout on people and news deemed “objectionable” and self-censorship in the form of withdrawal of statements by public institutions or of news reports that contradict government policies; censorship of scenes from programs on television channels or online platforms on grounds of sexuality, violence or violation of family values (same-sex relationship).

From the first days of 2019, dozens of journalists had their homes raided, got arrested and even jailed because of their reports. Charges that were used most frequently against journalists were “membership in a terrorist organization,” “spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization,” “insulting the president,” “insulting state officials,” and offences that are commonly referred to as “insulting Turkishness.” Many journalists who shared posts or published reports that were critical of the Operation Peace Spring were arrested in raids on their homes. According to a statement from the Interior Ministry, 186 people were arrested, 24 of whom were then imprisoned pending trial, in relation to the

Operation Peace Spring posts or comments. The public broadcasting watchdog RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) also weighed in, announcing in a statement that broadcasts against the Operation Peace Spring were “silenced” and thanking broadcasters that “contribute to national unity and togetherness.”

And in late 2019, an Istanbul criminal court ruled on a case against against former executives and journalists of the Cumhuriyet newspaper after its previous verdict was overturned by the Supreme Court of Appeals. Journalists and former executives, who were collectively sentenced to tens of years behind bars and some of whom spent well over a year in prison as part of the trial, were convicted again and given the same sentences when the Istanbul 27th High Criminal Court insisted on its previous verdict. The case is now to be taken up by the Supreme Court of Appeals' General Assembly of Criminal Chambers, whose decision will be final.

Emre İper, who was one of the defendants sentenced to less than five years in prison as part of the case, became the last employee of Cumhuriyet to be released following the entry into force of the Judicial Reform Package.

With the entry into force of the Judicial Reform Package, cases that were previously considered finalized as a result of an appellate court ruling will also be eligible for review by the Supreme Court of Appeals, opening the way for defense lawyers to request the release of their jailed clients pending the Supreme Court decision on the case. Several Kurdish journalists were released after courts accepted such requests.

In 2019, punishing journalists who produced “objectionable” content was not enough: Access to online news reports was blocked while television channels were ordered to temporarily suspend broadcast of news programs and/or pay hefty fines. An overwhelming majority of the censored news reports were those that were critical of members of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) or the government. And the requests to block access to these reports came from ministries, ministers, the president and other AKP politicians themselves. At this point, we should note that access to a report on the Susma Platform's website on a court decision to block access to news reports on alleged allocation of Treasury land to private Medipol University was also blocked upon a request filed by the Medipol University and the Health Ministry. Our individual application filed with the Constitutional Court against the decision censoring our report is still pending.

Broadcasters including Halk TV, Fox TV, Show TV and Fox Life were among the

national television channels that were ordered to suspend broadcast of their programs and/or pay administrative fines.

Broadcasters such as TV5, Erkam Radyo and RS FM were among those that resorted to preemptive self-censorship in order not to be “punished.” By pulling “objectionable” programs off air and firing “objectionable” journalists, these institutions demonstrated that a key aspect of censorship was about how it forced institutions and persons to self-censor. In such cases, media bosses or owners of media outlets self-censored by choosing to fire journalists so as to save their institutions from taking the hit.

One may observe that censorship and self-censorship peaked around the time when the election for mayor of Istanbul was held. To recall a few highlights of this era: Yeni Şafak refused to publish an article by its columnist Özlem Albayrak, which criticized prison sentences given to CHP politician Canan Kaftancıoğlu on the basis of her social media posts -- Albayrak said she resigned from the newspaper over the censorship; a court ordered access to news reports on controversial remarks by Esenler Mayor Tevfik Göksu of the ruling AKP on ethnic roots of Istanbul mayor-elect Ekrem İmamoğlu to be blocked upon Göksu's request; an episode of the CNN Türk's political talk show Tarafsız Bölge (Neutral Zone) that was attended by İmamoğlu took a commercial break as İmamoğlu started talking about alleged corruption and extravagance at the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality, and the program was then ended ahead of its scheduled time; beIN Sports censored a part of its live broadcast of the Turkish national football league game between Beşiktaş and Medipol Başakşehir, when fans shouted slogans in favor of İmamoğlu; access to online game Mazbata Online, featuring İmamoğlu as its main character, was blocked on Parliament's wireless Internet network.

Looking at the censorship and self-censorship cases documented in this report, we are faced with the fact that 2019 was not a bright year for the media. The fact that arrests and detentions of journalists continued unabated even after the entry into force of the Judicial Reform Package, which opened the way for the release of at least some journalists, leads us to conclude that the reform was merely a temporary fix. Here is to hope that the sentence added under the judicial reform to Article 7/2 of the Anti-Terror Law, which states that “expressions of thought that fall within bounds of criticism or for reporting purposes cannot be prosecuted,” will be applied to all journalists and the time when journalism ceases to be a “crime” will arrive...

## Social media

### Murat Şevki Çoban

Praise be to God, we remained afraid of expression in 2019 as well. When we speak through social media, we mainly speak through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and, nowadays TikTok, occasionally Skype and Snapchat, rarely LinkedIn and Pinterest, and perhaps even MySpace - if we are born before 2000. Nevertheless, while the seemingly limitless scope of social media enables introduction and spread of expression in infinite number of forms, it also forces us to reconsider practices of censorship and self-censorship.

According to Digital 2019 report<sup>1</sup> from We Are Social and HotSuite, 59.36 million people have access to Internet in Turkey. Given that the country population stands at about 82 million according to official census figures<sup>2</sup>, the report concludes that 72 percent of the Turkish populace are Internet users. Out of the people who have access to Internet, 52 million are active users of social media. The most popular social media platforms are YouTube (92 percent), Instagram (84 percent), WhatsApp (83 percent), Facebook (82 percent) and Twitter (58 percent). Turkey is among the leading countries based on number of users of Twitter, which is at the bottom of the list of the "Big Five": With 8.6 million active users, Turkey is the fifth country with largest number of Twitter users after the US, Japan, the UK and Saudi Arabia.<sup>3</sup>

Average amount of time per day spent using the Internet is 7 hours and 15 minutes. Average amount of time per day spent using social media platforms is 2 hours and 46 minutes.<sup>4</sup>

Given the momentum and course of our virtual existence and recent practices

<sup>1</sup> "Digital 2019: Turkey," DataReportal, Global Digital Insights, Simon Kemp, accessed 30.10.2019

<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-turkey?rq=%20turkey>

<sup>2</sup> According to the Results of Address Based Population Registration System published by the Turkish Statistical Institute, Turkey's population is 82 million 3 thousand and 822 people as of 31 December 2018. "Adrese Dayalı Nüfus Kayıt Sistemi Sonuçları, 2018," Türkiye İstatistik Kurumu, accessed 30.10.2019,

<http://www.tuik.gov.tr/PreHaberBultenleri.do?id=30709>

<sup>3</sup> "Leading countries based on number of Twitter users as of July 2019," Statista, erişim 30.10.2019, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/>

<sup>4</sup> "Digital 2019: Turkey," <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2019-turkey?rq=%20turkey>

of the state apparatus, this picture could lead us to simplistic deductions such as that there are at least 52 million potential virtual criminals in Turkey as of January 2019 and that these people spend an average of 2 hours and 46 minutes per day engaging in potentially criminal activities. But it is best to keep in mind that, in the words of one thinker, the world -- virtual or otherwise -- is bigger than five. Be it Ding, Ning, Ping, Scribd, Xanga, Epinions, Ecademy, Academia or Mix, Tagged, Quora, Goodreads, Watpadd, VK, SoundCloud or YY, Vero, Medium, Tagged, Tribe, Bubbly...

Censorship (and self-censorship in connection with it) operate through three channels: Rules and policies of the social platform, government practices, and user practices. Even though one would tend to assume, and generally for the right reasons, that in countries with a dismaying track record of freedom of expression such as Turkey, the usual offender is/has been/will be the government, in reality, there are mutually reinforcing relations among these three seemingly rival channels.<sup>5</sup>

By accepting the rules and policies, every user commits in advance to comply with terms that are set unilaterally by social media platforms for purposes that sound almost angelic, such as "to ensure all people can participate in the public conversation freely and safely",<sup>6</sup> and, therefore, never to share certain content.

Point 1: Our intent here is not to open the nature of the content that the platforms consider to be threatening to security and freedom up for discussion; it is to point out that users in fact crack open a door sealed by censorship and self-censorship by simply joining social platforms.<sup>7</sup>

By flagging content that they deem harmful for whatever reason or by reporting

<sup>5</sup> It is beyond the scope and purposes of this report to describe and debate the complex relations and web of interactions among social media platforms, state apparatus and users. Nonetheless, as a simple example to clarify our argument, one can point out that social media platforms rely mostly on user complaints in labeling and restricting circulation of content and that platforms or governments impose penalties again on the basis of user complaints.

<sup>6</sup> "The Twitter Rules," Twitter, accessed on 30.10.2019, <https://help.twitter.com/en/rules-and-policies/twitter-rules>

<sup>7</sup> Otherwise, it would have been possible to discuss, for instance, Instagram's banning photos of female nipples while having no problem with bare male nipples, or Twitter's listing of hate speech among banned contents from a freedom of expression standpoint.

them as spam, users prevent certain statements from being circulated, thus effectively acting as censors.<sup>8</sup>

Point 2: Furthermore, as in the case of *Zümrüt Apartmanı* (Zümrüt Apartment) or in an entirely unjustified campaign that was under way at the time of writing of this article against writer Aslı Erdoğan, social media users can also target off-platform content, seeking criminal sanctions against those targeted. Let's keep in mind that in the case of *Zümrüt Apartmanı*, those who campaigned for the book to be banned or for the arrest of its author included fervent advocates of freedom of expression as well.<sup>9</sup>

And Item 3. The usual suspect: The government. According to Twitter Transparency Report data, Turkey again led globally in number of content takedown requests in 2018.<sup>10</sup> Twitter users were prosecuted on various charges such as "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" and "incitement to hatred and enmity" for their posts.<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, 186 people who commented on Twitter on the Operation Peace Spring were arrested, 24 of whom were sent to prison pending trial.<sup>12</sup> Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, has been banned in Turkey for over two years. But while resorting to such primitive ways to censor content, the state keeps taking advantage of new means made available by latest technologies as well.

In Twitter and Gas, Zeynep Tüfekçi says "Digital technologies also highlight the importance of attention as a key resource, no longer to be conflated with mass media, and no longer under the sole control of traditional elites."<sup>13</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Again, our intent here is not to debate the nature of such content; it is to keep in mind user practices while thinking about censorship.

<sup>9</sup> Besides, Koton clothing company's attempt to fire workers due to their Instagram "likes" is a recent example reminding us that social media users have, in addition to the family and the state, even a stronger motive to self-censor: the free market. "Koton'da işçi kıyımı," BirGün, erişim 30.10.2019  
<https://www.birgun.net/haber/koton-da-isci-kiyimi-273913>

<sup>10</sup> At the time of the writing of this report, Twitter Transparency Report for 2019 was not yet available. For detailed information on 2018 and before: <https://transparency.twitter.com/tr.html>

<sup>11</sup> "BİA Medya Gözlem /2019 Ocak-Şubat-Mart," Bianet, Erol Önderoğlu, accessed on 30.10.2019  
<http://bianet.org/bianet/medya/208044-gun-gun-uc-aylik-medya-ifade-ozgurlugu-ihlalleri-tam-metin>

<sup>12</sup> "Barış Pınarı Harekati'yla ilgili kara propagandaya 24 tutuklama," CNN Türk, accessed on 30.10.2019  
<https://www.cnnturk.com/turkiye/son-dakika-baris-pinari-harekatiyla-ilgili-sosyal-medya-sorusturmasi-186-kisiden-24u-tutuklandi>

<sup>13</sup> Twitter and Tear Gas, Zeynep Tüfekçi, New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 2017

While social media platforms use their algorithms to turn attention of users into income, governments work to deflect attention through contradictory (alternative) narratives. For instance, aforementioned social media posts about the Operation Peace Spring are labeled as “black propaganda” by anonymous sources at the Interior Ministry, then the state news agency Anadolu uses this term when reporting on it, and then CNN Türk circulates the same terminology when reprinting this report. These contents are shared by institutions and users alike. The state thus becomes one of the main actors in this quest for public attention, which used to be under the monopoly of mainstream media and which it used to control relatively easily, by disseminating the narratives it builds in order to maintain control over the public attention.



## Publishing industry

### Seçil Epik

For the publishing industry, 2019 was a year marked by censorship and bans.

On the one hand, prison administrations prevented inmates from accessing an ever-increasing number of books, copies of books published many years ago were confiscated on the ground of “spreading terrorism propaganda,” and publishing house owners were arrested for their social media posts. On the other hand, the literary world also used its own means, with magazines and publishing houses engaging in censorship and self-censorship on several occasions.

Among the books whose distribution and sale were banned this year was the Turkish edition of Andrew Collins' *From the Ashes of Angels – The Forbidden Legacy of a Fallen Race* (Meleklerin Küllerinden – Günahkar Bir Irkın Yasaklanmış Mirası) published by the Avesta Publishing. Avesta publisher Abdullah Keskin's Twitter response to the banning of a book on Kurdish mythology that was published 18 years ago for “disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization” was telling: “Why would a book that was published 18 years ago and out of print for years, that has never been investigated until now, and that deals with Kurdish mythology does not include even a single word (except in its preface) about the modern times be banned?”

This year, we saw the Turkuvaaz Journal Group refusing to publish an ad from A7 Kitap publishing company on the *Sabitfikir* magazine that it owned because the ad featured, among others, the book *The Gay 100*; or Cumhuriyet Kitap, the book supplement of Cumhuriyet, censoring a book review by Bülent Forta that had been commissioned by the previous editorial team of the newspaper on the newly-published book of Faruk Eren, *Kayıp Bir Devrimin Hikayesi/Bir Zamanlar Hasköy'* (The Story of a Lost Revolution/Once Upon a Time in Hasköy), which tells the story of Eren's brother Hayrettin Eren who was forcibly disappeared after the 1980 military coup; or Timaş Publishing announcing that it would not publish the Turkish edition of British writer Hamza Andreas Tzortzis' *The Divine Reality: God, Islam and The Mirage of Atheism* due to a public backlash against the author.

These examples are significant as they indicate that several actors within the publishing industry also resorted to censorship and self-censorship. The

pressure that the sector felt throughout the state of emergency appears to have paved the way this year for legitimization of arbitrary censorship and seemingly inevitable self-censorship.

This means that there is a mechanism in the publishing industry that becomes operational even before more visible external mechanisms of censorship kick in. Publishing companies that are close to the government, for instance, may resort to censoring content related to LGBTI+ or Kurdish issues or deemed to be offensive to religious sensitivities before they are introduced to the public. It is also worth noting that these groups run a censorship mechanism that does not get coverage in the mainstream -- and even in the independent -- media. One can catch a glimpse of this unspoken censorship targeting authors deemed to be political opponents by looking at the way Elif Şafak's *On Dakika Otuz Sekiz Saniye* (10 Minutes 38 Seconds in This Strange World) was treated by the publishing conglomerate Turkuvas: The novel was never placed in window displays at the group's D&R stores or listed among best-sellers on its online book stores.

In addition to this, the Council for the Protection of Children from Harmful Publications, one of the first institutions that come to mind when it comes to censorship in publishing, declared children's books published by various publishers with a decision printed in the Official Gazette on 27 September 2019 on the grounds that they would be "harmful for the spirituality of children under 18." The reason behind the decision, which targeted Turkish editions of *Declaration of the Rights of Boys*, *Declaration of the Rights of Girls*, *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls: 100 Tales of Extraordinary Women* and *Sünnetçi Kız* (Circumciser Girl) was revealed afterwards. In a statement to the Independent Turkish, the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services said the books were deemed to be "harmful for the spirituality of the children" because of "encouragement of transsexuality, violence, and excesses in opposition to gender identities."

Another "censorship" incident that left its mark on the year 2019 went beyond the boundaries of the publishing industry and triggered a nationwide debate. Prosecutors launched an investigation against the author of *Zümrüt Apartmanı* (Zümrüt Apartment), who published under the pen name Abdullah Şevki, on the grounds of "obscenity" after the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and the Ministry of Family, Labor and Social Services filed complaints that the book included "pedophilic content." Şevki and owner

of the publishing house that published the book were detained as part of the investigation. This led to widespread debates around censorship and boundaries of fiction. It also triggered a backlash that culminated in stones being thrown at the windows of the publishing house that printed the book. Those who argued that an author cannot be prosecuted for pedophilic content in their book just as Dostoyevski cannot be sentenced to prison because of the protagonist of his *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov, on the other hand, were quite few in number.

The revelations this year that the word "Kurdistan" was censored in the Turkish translation of Paulo Coelho's *Eleven Minutes* in all its reprints since 2004 and that the word "Kurdistan" included in the original version of the 17th century Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi's *Seyahatname* (Book of Travels) was replaced with the phrase "Kurdish land" in a 2006 edition of the book published by the Yapı Kredi Publications were significant examples that raised the question of just how much more censorship that readers would discover in the decades to come might already be there, hidden in publications.

## Cinema

### Özkan Küçük

As indicated in Susma Platform's report last year, censorship and self-censorship in the cinema industry gave way to prosecution and imprisonments in 2019.

Two separate investigations launched by the Batman Republican Public Prosecutor's Office in relation to two documentaries resulted in prison sentences. Documentary filmmaker Veysi Altay and former manager of the Batman Yılmaz Güney Movie Theatre, Dicle Anter, went on trial on the charge of "terrorism propaganda" over the poster of documentary *Nû Jîn* (New Life), set in Kobani. While the trial had widely been expected to result in acquittal of both defendants, Altay was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months for "terrorism propaganda" and Anter was given 2 years and 1 month on the same charge.

Both sentences were well above the minimum terms set by the law and therefore likely to result in actual imprisonment if upheld by the appeal court, something that, according to legal experts, is meant to send a political message.

And in the second case, which involved the documentary *Bakur* (North), co-directors were given lengthy prison terms. In a trial where neither the filmmakers nor their lawyers were in attendance, co-directors Ertuğrul Mavioğlu and Çayan Demirel were convicted of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization" and sentenced to 4 years and 6 months each by the Batman 2<sup>nd</sup> High Criminal Court.

The following statement in the verdict was striking, given the fact that Çayan Demirel has medical reports certifying that he is 99 percent disabled due to a stroke he had: "... [It was decided] to not apply provisions of reduction of sentence as per Article 62 of the Turkish Criminal Code (TCK) given that our Court did not form a favorable impression that the defendants would not commit an offence again."

Another documentary director, Medet Dilek, faced a possible legal investigation when a member of the public filed a legal complaint against him with the Karşıyaka Republican Public Prosecutor's Office after the İzmir screening of his documentary *Taş Düğmeler* (Stone Buttons), which tells the story of Koçgiri Rebellion of 1918-21, for "insulting Atatürk" and "incitement to

crime." Fortunately, this saga ended without turning into a legal case when the prosecutor decided there was no ground for prosecution, a decision which should have set precedent for other similar cases but unfortunately did not.

Documentary filmmaker Kazım Kızıl was sentenced to 1 year and 3 months for "insulting the president."

Another case targeted director Kazım Öz, who was charged with "membership of a terrorist organization." Öz, who faces up to 15 years in jail in the case brought by the Diyarbakır Republican Public Prosecutor's Office, described the trial as a "tool for punishing me because of my productions."

In the meantime, obstructions of all sorts beset directors throughout the year as well. Documentary filmmakers Çınar Doğan and İlham Bakır were prevented from shooting a documentary in a village in the eastern province of Malatya by the gendarmerie, who told them they were not permitted to film. Doğan and Bakır had decided to shoot the documentary in Malatya after waiting in vain for a permit to shoot in Diyarbakır. Director Hacı Orman's passport was seized at the airport as he was trying to leave for Bulgaria to attend Sofia International Film Festival which he was invited to, on the grounds that he was subject to an international travel ban.

Documentary maker and video activist Oktay İnce, a member of the video activism collective Seyri Sokak, was detained several times as a result of his sit-in protests outside various public institutions demanding the return of his 20-year-old archive, which was seized when police raided his home about a year ago. But he is still unable to retrieve it.

The resistance put up by Oktay İnce in order to get back his digital archive also puts a spotlight on another form of censorship, which is the confiscation of the archive and equipments of the artists to prevent them from producing.

As multi-faceted attempts to obstruct and punish filmmakers and others in the cinema industry went on, we also witnessed censorship and self-censorship being solidified through legal means.

The new, much-debated Law on Evaluation, Classification and Supporting of Cinema Films appears set to become a means for outright bans on movies through its evaluation and classification mechanism, which is originally supposed to give age ratings to movies, as the law now states that "movies that are deemed inappropriate as a result of evaluation and classification cannot be commercially distributed." The fact that the word "inappropriate"

is open to interpretation is a further sign that bans might be awaiting cinema films, especially political and independent cinema.

The Commercial Screening License, which led to censorship incidents at festivals in the previous year, is no longer a requirement under the new law. But what problems that the newly-introduced mandatory R18+ rating for all the movies without the Commercial Screening License that are to be shown at festivals, irrespective of their content, might create in practice remain to be seen. This is likely to create complications especially when it comes to screening of children movies at festivals.

And the fact that cinema industry representatives will be in minority in the support boards under the new cinema law is a clear sign that state support for the industry will be at the discretion of state appointees.

As will be recalled, removal of the documentary and national competitions from the program of the Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival in the previous years following a censorship scandal in 2014 has been a major topic of debate over the past years. The festival was expected to face up to its past following the change of administration at the Antalya Metropolitan Municipality after the local elections in March. But although the new management of the festival reinstated the national documentary and national feature film competitions, it refused to face up to the censorship in 2014, despite calls from the Turkish Film Critics Association (SİYAD) and the Documentary Filmmakers Association (BSB) to that effect.

Censorship imposed by national broadcasters and fines slapped by the broadcasting watchdog RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) were another key issue on the agenda of censorship in 2019.

RTÜK often fined television channels on the grounds of “public morality” and “national and spiritual values of the society,” while violence was punished only on rare occasions.

It was a striking example showing the extent of self-censorship on national television that part of the song *Namus Belası* (A Matter of Honor) by late composer and singer Cem Karaca with lyrics that read “We repent a hundred thousand times and yet drink wine again” was censored when it featured in an episode of the TV show *Çarpışma* (Collision) on Show TV.

While Star TV censored a scene set in an alcohol serving place in *La La Land*, censoring of a dialogue in a scene in comedy film *Kaçma Birader* on Star TV which consisted of the following sentences “I was going to meet Atatürk.

What, is Atatürk dead? No, Atatürk did not die, he lives on in our hearts” went down in history as another testament to the dominant mentality of this era.

Censorship and self-censorship gained a whole new dimension in 2019 when global streaming platform Netflix began to censor content in Turkey following the entry into force of the new online broadcasting law, which requires online broadcasters to obtain a license from RTÜK and allows RTÜK to supervise online content.

Whether the Religious Affairs Directorate's (Diyanet) new directive on publications, which expands powers of its radio and television department, would mean another front for censorship remains to be seen.

In 2019, censorship and bans in cinema were administered by universities as well. Most recently, Yıldız Technical University administration banned the screening of all movies to be shown as part of a film screening program organized by students, titled Gender and Identity in Cinema, and two movies written and directed by David Lynch on the grounds that the films “featured sexuality and violence and that homosexuality was a red line for the administration.”

A planned event by the Pembe Hayat (Pink Life) LGBTI+ Solidarity Association, which included a short film screening as well, was banned by the Ankara Governor's Office on the grounds of “protecting public morality, public health and rights and freedoms of others.”

The documentary *Gitmek* (To Leave), made in memory of those killed in the 2015 bomb attack in Suruç, was also a victim of bans imposed by local authorities. Screening of the documentary, which was due to take place at the Şişli Municipality Nazım Hikmet Culture and Art House, was banned by the Şişli District Governor's Office and the Şişli Police Directorate. In a similar incident, the Tunceli Governor's Office banned the screening of *Cumartesi Anneleri* (Saturday Mothers) documentary as part of the Munzur Culture and Nature Festival.

One can conclude, therefore, that censorship in cinema became more blatant in 2019 with arbitrary bans, imprisonments, and RTÜK control becoming increasingly widespread.

## Theater

### Özlem Altunok

Looking at the theater scene in recent years, one may observe a rising trend in terms of both productions and the response from audiences.

Private theaters, which greeted the 2019/2020 season with more than 300 plays, witnessed a 11.9-percent increase in the audience compared to 2017, attracting more than seven million theatergoers in the previous season, according to TURKSTAT data. This balanced and apparently progressing supply-demand relationship needs to be explained by the different dynamics behind this rise.

This is because there are multiple factors behind the growing interest over the recent years in independent theaters in Turkey. First of all, developments in the theater scene are progressing in a direction of increasing art production in an atmosphere of repression that began first with the Gezi Park protests, continued with the State of Emergency (OHAL) and reached today.

The readiness of independent theaters, which extended their reach in the late 2000s, to reproduce and experiment with alternative content and formats in niche places; presence of the Actors' Union of Turkey; an influx of professionals, who were either expelled from the State Theaters (DT) and City Theaters (ŞT) or felt unwelcome there, into private theaters; a change of hands and transformation in the national TV series industry amid increasing Radio and Television Supreme Council (RTÜK) supervision on the one hand and pressure on the industry to ensure the productions reflect “national and domestic” values on the other (add to this the fact that online content will also be subject to RTÜK control); an increasing number of cinema actors and producers, particularly political opponents, turning to the theater stage due to discriminatory practices in allocating the Ministry support in the cinema industry, where productions are many times more costly, and as a result of stagnation in the industry stemming from the pressure for promotion of “national and domestic” values; presence and growth of vibrant, frequented and relatively spacious theaters – albeit in different categories - such as Zorlu, Moda Sahnesi, Baba Sahne, and DasDas; evolution of efforts to organize by theaters in Kadıköy, which have been ongoing for a while, into creation of collectives that incorporate many theaters across Istanbul... All these internal and external factors and more



explain why stages have become a center of attraction for both the audience and the artists.

This is also a process whereby a form of theater characterized by big-budget productions became popular. It is also evident that there is a high degree of production in this process in which smaller/alternative theaters that existed in the 2010s along İstiklal Street took up different forms to survive. To what extent, then, is production affected by censorship? To what degree do artists resort to self-censorship?

Even though an atmosphere of fear resonates across the board, there are many theaters that make political comments, directly or indirectly, through plays and scripts thanks to the distinct political nature of theater among art disciplines. That private theaters, which cut their links with the state to a minimum, have mastered the skills to get by on their own has a major role to play in this. And they should be given further credit as they managed to do so despite the big share of taxes in ticket prices, which emerges as a form of financial censorship.

Of course, practices that have now become traditional, such as denying rooms for “objectionable” and political plays, including most notably those in Kurdish, or cancelling of previously allocated rooms by decisions of the state institutions or local authorities on arbitrary grounds continued in 2019 as well, particularly in smaller provinces. Similar to what happened to Barış Atay’s *Sadece Diktatör* (Only a Dictator) in 2018, which was systematically banned in several provinces, some plays also came to the fore for repeated bans in 2019. Among them are Oyun Sandalı theater company’s *Taranta Babu*, a stage adaptation of Nazım Hikmet’s book *Taranta Babu’ya Mektuplar* (Letters to Taranta Babu), and Aziz Nesin’s *Azizname*, staged by Cumhuriyet Sahnesi theater group.

We mentioned that theater found a strong voice in Kadıköy thanks to the new and progressive theater stages being opened there and the support provided by the municipality. It should be no coincidence, therefore, that a World Theater Day march that was organized by the Kadıköy Theaters Platform in collaboration with the Kadıköy Municipality in Kadıköy and the inauguration march of Kadıköy Theater Festival, another municipality-platform collaboration, were banned by the Istanbul Governor’s Office on “security” grounds.

The situation is much grimmer in provinces where municipalities were taken over by government-appointed trustees. Signs that the arts and culture scene will get barren again in Van, Diyarbakır and Mardin are already there. This is mainly manifested by prohibition of the use of cultural venues held by these municipalities and bans they impose on activities. As is known, former actors and actresses of the Diyarbakır City Theater, who were dismissed after appointment of a trustee to run the Diyarbakır Greater Municipality in the aftermath of the state of emergency, established the Amed City Theater. The company went back to ÇandAmed stage after the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) candidate won the municipal elections of 31 March but that did not last long: It was forced to return to its small stage after appointment of the trustee in August.

Similarly, one of the first acts of the trustee appointed to the Van Metropolitan Municipality was to order that Fujan and Nupelda theater companies that were rehearsing for a play be expelled from the municipality's Women Life Center.

Whether planned theater festivals for which preparations are already under way will indeed come to life in these provinces remains to be seen. But it seems quite possible that bans on public events and demonstrations might affect cultural events as well, as was the case in previous periods.

Another chapter in Turkey's freedom of expression record in 2019 is the prosecution and/or arrests of artists. Among the artists who were punished for exercising their freedom of expression were Nazlı Masatçı, Ersin Umut Güler and Orhan Aydın.

Nazlı Masatçı of Yenikapı theater company was sentenced to 18 months in prison for "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization." She was freed on probation after five months in jail. Ersin Umut Güler was sentenced to 15 months in prison for "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" in his social media posts, while Orhan Aydın was given a prison term of 11 months and 20 days for "insulting the president."

## Music

### Sumru Tamer

In 2019, musicians' artistic freedom of expression was hindered mainly through trials brought on the charge of "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" under the Anti-Terror Law (TMK) and convictions handed down in those trials.

Examples are numerous: For instance, musician Azad Bedran was put on trial for "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" in the music video of his song *Partizan* and sentenced to 3 years and 9 months in prison. In another case, a criminal investigation was launched into singer Alpay for allegedly praising members of a terrorist group and insulting the state after he said in a concert "I dedicate the next song to these beautiful people who were cruelly murdered by the state" and showed photos of Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan, Hüseyin İnan – revolutionary student leaders who were executed in 1972 – and Berkin Elvan – a teenager who died after being hit by a tear gas canister fired by the police during the Gezi Park protests of 2013. And yet another case involves musicians who were arrested on the charge of "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" for singing Kurdish songs at weddings.

Musicians were prosecuted not just for the content of their artistic performances but for non-artistic deeds such as social media posts and political activities as well: Kurdish musician Hozan Canê has been in prison since 2018 after he was put on trial for his social media posts and convicted of "membership of a terrorist organization." Musician Ferhat Tunç has been facing many trials, most of which were brought on account of his social media posts. Tunç, who faces from 8 years and 6 months to 20 years in prison on charges of "membership of a terrorist group" and "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" over his social media posts about the military operation in Afrin, is also charged with "openly inciting people to hatred and enmity" in another trial brought again for his social media posts.

Musicians were also the target of "insult" cases, which have increased significantly in recent years. They were charged with insulting the president and other state officials under articles 215 and 299 of the Turkish Criminal Code (TCK). Ferhat Tunç, for instance, was put on trial for "insulting" former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım in a social media post from 2016. The artist is

still on trial for “insulting the president” as part of a court case brought in 2018. Musician Hozan Canê, on the other hand, was given a prison term of 1 year, 5 months and 15 days on the charge of “insulting the president” for a cartoon he allegedly posted on his Facebook page.

Other artists faced “insult” cases for gestures and statements they made during stage performances. Singer Zuhâl Olcay was sentenced to 11 months and 20 days in prison for insulting President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan through a hand gesture she made during a performance.

Many musicians were barred from attending festivals or giving concerts due to bans imposed by provincial police departments, governors or district governors. The bans, which were implemented on a wide scale, were made possible by the Law No. 7145, which turned many of the state of emergency provisions into law and gave the law enforcement authorities and governors extended powers to ban public events. Mem Ararat concert and the Gezgin Fest Van Youth Festival that were banned by the Van Governor’s Office and the Batıkent Culture Festival, which had been due to include concerts by Sabahat Akkiraz, Lâl Gazel, Ahu Sağlam and Metanu, that was banned by the Ankara Governor’s Office, are some of the examples.

Bans on concerts by the folk-rock band Grup Yorum, which have been a routine practice since 2016, and police raids on the İdil Cultural Center that it uses continued in 2019 as well. Musicians’ instruments got broken or lost and music notebooks were damaged during these raids. The band’s concerts were banned by the governor’s office in Hatay and by the district governor’s office in Istanbul while the bans were announced through loudspeakers from armored police vehicles. Grup Yorum members have been on a hunger strike since May, demanding raids on İdil Cultural Center be stopped and bans on concerts be lifted.

It was not only the governors that banned the concerts; other actors such as municipalities, associations and organizers also blocked them. In many cases, no reason was given while in others, musicians’ political views were the apparent cause. Selçuk Balcı’s concert that was planned to take place as part of the Malatya Festivities, for example, was canceled by Gökçen Yılmaz Academy, organizer of the event. Balcı wrote on social media that the concert was canceled as a result of pressure from lawmakers and the Malatya Municipality on the organizers because of his social media posts expressing support for Ekrem İmamoğlu, the opposition candidate who won

the election for Istanbul municipality. In a similar case, a concert to be given by the Anatolian rock band Moğollar as part of the Alumni Day, organized by the Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) Alumni Association, was canceled by the association just a day before it was to take place without any reason.

Musicians faced censorship, prosecution or anonymous criminal complaints because of lyrics of their songs as well. Lyrics were generally targeted on the grounds of “public morality” or for their critical take on government policies. An unidentified member of the public filed a criminal complaint against rapper Şanişer and 17 other artists who collaborated in the socially critical rap song *Susamam* (I can't remain silent), citing the song's “disturbing” lyrics. Another rapper, Şehinşah, was arrested because of the lyrics of one of his songs.

To conclude, one can justifiably argue that artistic freedom of expression did not improve at all after the lifting of the state of emergency and that the Law No. 7145 normalized and legalized many aspects of the emergency rule, paving the way for increasingly common use of extended powers to suppress freedom of expression. It should also be emphasized that discretionary powers of governor's offices and the police were expanded on the basis of this law, allowing them to ban public events such as concerts and festivals on vague grounds such as “security” and “public wellbeing.”

We also witnessed the TMK and criminal law provisions tackling the offence of insult being used against musicians at an increasing rate. Musicians were punished not just for the content of their artistic production but also for their opinions. These punishments prevented them from exercising their artistic freedom of expression by curtailing their personal lives and artistic production.

## Visual arts

### Kültigin Kağan Akbulut

Visual arts scene has been in an unacknowledged spiral of self-censorship since the declaration of the State of Emergency (OHAL). Artists, curators and institutions have been dealing with potentially risky and “dangerous” undertakings internally and long before they culminate in full-blown problems. Workshops, invitation-only events, or research-based activities emerge as instruments of a withdrawal process that helps institutions survive.

Self-censorship has been occurring in other branches of art, too, such as cinema, music and theater. But in the world of visual arts, the lack of taboo-breaking manifestations of the 2000s or the post-Gezi Park protests era appears to be a central feature.

We also observe that those who are unwilling to follow these conventional norms take their careers abroad, taking advantage of the welcoming atmosphere of the contemporary art internationally.

Against the backdrop of this whole spiral of censorship, two incidents that transpired in the final half of the year – an alleged episode of censorship in Sinopale, International Sinop Biennial, and a statement on Turkey's Operation Peace Spring military campaign in Syria that was penned by the chairman of Contemporary Istanbul art fair, Ali Güreli, and sent to the fair's international partners and members of the press, revealed that censorship is also alive and kicking, rearing its head at times of heightened pressure.

Curators of the biennial, which took place between 17 August and 20 September this year with the conceptual framework “here and where” A Politics of Location, were Aslı Serbest and Mona Mahall. Workshops by artists who focused on the region were particularly remarkable. According to the biennial program, some of the works were to be exhibited at the Tophane-i Amire building in Istanbul after the biennial is completed in Sinop on 20 September.

But a few days before the biennial's Sinop leg was to end, we learned through an e-mail that the curators canceled the rest of the program. In a statement, they said they ended the program because the biennial's director Melih Görgün prevented the screening of artist Angela Melitopoulos' film, *Passing Drama*. They also claimed that Görgün blocked Melitopoulos' research

in Sinop by preventing her from meeting with relevant people. The two curators organized an event at Marsistanbul on 12 September instead, consisting of the screening of *Passing Drama* and a public discussion on institutional and patriarchal power structures. Görgün, who also attended the event, categorically denied the accusation of censorship, saying that *Passing Drama* was added to the biennial program at the last minute and that he objected to screening of the film due to sensitivities of the region. He also particularly emphasized that as the biennial organizers, they were “open to alternative ways.” But the meeting ended on a vague note, without a discussion on issues such as the limits of the authorities of the curators and of the director, who had the authority to add to or remove from the biennial program a work at the last minute, or what the overall framework for negotiations on such matters should be like.

The Sinopale case has shown us that censorship and self-censorship are in fact at work in the visual arts scene but that attempts are being made to keep this out of the public eye. What transpired at the Sinopale was in fact quite reminiscent of the “was it censorship or not” debate that followed from the experience of curator Halil Altındere and artist Burak Delier in 2005, which involved the withdrawal of a work by Delier from the *Serbest Vuruş* (Free Kick) exhibition in the Hospitality Zone of the 9th Istanbul Biennial in that year. And, similarly, what happened at Sinopale went down in history as an unsolved case of censorship that no one took responsibility for.

Another noteworthy development in the visual arts scene occurred in the first days of the Operation Peace Spring. A statement signed by the founder and chairman of the Contemporary Istanbul art fair, Ali Güreli, and sent to international partners of the fair and the press, openly called for censorship. Güreli told the fair’s “art loving friends” that the international press coverage of the military operation amounted to “fabricated news and comments” and asked them to “not take such manipulative news, comments, and posts seriously.” Noting that “Turkey’s current operation does not target any ethnic group, nation, or country; rather, it purely and simply aims to neutralize the elements that pose a terrorist threat on a regional and global scale as well as to our country,” Güreli concluded by saying that the military operation “will not harm the Turkish economy”, which has in fact been “boosted [by] the recent attacks it was exposed to, resulting in upward accelerating economic indicators that reflect positively on the art scene and market.”

Members of the art world severely condemned Güreli's statement. Critics and dealers said the statement echoed the state line, with some pledging to never join the fair again. Following the backlash, Güreli sent out a second statement apologizing for the first. Describing his previous statement as "entirely inappropriate," Güreli said "I was in no position to comment on Turkey's political context, which is very complex, and it was wrong for me to do so, especially given the circumstances," adding that "emotions drove my actions."

Leaving these two symbolic cases aside, when we look at the cases of censorship documented in this report by the Susma Platform, we see traces of censorship that is in fact occurring locally in the visual arts scene yet remains invisible to the public eye. Certain exhibitions that are not deemed to fall under the category of "contemporary art" and are generally hosted at public exhibition halls such as municipal art galleries were canceled for "obscenity," while some sculptures were removed for political reasons. But the fact that such cases of censorship do not attract public attention reveals that the gap between Istanbul and rest of the country has grown even wider.



## Regions

### Ankara

#### **Pelin Buzluk**

The State of Emergency (OHAL) was lifted in 2018 but OHAL conditions remained in effect in Ankara, as everywhere else in Turkey, throughout 2019.

The Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) sadly took the lead in bans, restrictions and censorship incidents at universities. Such rights violations were mostly compounded with a sexist overtone.

The blanket and indefinite ban imposed in November 2017 on all “LGBT and LGBTI” events in Ankara contributed, without a doubt, a great deal to this outlook. As for bans of this year, all International Women’s Day events, panel discussions organized by the Gender Studies Society student club and subsequently the Pride March were banned at ODTÜ. Following in ODTÜ’s footsteps, Hacettepe University also blocked LGBTI+ events. These two universities, which previously used to be among the main venues for events on women studies, gender equality, LGBTI+ and queer issues, increasingly turned into the most prohibitive institutions.

Efforts by associations, professional chambers and other institutions (such as the Ankara Bar Association) to create space for activities of LGBTI+ groups, which, when barred from universities, turned ineffectual, were similarly hindered.

Verşan Kök, appointed by the president as ODTÜ president instead of the popularly elected candidate, let no critical or opposition voice be raised throughout 2019. The university administration’s refusal this year to allow the 13th Aykut Kence Evolution Conference to be held at the ODTÜ convention center, the event’s traditional venue since its inception, can be viewed as a manifestation of this stance.

The annual International Spring Festival, which, throughout the many decades of ODTÜ’s existence, has nourished and reproduced the university’s spirit of opposition, was reduced last year from four days to one. This year, the festival was canceled altogether, due to unspecified “technical and administrative deficiencies.” The university administration, however, was forced to announce that the festival would go ahead after singers and bands

took to Twitter one after the other to offer free-of-charge concerts and performances, sparking a social media storm. Lastly, the annual ceremony to mark the start of the 2019-20 academic year was canceled on security grounds after a large group of students protested President Erdoğan.

Though the Labor Day was celebrated freely in 2019 in Ankara, countless demonstrations and gatherings were either banned in advance or obstructed with police intervention. The Grand Gathering of those expelled from state positions under emergency decrees commonly referred to as KHKs, which was planned to take place on 5-6 October 2019, was canceled by a decision of the Ankara Governor's Office, citing the Law on Demonstrations and Public Meetings. The police barricade around of the Human Rights Statue on Yüksel Street was removed, but the area remains closed to public meetings and demonstrations.

In Batıkent, a neighborhood home to a mostly urban, leftist populace, a public concert that had been planned as part of the Batıkent Cultural Festival, was banned by the Ankara Governor's Office on grounds of "public welfare and safety." It should be emphasized that bans on public meetings and festivals where opposition groups and the leftist thought renew and reproduce themselves appear to be targeted at isolating such groups.

Given the violations of basic human rights and freedoms that kept increasing over the past few years, arbitrary bans, harsh police interventions and de facto bans, one can conclude that Ankara's residents refrained from exercising their freedoms to assembly, demonstration and protests even more throughout 2019. The fact that OHAL conditions remained in effect despite its formal abolition shows that a permanent repressive regime took root in daily life. One can observe across Ankara that, compared to the previous year, universities went quieter and public events that one would have expected to become massive ended up being small gatherings.

One can also observe that municipality services were made available more evenly to Ankara's all districts following the victory of opposition candidate Mansur Yavaş in last April's local elections. But the fact that the new administration so far failed to improve the exercise of the public's rights to assembly, demonstration and protests as well as the freedom of expression shows that the Governor's Office, the Police Directorate and the Interior Ministry still maintain a restrictive regime across Ankara.

## Diyarbakır

### Özkan Küçük

If we are to recap the year 2019 for Diyarbakır and the wider region, it would not be wrong to say that the winter returned to the region in the middle of summer with a fresh wave of appointment of trustees to take over municipalities, after a brief spring that had arrived on the heels of the local elections on 31 March.

Municipality halls, the main venues for culture and art events, had been closed off to alternative events during the first era of these government appointed trustees.

In this era, culture and art events, weakened by the lack of venues and resources, had been confined to cafes and small venues.

Following the 31 March elections, we were able to witness a growth in culture and art activities as municipalities returned to the rule of popularly elected mayors.

The multiple-hall Cultural Convention Center, or “Çand Amed” as the Diyarbakır Greater Municipality calls it, hosted a large number of events and festivals between the two periods of trustees.

After this brief period of time when Diyarbakır was able to breathe a sigh of respite, culture events were again confined to small rooms. Many planned festivals and events were shelved.

In Diyarbakır and the wider region, cultural and artistic expression, as well as other areas of expression, were marred by policies of the trustee administrations throughout the year 2019.

Mehmet Emin Bilmez, the trustee appointed to govern the municipality of Van, had the Nûpelda Theater Group and the Iranian theater group Fujan expelled from the municipality's Women Life Center while rehearsing for the play *Kanlı Düğün* (Bloody Wedding), to be staged in Kurdish and Persian.

Archaeological excavations under way near the Van Fortress were also a victim of the trustee policies: Municipality funds provided to support the excavations were slashed without any explanation after the municipality was taken over by the government appointed trustee.

Looking at the everyday life in Diyarbakır, it would not be wrong to say that, the state of emergency, or OHAL as it is commonly known, lived on in practice as if it had never been lifted.

As a result of OHAL policies, holding press releases inside buildings, rather than open public areas, became a routine practice.

Streets and squares ceased to be a venue for the expression in provinces in the region including Van, Muş, Batman and Hakkari, thanks to bans on demonstrations and public meetings that kept getting extended regularly and deterrent police measures.

In Van, the Mem Ararat concert was banned as part of the ban on public meetings and demonstrations extended every 15 days. Another event banned by the Van Governor's Office was the Gezgın Fest Van Youth Festival, which had been planned to take place in Van's Gevaş district.

Similarly, the Tunceli Governor's Office banned the screening of *Cumartesi Anneleri* (Saturday Mothers) documentary and the LGBT Concept Workshop that were planned to take place as part of the Munzur Culture and Nature Festival, to "preserve public morality."

Sit-in protests, which started after appointment of trustees to metropolitan municipalities of Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van and, although met with harsh police response in earlier days, turned into long-running daily demonstrations thanks to the unyielding commitment of the protesters, were effectively banned following the Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria. The restrictions culminated in the police preventing the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP) officials from making press statements by cordoning off the party's Diyarbakır Provincial Office holding up their riot shields. Images of HDP deputies encircled by police shields speak volumes on the current state of freedom of expression in public space.

Furthermore, bans in all prisons in the region on several publications and books remained in place throughout the whole year. Authorities' refusal to deliver slain Kurdish writer and journalist Musa Anter's book *Vakayiname* (Chronicle) to imprisoned journalist Nedim Türfent on the grounds that it would "jeopardize the indivisible unity of the state of the Republic of Turkey" and that there were "attempts to foment strife and chaos within society" is just one example of these bans.

The Kars Criminal Judgeship of Peace ordered a ban on distribution and sale of the two books published by the Avesta Publishing House, the Turkish edition of Andrew Collins' *From the Ashes of Angels – The Forbidden Legacy of a Fallen Race* (Meleklerin Küllerinden – Günahkar

Bir Irkın Yasaklanmış Mirası) and Toprağın Şarkısı (the Song of the Land) on the grounds that they “spread propaganda for a terrorist organization.”

Authorities also issued an order for confiscation of all copies of the *Kayyım Raporu* (the Trustee Report) that was prepared by the HDP as part of an investigation on the grounds of “terrorism propaganda.”

On 1 September, authorities banned posters, placards and slogans containing words like “trustees,” “coup,” and “plundering of the nature” at the World Peace Day demonstrations held in Diyarbakır and Antalya.

And one of the most striking developments of the last year took place in Viranşehir, a district of Şanlıurfa, where musicians singing Kurdish songs were targeted in systematic late-night police raids. First, nine musicians were arrested in one night, two of whom were subsequently detained on remand, in January. In October, seven people, among whom were cameramen and photographers, were arrested on the same night and detained on remand on the charge of “terrorism propaganda.”

2019 was also a year when progress in expanding Kurdish language rights was reversed through several means. One prominent example was the decision to close down the Institute of Living Languages of the Mardin Artuklu University, which was founded by a decision of the university senate in 2009 and became popular for its Kurdish language studies.

In 2019, Diyarbakır also witnessed a local media workshop without participants from the local media. Representatives from the local media organizations in Diyarbakır were not invited to the *Local Media Representatives and Security Bureaucracy Workshop* organized by the Interior Ministry's Department of Internal Security Strategies.

One of the promising news of the last year in Diyarbakır was the realization of many culture and art activities and workshops were held with support from Spaces of Culture. Another good news was that the annual TÜYAP Book Fair received a record high number of visitors.

In one of the most memorable moments of the year, the Amed City Theater kicked off the new season with *Mem û Zîn* musical, staged at the atrium of a shopping mall that also houses their small stage.

## İzmir

**Onur Yıldırım**

Although many factors resulted in a significant defeat for the government in the local elections across Turkey, the ruling Justice and Development Party's (AKP) was still able to increase its votes in İzmir, which is traditionally seen an opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) stronghold.

Even though the CHP was victorious in local elections, İzmir is no different than other provinces when it comes to rights violations. The Governor's Office imposes bans on demonstrations and public meetings by opposition parties, labor unions, civil society organizations, women groups and the LGBTI+ movement.

Anti-democratic practices are taking their toll on artists as well: A legal complaint was made to the Karşıyaka Chief Republican Public Prosecutor's Office against documentary director Medet Dilek after the İzmir screening of his documentary *Taş Düğmeler* (Stone Buttons), which tells the story of Koçgiri Rebellion of 1918-21, on the grounds of "insulting Atatürk" and "incitement to crime." Actor Nazlı Masatçı of Yenikapı Theater, which was closed down by an emergency decree, was jailed pending trial on 30 January 2019 on the charge of "spreading terrorism propaganda" for a street performance inspired by a scene from *V for Vendetta*. (<https://www.gazeteduvar.com.tr/kultur-sanat/2019/05/12/v-for-vendettadan-cezaevine-nazli-masatci/>) Masatçı was kept behind bars for about five months before she was released on probation. Actor Mahmut Canbay was barred from entering Turkey under an "administrative decision" as he was traveling from Hamburg to İzmir to attend the 13<sup>th</sup> Theater Reunion of Turkey.

Documentary maker and video activist Oktay İnce has been staging demonstrations to get back his 20-year-old archive, which was seized when police raided his home about a year ago on the charge of "praising terrorism and a terrorist organization" through his social media posts. İnce first started a sit-in in front of the İzmir Courthouse with the slogan "Free Cinema, Free News" and then moved his one-man protest to the pavement in front of the İzmir Governor's Office. İnce's struggle stands out as a major act of resistance against arbitrary confiscation of documentary makers' digital materials and records, something that could significantly hinder their work.

Meanwhile, rights violations in the city are insufficiently covered in the İzmir

press. One can observe that original, critical and public interest-oriented reporting is gradually being abandoned as a result of the pressure imposed on the local media by local administrative organs, which comes on top of the already dismal state of the media freedom in general.

While the culture and art sphere continued to expand in İzmir, rights violations also occurred. İzmir Governor's Office ordered a ban on activities planned for the 7<sup>th</sup> İzmir LGBTI+ Pride Week on 17-23 June. Pride March in Alsancak was also dispersed. Police used pepper gas against participants and detained 20 persons.

Protests sparked by an Interior Ministry decision on 19 August to replace mayors from the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP) of three metropolitan municipalities with government-appointed trustees were met with bans, restrictions and police violence. 26 lawyers who attended a gathering in front of the Bayraklı Courthouse, called by the Contemporary Lawyers' Association and the Association of Lawyers for Freedom to read out a press statement in protest of the appointment of trustees and a Governor's Office ban on all public meetings and demonstrations across İzmir for 10 days, were detained by the police. Documentary maker Oktay İnce, who was there to record the gathering on camera, was also detained. Police also obstructed a press statement by HDP lawmakers Serpil Kemalbay, Murat Çepni and Hasan Özgüneş in Alsancak, detaining several people including journalists.

The situation is not different in the universities, which are among the institutions where censorship and restrictions are the most common. A group of female students of Ege University who were detained as they attempted to make a press statement on the International Women's Day on 8 March also faced a disciplinary investigation launched by the university administration. Two pieces by students displayed at a painting exhibition again at the Ege University were removed from the exhibition by a decision of the Health, Culture and Sports Department for "obscenity." Five academics who objected to the administration's plans to move the Dokuz Eylül University's Faculty of Fine Arts to a new location on the ground that the current building was not quake-resistant were removed from their administrative posts without any explanation. In addition, the university administration launched an investigation against 17 students who read out a press statement against the decision to move; 10 of them were suspended.

## Cases

### January

Authorities refused to deliver slain Kurdish writer and journalist Musa Anter's book *Vakayiname* (Chronicle) to journalist Nedim Türfent, held in Van High Security Prison, on the grounds that it would "jeopardize the indivisible unity of the state of the Republic of Turkey" and that there were "attempts to foment strife and chaos within society."

Academic Bülent Şık was indicted with "providing and disclosing forbidden information" and "disclosing work secrets" for publishing the findings of a Ministry of Health-led research about carcinogenic pollutants that was endangering public health, charges carrying a prison sentence of up to 12 years.

Public broadcasting watchdog RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) stopped the broadcast of American sitcom *Modern Family* twice and fined the broadcaster beIN Series HD Comedy on the grounds that the show "presented adoption out of wedlock as normal" and for "foul language."

A sculpture depicting a man holding a tray of cheese pastry dessert *kunafa* in Hatay was vandalized again by unidentified perpetrators. The sculpture, installed by the Hatay Metropolitan municipality at the Ulus Square as a tribute to kunafa makers of the city, had been attacked before, when its tray was stolen.

Authorities launched an investigation into an apparent performance in the Hagia Sophia museum after business person Leyla Alaton posted on social media a photo of a woman doing ballet inside the historic building, sparking a barrage of protests and threats against Alaton.

Netflix Turkey blurred a hand gesture featuring in the trailer of its show *Sex Education*, which was released in Turkey on 11 January.

Nine musicians singing Kurdish songs at weddings were arrested on the charge of "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization." Two of them were imprisoned pending trial.



State prosecutor in charge of an investigation into actors Metin Akpınar and Müjdat Gezen for their remarks at private broadcaster Halk TV prepared a report on Metin Akpınar, seeking an additional investigation against the renowned actor for “inciting the public to armed rebellion against the government of the Republic of Turkey.”

The Law No. 7163 on the Amendment of the Law on Evaluation, Classification and Supporting of Cinema Movies, which requires cinema movies to go through evaluation and classification in order to be commercially distributed and shown, went into force as it was published on the Official Gazette on 30 January. According to the law, the movies which have not been evaluated and classified can only be shown in festivals, special screenings and similar cultural and artistic events with “18+” age mark. The law, which amends an earlier version enacted in 2004, is criticized for fostering censorship.

Film director Kazım Öz, who was arrested on 24 November 2018 as part of a “terrorism” investigation and released after questioning by a prosecutor,” was indicted with “membership of a terrorist organization,” a crime punishable by a prison term of 7.5 years to 15 years.

Writer Perihan Mağden and journalist Tunca Öğreten were each fined TL 7,000 for “insulting the president.”

A dialogue on Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his mausoleum, Anıtkabir, in the comedy movie *Kaçma Birader* was censored during its TV screening by STAR TV.

The Sakarya University administration canceled the room for actor Firat Tanış's play *Gelin Tanış Olalım* (Come, Let Us All Be Friends for Once), on the grounds that the actor is a “supporter of the Gezi protests” and a “political” figure.

Journalist Ercan Ayrancı, who was arrested in Istanbul's Kartal district on 20 May 2017 while covering a demonstration by academic Nuriye Gülmen and teacher Semih Özakça in protest of their expulsion from their jobs by an emergency decree, was sentenced to five months in prison.

Mersin Governor's Office canceled a planned concert by musicians Pınar Aydınlar and Serhat Çarnewa at Yenişehir Atatürk Cultural Center, on the grounds that the organizers did not obtain official permit.

The Istanbul 33rd High Criminal Court accepted an indictment against Necla Demir, journalist and former publisher of the online newspaper *Gazete Karınca*, which seeks up to 13 years in jail for Demir on the charge of "systematically spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization."

Musician and human rights activist Ferhat Tunç was arrested upon his arrival at the Istanbul Airport from Germany due to an arrest warrant issued as part of an investigation launched in Diyarbakır. Tunç was released after giving his statement at Bakırköy Courthouse.

Authorities at the Mardin E-Type Prison refuse to deliver *Yeni Yaşam* newspaper to inmates, citing a Justice Ministry ban on the paper.

Musician Azad Bedran was sentenced to 3 years and 9 months in prison for "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" on the grounds that the music video for his song *Partizan*, which had a banderole from the Culture Ministry, included criminal content.

Ans Boersma, the Turkey correspondent of the Dutch daily *Het Financieele Dagblad*, was detained when she visited the Police Foreigners' Department to extend her residence permit. Boersma was later deported on "security" grounds.

A legal complaint was made to the Karşıyaka Chief Republican Public Prosecutor's Office against documentary director Medet Dilek after the İzmir screening of his documentary *Taş Düğmeler* (Stone Buttons), which tells the story of Koçgiri Rebellion of 1918-21, for "insulting Atatürk" and "incitement to crime."

The Middle East Technical University (ODTÜ) Presidency, which closed down the university's cultural and convention center until March for renovation and reorganization purposes, announced that the center would not be used as a

venue for the 13th Aykut Kence Evolution Conference, even though a room at the center had been booked for the event a year ago.

Journalist Salih Turan was arrested in a raid on his home on 12 February.

Turan was then imprisoned pending trial on charges of “terrorist group membership” and “terrorism propaganda” for his social media posts.

RTÜK approved penalties meted out to Halk TV and Fox TV. Halk TV was ordered by RTÜK to stop the broadcast of the program *Halk Arenası* (Public Arena) three times for an episode that hosted journalist Yılmaz Özdil and the broadcast of another program for an episode hosting actors Metin Akpınar and Müjdat Gezen for five times; while Fox TV was ordered to stop the broadcast of its daily prime-time news program presented by anchorman Fatih Portakal for three days.

Actor Nazlı Masatçı of Yenikapı Theater, which was closed down by an emergency decree, was jailed pending trial on 30 January 2019 on the charge of “spreading terrorism propaganda” for a street performance inspired by a scene from *V for Vendetta*. Masatçı was sent to İzmir Women’s Prison for execution of her sentence.

**February**

Broadcasting watchdog RTÜK ordered Fox TV to stop the broadcasting of the show *Yasak Elma* (Forbidden Apple) for five times on the grounds that its episode which aired on 8 October 2018 “tackled forms of relationship that are generally not welcomed in society” and “was of a nature that could be detrimental to moral, national and spiritual values of the society.”

Part of the song *Namus Belası* (A Matter of Honor) by late composer and singer Cem Karaca with lyrics that read “We repent a hundred thousand times and yet drink wine again” was censored while it featured in an episode of the TV show *Çarpışma* (Collision) airing on Show TV.

RTÜK fined broadcaster Kanal D on the grounds that the movie *Hayat Sana Güzel* (Life Treats You Well) contained “dialogues and acts that run counter to public morality and include vulgar phrases and sexual connotations.”

RTÜK fined Show TV over *Çarpışma* for “possible psychological effects of violent scenes in the show on children and the youth” and ordered the network to stop the broadcasting of *Çukur* (the Pit) twice for “scenes of extreme violence” and “for negative impacts the show may have on the audience.”

The Denizli T-Type Prison administration refused delivery of journalist Fehim Taştekin's book *Suriye: Yıkıl Git, Diren Kal!* (Syria: Fail Leave, Resist Stay!) to inmates because the book included “content supporting activities of terrorist groups and defaming reputation of the president.”

The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure declined to provide a response to main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) Deputy Parliamentary Group Chairman Özgür Özel's formal question addressing Minister Cahit Turhan on bans on access to websites and for which crimes these bans are imposed. The Ministry said: “Release of figures on the said measures solely by our country leads to an unjust image and misinformation against our country based on these figures.”

Opposition Saadet Party shelved a political ad, which was based on the story of a real-life grifter known as Sülün Osman and due to be shown in movie theaters ahead of the local elections, under government pressure.

Istanbul Anadolu Criminal Judgeship of Peace issued a publication ban on the collapse of a building in Kartal, Istanbul.

The Association of Access Providers sent an e-mail to Gazete Tamam, asking the online newspaper to remove from its website a report, headlined "Saturday Mothers 712th Week: "We want bones, not money, from the state".

Adana Governor's Office banned the planned Kurdish Theater Days, to be organized by the Peoples' Democracy Party (HDP) Adana Provincial Office on 10-13 February, on the grounds that it "threatens public security."

A court in the southeastern province of Batman convicted director of documentary *Nû Jîn* (New Life) Veysi Altay and Dicle Anter, who was the director of Yılmaz Güney Movie Theater when the documentary was screened there, of "terrorism propaganda." Altay was sentenced to 2 years and 6 months in prison, while Anter was given 2 years and 1 month.

Election speech of imprisoned HDP politician Selahattin Demirtaş, who was the presidential candidate of the HDP in presidential elections of 24 June 2018, was removed from HDP's YouTube channel upon a copyright infringement complaint from the state broadcaster TRT, where the speech had been aired.

Journalist Çağdaş Kaplan, the former editor-in-chief of *Yeni Yaşam* newspaper, was indicted with "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" through his social media posts.

Two reproduction paintings displayed at an exhibition at Yıldız Technical University's Faculty of Art and Design were removed by an order from the university administration on the grounds of "sexual exhibitionism and female and child nudity." The censorship came after the pro-government *Yeni Akit* newspaper called the pieces "A disgrace disguised as art."

Diyarbakır Chief Public Prosecutor's Office prepared an indictment against musician and human rights activist Ferhat Tunç, seeking a prison term of eight years and six months to 20 years on charges of "membership of a terrorist organization" and "terrorism propaganda" for his social media posts about the Operation Olive Branch, which the indictment said were "supportive of the YPG/PKK and against the operation."

Access to a news report on Cumhuriyet's website, penned by the newspaper's reporter Alican Uludağ and entitled "Erdoğan böyle yargı istiyor" (This is the sort of judiciary Erdoğan wants), was blocked at a request filed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's lawyer.

Journalist Özgür Paksoy was sentenced to 3 years, 1 month and 15 days in prison at the end of a trial where he was charged with "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" in his social media posts.

Derya Okatan, a reporter for Artı Gerçek news portal, was arrested for her social media posts.

Security guards at the entrance of the Istanbul Courthouse in Çağlayan seized a copy of Yol journal that Can Uğur, a member of the Editorial Board of *BirGün* newspaper, was carrying in his bag as he was trying to get in the courthouse to give his statement in an investigation.

*Karar* columnist Ahmet Taşgetiren's program airing on Erkam Radio was canceled after Taşgetiren made remarks critical of the government during the *Medya Analiz* (Media Analysis) program on TV5.

Criminal judgeships of peace in Bingöl, Antalya, İzmir and Kırşehir issued a publication ban on four separate incidents of sexual abuse under Article 3/2 of the Press Law, which states that the exercise of press freedom may be restricted "to ensure the authority and impartial functioning of the judiciary."

**March**

*Hürriyet* Washington representative Cansu Çamlıbel and *Hürriyet Daily News* News Coordinator Emre Kızılkaya resigned from their positions following the purchase of Doğan Media Group, which owned both newspapers, by the Demirören Media Group.

The ODTÜ Presidency refused to give permission for a planned panel discussion to be organized by the Social Democracy Society student club on the International Women's Day, saying it is "politically charged."

Faruk Bildirici, the ombudsman of *Hürriyet*, was fired after the newspaper's sale to Demirören group.

Access to the website of Bakırköy Gazette was banned by a decision of the Bakırköy 4<sup>th</sup> Criminal Judgeship of Peace after it reported on internal disputes within the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP).

Muğla Sıtkı Koçman University administration banned the screening of *Limonlu Kahve* (Lemon Coffee), a documentary about sex workers. The documentary, directed by Medet Dilek, was due to be shown by the university's Cinema Club to mark International Women's Day.

Television program *Gündemdekiler* (Newsmakers) which aired on online broadcaster TV5, was taken off air and its anchorman Çağlar Cılara was fired over remarks by Beyoğlu mayoral candidate Alper Taş, who was a guest on the show, on the LGBTI+ rights.

Mezopotamya Agency Dersim (Tunceli) correspondent Semra Turan was arrested in a raid on her home. No information was immediately available on the grounds for the arrest.

Marmara University Presidency banned the screening of Yeşim Ustaoglu's film *Güneşe Yolculuk* (A Journey to the Sun) as part of a Cinema Club event dedicated to the works of female directors.

Documentary filmmakers Çınar Doğan and İlham Bakır were prevented from shooting a documentary in a village in the eastern province of Malatya by the gendarmerie, who told them they were not permitted to film. Doğan and Bakır had decided to shoot the documentary in Malatya after waiting in vain for a permit to shoot in Diyarbakır.

State employment agency İŞKUR removed official unemployment figures for February 2019 from its website, shortly after making them public.

A court in the southeastern province of Siirt ordered confiscation of copies of the Report on Trustees prepared by the HDP as part of an investigation on the grounds that the report disseminated “propaganda for a terrorist organization.”

Director Hacı Orman's passport was seized at the airport as he was trying to leave for Bulgaria to attend Sofia International Film Festival which he was invited to, on the grounds that he was subject to an international travel ban.

HDP's political campaign video for the 31 March local elections was not aired by any TV channel.

Singer Ferat Üngür was arrested in Diyarbakır for “spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization” on social media. Üngür was released after giving his statement in response to accusations.

Istanbul Governor's Office banned a World Theater Day march that was organized by the Kadıköy Theaters Platform in collaboration with the Kadıköy Municipality in Kadıköy.

ODTÜ Presidency banned a talk, called *Farklı Bir Aile Mümkün* (A Different Family is Possible), that the university's Gender Studies Society had planned to organize, citing “rainbow – LGBT relation.”

Pages 1, 2, 11 and 12 of the *Cumhuriyet* daily's copy dated 25 March 2019 were not given to inmates in the Siverek T-Type Prison in Şanlıurfa under a decision of the prison administration. The censored pages included reports



on hunger strikes by HDP lawmakers and prison inmates across Turkey in protest of the imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's isolation.

A court in Istanbul issued a warrant for the arrest of musician and rights activist Ferhat Tunç for repeatedly failing to present his defense statement in a trial, where he faces a prison term of one to three years on the charge of "inciting people to hatred and enmity" in his social media posts.

Cumhuriyet Kitap, the book supplement of Cumhuriyet, censored a book review on the newly-published book of Faruk Eren, the former managing editor of the newspaper who was fired after a takeover of its administration.

CHP deputy Fuat Oktay, who directed a formal question on the expenses of state broadcaster TRT to Vice President Fuat Oktay, was told in response that "information on program fees is not disclosed because it is a matter of commercial secret."

**April**

Oktay İnce, documentary maker and a member of the Seyri Sokak Video and Documentary Collective, began a sit-in protest to demand the return of his digital archive seized during a police raid on his home.

In one of his first acts in office, Mayor of the Pazarcık district of Kahramanmaraş İbrahim Yılmazcan banned a play adapted from Muzaffer İzgü's *Duvar* (The Wall) by the Tarsus City Theater.

Scenes involving sexuality were censored in the screening of the South Korean film *Beoning* (Doubt) on TRT2.

Unidentified perpetrator(s) destroyed four of the 200 marble goddess statues exhibited at the International Knidos Academy of Culture and Arts in Muğla's Datça district.

Musician Ferhat Tunç was sued for "insulting" former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım in a social media post in 2016.

Access to online game *Mazbata* Online, featuring Istanbul's mayor-elect Ekrem İmamoğlu as its main character, was blocked on Parliament's wireless Internet network.

Hüsametdin Aslan, a columnist for *Milat* newspaper, announced that the newspaper ended his columns after he called on Minister for Treasury and Finance Berat Albayrak to resign in a social media post.

RTÜK ordered FOX Life to stop the broadcast of its TV show 9-1-1 three times due to "inappropriate images of an old male couple."

This year's edition of the International Spring Festival at ODTÜ was canceled by the university rectorate.

Online access to an article by Barış Terkoğlu published in Cumhuriyet, entitled "Pelikancılar Neden Saldırıyor" (Why the Pelikanists Attack), was blocked.

Istanbul mayor-elect Ekrem İmamoğlu announced on social media that he had answered a question by private broadcaster A Haber, clarifying what he meant when he talked of “the democracy struggle of 145 years,” but that A Haber did not broadcast it.

beIN Sports censored a part of its live broadcast of the Turkish national football league game between Beşiktaş and Medipol Başakşehir, when fans shouted slogans in favor of Istanbul mayor-elect Ekrem İmamoğlu.

RTÜK ordered private broadcaster TELE 1 to pay a fine of 2 percent of its annual advertisement revenue and gave a penalty of program suspension twice for broadcasting a parliamentary speech by HDP Co-Chairman Sezai Temelli, in which he used the word “Kurdistan.”

A joint exhibition of paintings by Ayfer Demircioğlu and Avni Yamaner at the Tayyare Cultural Center of Bursa Metropolitan Municipality was shut down for “obscenity” after a complaint.

The Kayseri Kadir Has Cultural Center canceled the room allocated for Aziz Nesin's play *Azizname*, to be staged by the theater group Cumhuriyet Sahnesi (Republican Stage).

Actress Deniz Çakır was charged with “openly insulting a segment of the society based on social, class, religious, sectarian, gender and regional differences,” a crime punishable by up to a year in prison, for allegedly insulting a group of women at a café.

A commemoration ceremony that the Human Rights Association (İHD) Istanbul branch had planned to hold at Istanbul's Sultanahmet (Blue Mosque) Square on anniversary of the Armenian genocide on 24 April was prevented by the police.

Istanbul Governor's Office rejected a request for permit from the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK), The Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (KESK), The Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) and the Turkish Medical Association (TTB) to celebrate the May 1 International Workers' Day in Taksim Square.

Timaş Publishing announced that it would not publish the Turkish edition of British writer Hamza Andreas Tzortzis' *The Divine Reality: God, Islam and The Mirage of Atheism* due to a backlash against the author.

Alexis Kalk of Nor Zartonk Association was arrested hours after speaking at a ceremony to commemorate Sevag Balıkcı, a Turkish soldier of Armenian descent who was killed by a fellow soldier on the anniversary of the Armenian genocide in 2011 in what is said to be an accident. Kalk was released after giving his statement.

**May**

Access to an article by soL news portal columnist Özgür Şen, called "AKP'nin Beceriksizler Ordusu" (the AKP's Army of the Incompetent), was blocked in state institutions affiliated to the Health Ministry.

Access to a news report revealing that the former administration of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality had channeled public funds worth over TL 847 million to various foundations and associations was blocked by a court order.

Access to online radio Özgürüz Radio was blocked across Turkey without an official explanation.

ODTÜ administration announced that it banned the planned Pride march due to a blanket ban on LGBTI+ events announced by the Ankara Governor's Office.

A planned event by the Pembe Hayat LGBTT Solidarity Association was banned by the Ankara Governor's Office on the grounds of "protecting public morality, public health and rights and freedoms of others." The event was to consist of a panel discussion on LGBTI+ rights and restrictions and a short film screening.

An article by *Yeni Şafak* columnist Kemal Öztürk criticizing a Supreme Election Council (YSK) decision to repeat Istanbul municipal elections after an opposition win was censored by the newspaper.

Amasya Municipality canceled a hall allocated to the play *Taranta Babu*, a stage adaptation of Nazım Hikmet's book *Taranta Babu'ya Mektuplar* (Letters to Taranta Babu), on the grounds that the play was "political."

Access to news reports on a conversation caught on open microphone between Beyoğlu Mayor Haydar Ali Yıldız and President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's son Bilal Erdoğan, in which they appeared to discuss potential benefits from ongoing urban regeneration projects, was blocked by a court order upon a request from Bilal Erdoğan.

A radio show on TRT FM in which musician Sibel Tüzün was due to join as a guest was canceled after Tüzün posted on social media with the hashtag “Everything will be fine,” the popular CHP slogan for the municipal elections.

The Department of Health, Culture and Sports censored two works in a painting exhibition organized by the students at Ege University, on the grounds they were “too obscene”.

Musician Cahit Berkay and actress Parla Şenol were told by organizers of an award ceremony held by the Turkish Cinematographic Work Owners Professional Association (SESAM) that they would not be given awards due to “time constraint.” The artists said they were denied their awards for publicly expressing support for Istanbul mayor-elect Ekrem İmamoğlu.

Claude Bernard University Lyon 1 academic Tuna Altınel, a signatory of the Academics for Peace declaration, was imprisoned pending trial on the charge of “terrorism propaganda” in the western province of Balıkesir.

RTÜK ordered Radyo Sputnik (RS FM) to suspend the broadcast of a show hosted by journalist Zafer Arapkirli, Seyr-i Sabah, for five days.

RTÜK ordered TELE 1 television not to broadcast prime time news program for two days.

Istanbul Governor’s Office banned posters and slogans with the CHP’s municipal election slogan “Everything will be fine” during a ceremony held in Kadıköy, Istanbul, to commemorate the 301 miners who perished in a mining accident in Soma.

Access to the website of Jin News was blocked for the third time.

A court ordered access to news reports on controversial remarks by Esenler Mayor Tevfik Göksu of the ruling AKP on ethnic roots of Istanbul mayor-elect Ekrem İmamoğlu to be blocked, accepting a request from Göksu to that effect.

Police prevented lawyers from the Ankara Bar Association LGBTIQ+ Rights Bureau from reading out a press statement on the occasion of International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia on 17 May.

Police forcefully dispersed several gatherings in Istanbul, Diyarbakır and elsewhere in Turkey by mothers of prison inmates who were on a hunger strike to protest PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan's isolation in an island prison off Istanbul.

An episode of the CNN Türk's political talk show *Tarafsız Bölge* (Neutral Zone) that was attended by Istanbul mayor-elect Ekrem İmamoğlu took a commercial break as İmamoğlu started talking about alleged corruption and extravagance at the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. The program, hosted by Ahmet Hakan, was then ended ahead of its scheduled time.

Van Governor's Office banned all demonstrations and public events, including gatherings to read out press statements, across the province for 10 days as of 19 May.

Prosecutors launched an investigation against writer Abdullah Şevki on the grounds of "obscenity" after the ministries of culture and family filed complaints that his novel *Zümrüt Apartmanı* (Zümrüt Apartment) included "pedophilic content." Şevki and owner of the publishing house that published the book were detained as part of the investigation.

Activist Oktay İnce, who had been regularly holding a sit-in to demand the return of his digital archive seized by the police during a raid on his home, was arrested after he chained himself to a flag pole in front of the General Directorate of Cinema in Ankara.

A court ordered access to the collaborative online "dictionary" Ekşi Sözlük's entry on the Şule Çet murder to be blocked upon a request from defendant Çağatay Aksu, who is charged with murder and sexual assault in the case.

## June

Prosecutors launched an investigation into Singer Alpay for allegedly “praising members of a terrorist organization and insulting the state” during a concert he gave to mark his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The Governor's Office of Van did not allow the Gezgin Fest Youth Festival, which was planned to be held in Gevaş district on 20-23 June 2019.

RTÜK imposed an administrative fine at the maximum rate as well as program suspension penalty on Fox Life because of “homosexual relations” featured in the American TV show *Jane the Virgin*.

*Yeniçağ* columnist Yavuz Selim Demirağ was arrested for “insulting the president.” He was released a day later.

38 people, including Bloomberg reporters Kerim Karakaya and Fercan Yalınkılıç, were sued for a news report from 2018 on the last summer's currency crisis and social media comments on the report.

İleri Haber's Twitter account was suspended after it published a video of a speech by theologian Nurettin Yıldız in which he appears to defend child marriages. The account was suspended upon a “copyright infringement” complaint from Yıldız.

İzmir Governor's Office banned public events planned as part of the 7th İzmir LGBTI+ Pride Week.

Antalya Governor's Office banned the 3rd Antalya LGBTI+ Pride March and “all associated events” on the grounds of “public morality, public order and indivisible unity of the state.”

Seven people, including editors and reporters of the Etkin News Agency (ETHA), were arrested during a police raid on the news agency's Istanbul offices. Access to ETHA website and its servers were also blocked.

Documentary maker and video activist Kazım Kızıl, who was on trial for



“violating the Law on Demonstrations and Protest Marches” and “insulting the president” in connection with a demonstration in protest of the 16 April 2017 constitutional referendum results, was acquitted of the first charge but sentenced to 1 year, 3 months and 16 days for “insulting the president.”

An investigation was launched into Avesta Publishing House owner Abdullah Keskin for allegedly “spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization” in his social media posts.

Twitter removed a post by ETHA featuring a video in which HDP politician Selahattin Demirtaş criticizes President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, titled “Biz seni bedavaya rezil ederiz” (We’ll embarrass you for free).

Requests from several media outlets for accreditation to follow the rerun of Istanbul mayoral election at the AKP Election Coordination Center were rejected by the AKP Istanbul Office.

Bakırköy Women’s Prison administration banned delivery of two latest editions of *Önsöz* (Foreword) journal to inmates on the grounds that they were “detrimental to security and order of the facility” and “might provoke rebellion through terrorist group propaganda.”

Access to an article by Mehmet Y. Yılmaz concerning the wealth of former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım’s son Erkan Yıldırım on news portal T24 was blocked.

Mersin Governor’s Office announced a blanket ban on all public events for 20 days, including the dates when the 5th Mersin Pride Week events were due to be held.

## July

Van Governor's Office banned all demonstrations, marches, public meetings and other events for 15 days as of 28 June.

Satirist Cihan Demirci was sued for "insulting the president" in his social media posts.

Turkuvaz Journal Group refused to publish an ad from A7 *Kitap* publishing house on the *Sabitfikir* magazine that it owned because the ad featured, among others, the book *The Gay 100*.

The gala screening of documentary *Gitmek* (Leaving), made in memory of those killed in the 2015 bomb attack in Suruç, that was due to take place at the Şişli Municipality Nazım Hikmet Culture and Art House was banned by the Şişli District Governor's Office and the Şişli Police Directorate.

A planned concert that was due to be given by the folk rock band Moğollar within the scope of ODTÜ Alumni Day activities organized by the ODTÜ Alumni Association, was canceled by the association.

Istanbul mayoral candidate Binali Yıldırım sued *Evrensel* newspaper for compensation for reporting on a social media campaign criticizing Yıldırım and AKP.

Türksat, the sole communications satellite operator in Turkey, halted the broadcast of Cem TV as of 1 July.

Sabitfikir magazine did not report on the death of famous poet Derman İskender Öven, who wrote in the name of Küçük İskender.

A news report by journalist Candaş Tolga Işık published in Posta newspaper concerning the controversial purchase of a jet ski by the Ankara Metropolitan Municipality during the term of former Mayor Melih Gökçek was censored.

The Office of Mufti in the eastern province of Erzincan canceled a hall allocated to the play *Taranta Babu*, a stage adaptation of Nazım Hikmet's book *Taranta Babu'ya Mektuplar* (Letters to Taranta Babu), without an explanation.

Theater actor Ersin Umut Güler was sentenced to 1 year and 3 months in prison on the charge of "terrorism propaganda" in his social media posts.

Pianist Fazıl Say's concert scheduled for the evening of 14 August at Harbiye Cemil Topuzlu Open-Air Theatre was canceled by Atlantis Production.

An investigation was launched into theologian, writer and TV commentator Cemil Kılıç for writing on Twitter that wearing headscarf was not mandatory under Islam.

Yurt editor Baran Furkan Gül announced that he was resigning from the newspaper due to pressure and censorship by the newspaper administration.

Writer and social media sensation Selen Pınar Işık, known by her Twitter name "Pucca," was sentenced to 5 years and 10 months in jail and a fine of TL 66,660 in a trial where she was charged with "encouraging drug use."

Aziz Nesin's play *Toros Canavarı*, to be staged by Giresun Halkevi, was banned by the Giresun Governor's Office.

Van Governor's Office banned all public events including marches, meetings, gatherings and sit-in protests between 13-27 July 2019 for "security" reasons.

Batman Governor's Office announced that all public gatherings, except those organized by official institutions, would be subject to prior permission, while all events in the vicinity of prisons were banned between 15-29 July on the grounds of "protection of national security, public order and security."

It emerged that the word “Kurdistan” in the Turkish translation of Paulo Coelho’s *Eleven Minutes*, first edition of which was published by the Can Publishing House in 2004, had been censored.

Hatay Governor’s Office banned a concert by Grup Yorum that was due to be held in Samandağ district on 16 July.

*Bakur* (North) documentary directors Çayan Demirel and Ertuğrul Mavioğlu were each sentenced to 4 years and 6 months in jail for “spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization.”

A youth summer camp organized by the Özgürlükçü Gençlik Derneği (Libertarian Youth Association) that was due to take place on 19-21 July was banned by the Seferihisar District Governor’s Office.

The Supreme Court of Appeals approved a suspended prison sentence of 11 months and 20 days given to singer Zuhal Olcay for “insulting the president” during a concert performance.

Two days before the anniversary of the Suruç Massacre, the Şanlıurfa Governor’s Office banned all public gatherings across the province on the grounds of “protecting peace and public order.”

Journalist Yavuz Oğhan announced that his program at Radyo Sputnik (RS FM) had been taken off air after an interview with former Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu.

Access to [geziyasavunuyoruz.org](http://geziyasavunuyoruz.org), a website dedicated to monitoring the Gezi Park trial against 16 civil society figures and others, was blocked under a decision issued by the Ankara 3<sup>rd</sup> Criminal Judgeship of Peace.

It emerged that the word “Kurdistan” included in the original version of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Ottoman explorer Evliya Çelebi’s *Seyahatname* (Book of Travels) was replaced with the phrase “Kurdish land” in a 2006 edition of the book published by the Yapı Kredi Publishing House.

Police forcefully dispersed many public gatherings and commemoration ceremonies held across Turkey to mark the fourth anniversary of the Suruç Massacre on 20 July.

Five academics who objected to the administration's contested plans to move the Dokuz Eylül University's Faculty of Fine Arts to a new location on the ground that the current building was not quake-resistant were removed from their administrative posts.

A planned concert by Kurdish musician Mem Ararat in Van on 31 July was blocked as part of a blanket ban on all public gatherings in the province that was imposed by the Governor's Office and renewed in every 15 days.

Representatives from the local media organizations in Diyarbakır were not invited to the *Local Media Representatives and Security Bureaucracy Workshop* organized by the Interior Ministry's Department of Internal Security Strategies.

The Tunceli Governor's Office banned the screening of *Cumartesi Anneleri* (Saturday Mothers) documentary and the LGBT Concept Workshop that were planned to take place as part of the Munzur Culture and Nature Festival in the name of "preserving public morality."

A scene in *La La Land* that was set in an alcohol serving restaurant was censored when the movie aired on Star TV.

**August**

A regulation that makes it mandatory for streaming platforms like Netflix, PuhuTV and BluTV and Turkish services of international news channels such as DW Türkçe and BBC Türkçe to obtain broadcasting licenses and permits from RTÜK in return for significant sums formally went into effect on 1 August 2019. The regulation also allows RTÜK to supervise online content and introduce sanctions in case of non-compliance with broadcasting principles.

A court in Ankara ruled to block access to 135 web sources, including Gazete Fersude and ETHA websites, the website geziyisavunuyoruz.org which monitors Gezi trial and the Twitter account of HDP lawmaker Oya Ersoy, upon a complaint from Gendarmerie Command, which claimed that the mentioned sites violated Article 8/A of the Law No. 5651, which covers online publication and cyber-crimes. Article 8/A allows judges to order removal of content or block access on one or more of the following grounds: to protect the right of life or security of life and property, to protect national security and public order, to prevent the commission of a crime, or to protect public health.

Education Minister Ziya Selçuk revealed that a total of 301,878 books deemed to be associated with what authorities call FETÖ had been destroyed in libraries of the ministry and institutions affiliated with the ministry after the coup attempt of 15 July 2016.

Court documents in a trial over dismissal of Anadolu Agency photojournalist Ensar Özdemir in 2018 revealed that Özdemir had been fired for allegedly "spreading propaganda for the PKK and PYD in photographs he shared on his social media accounts, for having friends on social media who are sympathetic towards the PKK/PYD rhetoric and sharing critical posts."

The Ankara 8th Criminal Judgeship of Peace issued an order to ban access to tweets commenting on reports that Communications Director of the Presidency Fahrettin Altun and his wife, Fatmanur Altun, were on the payrolls of multiple public institutions.

A concert that was due to be held as part of the Malatya Festivities, organized by the Gökçen Yılmaz Academy on 24-30 August, was canceled amid claims of pressure.

Access to 564 links to news reports on designation of Medipol Hospital, founded by Health Minister Fahrettin Koca, as an “advanced hospital” under a directive issued by Koca and allocation of Treasury-owned land to the same hospital was blocked on the grounds that the reports “violate personal rights.”

Actor Mahmut Canbay was denied entry to Turkey as he was traveling from Hamburg to İzmir to attend the 13th Theater Reunion of Turkey under an “administrative order.”

Gebze Municipality refused to allocate a room to the play *Taranta Babu*, a solo performance by Cansu Fırıncı that was produced by the Oyuncu Sandalı company, citing “ongoing renovation works.”

A child viewer who called into a program on TRT's kids channel was interrupted by the show's host and quickly taken off air when he started complaining of deforestation in Kaz Mountains (Mount Ida) in northwestern Turkey.

Mardin Artuklu University Senate ordered closure of the Institute of Living Languages founded in 2009.

Mezopotamya Agency editor Ziyen Karahan was arrested during a raid on her home in Diyarbakır following the appointment of a trustee as Diyarbakır mayor.

Ayşegül Tözeren, a literary critic and a columnist for *Evrensel* daily, was arrested during a raid on her home on 20 August. Tözeren was released on 23 August under an international travel ban.

Police broke up protests in various provinces of Turkey held after replacement of mayors of Diyarbakır, Van and Mardin with government-appointed trustees. Six journalists covering the protests were detained.

Access to links to 168 news reports on an Istanbul 6<sup>th</sup> Criminal Judgeship of Peace decision blocking access to 564 news reports on allocation of Treasury-owned land to Medipol Hospital was blocked. The 168 censored reports included a report on Susma Platform website as well.

The Istanbul 37<sup>th</sup> High Criminal Court issued an arrest warrant against musician Ferhat Tunç over “spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization” in his social media posts before the investigation phase was completed.

Access to news reports that a school friend of President Erdoğan's son Bilal Erdoğan had been given 63 public tenders worth TL 308 million was blocked.

Dokuz Eylül University administration launched an investigation against six academics who publicly supported students opposing a controversial decision to move the building of the Faculty of Fine Arts to a new location.

ODTÜ administration launched an investigation against students who distributed leaflets protesting the arrest of other students ahead of the university's commencement ceremony.

26 lawyers who attended a gathering in front of the Bayraklı Courthouse, called by the Contemporary Lawyers' Association and the Association of Lawyers for Freedom to read out a press statement in protest of the appointment of trustees to replace Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van mayors and a Governor's Office ban on all public meetings and demonstrations across İzmir for 10 days, were detained by the police. Documentary maker Oktay İnce who was covering the event was also detained.

An investigation was launched into officials of the publishing house that printed the anonymous book *Put Adam* (the Idol Man), which the authorities said contained phrases insulting Atatürk, on the charge of “openly insulting the memory of Kemal Atatürk.”

Eight people, including Özgür Gelecek newspaper reporter Taylan Öztaş, were arrested in coordinated raids in Pendik, Bayrampaşa and Beşiktaş districts of Istanbul.



Kadıköy District Governor's Office banned activities planned to take place on 23 and 24 August as part of the Queer Olympics, a queer sports event organized by the Istanbul-based LGBTI+ soccer team Atletik Dildo, on the grounds of "protection of public order, prevention of crime, protection of public health and morality."

*BirGün* columnist and former CHP deputy Hüseyin Aygün announced on his Twitter account that his book *Hatır* was taken off shelves at D&R book stores because it was deemed "objectionable."

23 people were detained while attending a demonstration called by a women's platform in protest of the appointment of trustees to municipalities of Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van in Beşiktaş, Istanbul.

Access to news reports published on Euronews and Kronos websites on four people who were forcibly disappeared in February and reappeared in police custody in Ankara in late July was blocked by a court order at the request of lawyer Neslihan Koçer.

Access to news reports and social media posts on a controversial decision of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality to offer scholarship to AKP lawmaker Ravza Kavakçı Kan to study in the US was blocked by a court order.

Van Metropolitan Municipality halted its support for excavations near the Fortress of Van without any explanation after the municipality was taken over by a government appointed trustee.

Artı Gerçek news portal correspondent Meryem Yıldırım was sentenced to 2 years, 4 months and 3 days in prison for "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" in her social media posts.

Authorities banned posters, placards and slogans containing words like "trustees," "coup," and "plundering of the nature" at the September 1 World Peace Day demonstrations held in Diyarbakır and Antalya.

**September**

Mehmet Emin Bilmez, the trustee appointed to govern the municipality of Van, had the Nûpelda Theater Group and the Iranian theater group Fujan expelled from the municipality's Women Life Center while rehearsing for the play *Kanlı Düğün* (Bloody Wedding), to be staged in Kurdish and Persian.

Mersin Governor's Office banned all planned public demonstrations, marches and events that had been due to be held in protest of appointment of trustees to take over municipalities of Diyarbakır, Mardin and Van for 10 days as of 30 August on the grounds of "public security, preservation of public order and safety, prevention of crime and protection of lives and properties of citizens."

Netflix said it would work with local regulators through bolstering parental controls to protect the "children from content that may be inappropriate for their age," without commenting about potential censorship concerns under new online broadcasting rules.

Photojournalist Çağdaş Erdoğan, on trial for his social media posts, photos, and allegedly taking pictures of a social facility for the employees of the national intelligence agency, was acquitted of "membership of a terrorist organization" but sentenced to 1 year and 8 months in jail for "systematically disseminating propaganda for a terrorist organization."

An Istanbul court ruled to acquit Özlem Şendeniz of Iğdır University, who was standing trial on the charge of "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist group" for signing 2016's Academics for Peace petition, was acquitted. Şendeniz became the first academic to be acquitted as per a Constitutional Court ruling that found that the Academics for Peace trials constituted a violation of the signatories' rights to freedom of expression.

Canan Kaftancıoğlu, the CHP Istanbul provincial chairperson, was given a combined prison sentence of 9 years, 8 months and 20 days on charges of "insulting the president," "publicly insulting the state of the Turkish Republic," "incitement to hatred and animosity," "insulting a public official

due to the performance of their duty" and "disseminating propaganda for a terrorist group" in a case over her social media posts.

Imprisoned musician Saide İnaç, known by her stage name Hozan Canê, was sued on the charge of "insulting the president" for allegedly posting a cartoon on her Facebook page.

*Yeni Şafak* refused to publish an article by Özlem Albayrak, a columnist in the newspaper for the past 20 years, which criticized prison sentences given to CHP politician Canan Kaftancıoğlu on the basis of her social media posts. Albayrak said she resigned from the newspaper over the censorship.

JinNews reporter Melike Aydın was sentenced to 1 year and 3 months in prison on the charge of "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" for a social media post from 2006.

Journalist Barış İnce was given a suspended sentence of 11 months and 20 days in prison for "insulting the president" in an acrostic, which was presented as a defense statement in an earlier trial and subsequently published in İnce's newspaper *BirGün*. İnce's defense statement in question featured an acrostic, in which the first letter of each paragraph spells the phrase "Hırsız Tayyip" (Tayyip the Thief).

Journalist Uğur Dündar was sentenced to 11 months and 20 days in prison for "insulting" AKP politician Binali Yıldırım in a column published in 2014. The sentence was commuted to mandatory book reading.

A member of the public filed a criminal complaint with the Istanbul Chief Public Prosecutor's Office against rapper Sarp Palaur, widely known as *Şanışer*, and 17 other rappers who collaborated in the production of the song *Susamam* (I can't remain silent). The rap song, which went viral as soon as it was released, paints a gloomy picture of social issues in Turkey, ranging from animal rights, environment to justice and violence against women.

Musician Saide İnaç, known by her stage name Hozan Canê who was already imprisoned for "terrorist group membership," was sentenced to 1 year, 5

months and 15 days in prison for “insulting the president” for allegedly posting a cartoon on her Facebook page.

Mardin Governor’s Office which had already banned all public gatherings and demonstrations in the province for 30 days following appointment of trustees to take over the municipalities of Diyarbakır, Van and Mardin extended the ban for another month as of 18 September on the grounds of “preservation of peace, public order, public security, prevention of crime, protection of basic rights and freedoms and prevention of violence.”

A public concert that was due to held within the scope of Batıkent Cultural Festival was banned by the Ankara Governor’s Office on the grounds of protection of public order and security.

The Kars Criminal Judgeship of Peace ordered a ban on distribution and sale of two books published by the Avesta Publishing House, the Turkish edition of Andrew Collins’ *From the Ashes of Angels – The Forbidden Legacy of a Fallen Race* (Meleklerin Küllerinden – Günahkar Bir Irkın Yasaklanmış Mirası) and *Toprağın Şarkısı* (Song of the Land) on the grounds that they “spread propaganda for a terrorist organization.”

Rapper Şehinşah was detained in connection with the lyrics of one of his songs. He was released after giving his statement.

Yıldız Technical University administration banned the screening of all movies to be shown as part of a film screening program organized by students, titled Gender and Identity in Cinema, and two movies written and directed by David Lynch on the grounds that the films “featured sexuality and violence and that homosexuality was a red line for the administration.”

RTÜK ordered Fox Life to suspend the broadcast of TV series 9-1-1 for five times over a scene showing two women kissing for “violation of public morality.”

Netflix Turkey edited out the image of a cigarette appearing in a scene in the trailer for the *Breaking Bad sequel El Camino*.

An annual ceremony to mark the start of the 2019-20 academic year at ODTÜ's Kemal Kurdaş Culture and Convention Center was canceled on security grounds after a large group of students protested President Erdoğan.

Dicle News Agency reporter Ziya Ataman, imprisoned for over three years despite his poor health, was sentenced to 14 years and 3 months in prison for "membership of a terrorist organization."

Documentary maker and video activist Oktay İnce was detained as he attempted to read out a press statement in front of the Ankara Governor's Office demanding the return of his 20-year-old archive, which was seized when police raided his home about a year ago.

Access was blocked to a tweet by lawyer Efan Bolay announcing that access to news reports over a deadly car accident in 1998, in which President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's son Burak had been involved and had led to the death of singer Sevim Tanırek, was blocked. Access to a news report on independent news portal bianet's website covering the censorship was also blocked.

Authorities banned a youth culture and art festival that was due to be organized by the HDP Istanbul Provincial Youth Assemblies, citing first the "lengthy duration" of the event and then its "possible negative impact on the public order."

An Istanbul court sentenced academic Bülent Şık to 1 year and 3 months in prison on the charge of "disclosing work secrets" for publishing four articles which reported on the findings of a Ministry of Health-led research in 2011-2016 about environmental pollution that was endangering public health.

Serhat Albayrak, the vice chairman of Turkuvaz Media Group, sued *Evrensel* daily, seeking TL 200,000 in damages over an article by columnist Ceren Sözeri. Albayrak claimed he suffered commercial damages because of the article, which discussed the pro-government media coverage of the results of 31 March elections.

Rapper Onur Dinç, known as Khontkar, was sentenced to 4 years and 2 months in jail in a trial where he was charged with “encouraging drug use” and “drug possession.”

Journalist Mehmet Y. Yılmaz was sued over articles investigating an increase in personal assets of former Prime Minister Binali Yıldırım and his sons, facing up to 4 years and 1 month in prison.

**October**

It emerged that several newspapers and magazines, including *Yeni Yaşam* daily, were not admitted into Van F-Type High-Security Prison, while inmates' requests to watch television channels Hevi, Yaşam, Yol, Cem, Halk, Damla, TELE-1 and K-24 were also denied.

The Committee for the Protection of Children from Harmful Publications declared that the Turkish translations of *Declaration of the Rights of Boys and Girls* (published by Yapı Kredi Publications) and *Good Night Stories for Rebel Girls: 100 Tales of Extraordinary Women* (published by hep kitap) and the book *Sünnetçi Kız* (Circumciser Girl) published by Cinius Publications were "harmful for the spirituality of children under 18."

Theater actor Ersin Umut Güler was sentenced to 1 year and 9 months in prison in a trial where he was charged with "insulting the president" and "insulting a state official" in several social media posts between 2014-2017.

Hacettepe University Rectorate banned student club Queer Studies Society from opening an exhibition stand at campus.

Adana Police Directorate banned demonstrations, public gatherings, marches and other events across the province for 15 days as of 3 October citing "appointment of trustees to municipalities of Diyarbakır, Van and Mardin" and "ongoing investigations and trials targeting PKK/KCK."

The conference on *Social, Cultural and Economic History of Kayseri and the Region*, organized by the Hrant Dink Foundation and planned to take place in Kayseri, was moved to Istanbul after Kayseri Governor's Office banned it.

A concert that was due to be organized by Adana Dersimians Solidarity and Assistance Association at the Seyhan Municipality Yaşar Kemal Culture Center was banned by the Adana Governor's Office, which deemed the event "inappropriate."

Seven musicians arrested in house raids in Şanlıurfa's Viranşehir district for singing Kurdish songs at weddings were jailed pending trial on the charge of "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization."

Muş Governor's Office banned all public meetings and marches across the province for 15 days on security grounds.

Four of the six people who had been detained during a LGBTI+ Pride March on 1 July 2018 and later put on trial on charges of "violating the Law No. 2911 on Assemblies and Demonstrations," "obstructing a police officer in the course of his duty" and "endangering traffic safety" were acquitted of all charges while one was given a prison term of five months for "obstructing a police officer" and another was sentenced to 2.5 months for "endangering traffic safety."

The Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet) issued a new directive on publications, extending responsibilities of its radio and television department.

Ankara Governor's Office banned a planned gathering of those expelled from their state jobs under emergency decrees, or KHKs, on 5-6 October in Ankara under the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations.

A criminal investigation was launched into journalist Ender İmrek for his column titled "Parıl Parıl Parlıyordu Hermes Çanta" (Hermes Purse was Shining Brightly). The column was published in *Evrensel* newspaper on 29 June 2019.

The Police Directorate General announced that legal action was initiated against 78 people for "inciting people to hatred and enmity through a smear campaign" on social media and various websites against Turkey's Operation Peace Spring in northern Syria.

BirGün online editor Hakan Demir and Diken news portal managing editor Fatih Gökhan Diler were detained over the news outlets' reporting on the military operation in Syria.



Jinnews reporter Beritan Canözer's house in Diyarbakır was raided as part of a criminal investigation against Canözer and 22 other people for their social media posts.

Journalist Burcu Özkaya Günaydın was arrested in Hatay in relation to her social media posts. Günaydın was released under judicial control measures.

The Ankara Chief Republican Prosecutor's Office launched an investigation into HDP co-leaders Pervin Buldan and Sezai Temelli and lawmakers Gülüstan Kılıç Koçyiğit, Leyla Güven and Berdan Öztürk for their public statements on the Operation Peace Spring.

The co-mayor of Derik district in Mardin, Şerif Kıran, and members of the HDP-controlled municipality's assembly were arrested on the charges of "inciting people to hatred and enmity" and "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization" in relation to their social media posts on the military operation in Syria.

Broadcasts against the Operation Peace Spring were "silenced," according to a RTÜK statement, which also thanked broadcasters that "contributed to national unity and togetherness."

Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu announced in a statement that legal measures had been initiated against nearly 500 social media accounts and that 121 people had been arrested in relation to their social media posts on the Operation Peace Spring.

Istanbul Governor's Office banned on security grounds a planned march and a public event organized by the Kadıköy Theaters Platform to mark the inauguration of the 4<sup>th</sup> Theater Festival.

Hakkari Governor's Office banned all public demonstrations and gatherings for 30 days on the grounds of "national security, public order and prevention of crime."

The Ankara Chief Republican Prosecutor's Office launched a criminal investigation against CHP lawmaker Sezgin Tanrıku for "openly denigrating

the government of the Republic of Turkey" in relation to his social media posts on the Operation Peace Spring.

Nine people who were arrested when they attempted to stage a march after attending a press conference at the HDP Beşiktaş district office on the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of HDP's establishment were jailed pending trial for "leading, organizing and attending unlawful public meetings and demonstrations" in violation of a ban imposed by the Beşiktaş District Governor's Office on public demonstrations in relation to the Operation Peace Spring and "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization."

The chairman of annual art fair Contemporary Istanbul, Ali Güreli, sent a mass e-mail to members of the international media and culture professionals, criticizing the foreign media for "totally inaccurate reporting" on Turkey's military operation in Syria and urging the receivers not to "manipulative news, comments, and posts seriously, and not allow to spread the information pollution."

A panel discussion titled *Our Struggle for Democracy and Local Administrations*, which was due to be organized by the Unity for Democracy initiative and take place on 16 October at Şişli Cemil Candaş Culture Center, was banned by a decision of the Şişli District Governor's Office.

24 people who were among 186 individuals arrested for "spreading black propaganda" on social media on Turkey's military operation in Syria were imprisoned pending trial.

Adana Police Directorate ordered a 15-day ban on all public demonstrations across the province as of 3 October. The ban followed two similar bans imposed by the Governor's Office, first on 19 August and then on 3 September.

The conference on *Social, Cultural and Economic History of Kayseri and the Region*, organized by the Hrant Dink Foundation, was banned by the Şişli District Governor's Office. The event, which was originally planned to take place in Kayseri, had been moved to Istanbul after it was banned there.

The Muş Governor's Office banned all public demonstrations across the province for 15 days on security grounds.

Actor Orhan Aydın was sentenced to 11 months and 20 days for "insulting the president" in a 2017 speech he made during a ceremony organized by the Kuşadası Hacı Bektaş Veli Anadolu Culture Association to commemorate victims of the Sivas Massacre of 1993.

The Ankara Governor's Office banned a pro-democracy rally HDP planned to hold in Ankara on 19 October, citing the Law on Assemblies and Demonstrations.

Journalist Nurcan Baysal's home in Diyarbakır was raided by police teams over her social media posts.

Sinop Provincial Culture Directorate revoked, without an explanation, an earlier decision to allocate a room at the Sinop Culture Center for *Yiyin Efendiler* (Eat Ye Gentlemen), a play written and directed by İlker Görkem.

The Adana Governor's Office banned all public demonstrations in the province for 15 days as of 18 October.

Authorities in Tunceli banned all outdoor public meetings and demonstrations, except those that had prior consent of the Governor's Office or the District Governor's Offices, for 30 days.

Former Co-Mayor of Diyarbakır Gültan Kışanak, who is imprisoned in Kandıra No. 1 F-Type Prison, said in a letter to Mezopotamya News Agency that the prison administration had introduced a ban on the delivery of books and magazines sent via mail or brought by visitors.

The Center for Gender and Women's Studies of Munzur University was renamed as the Center for Family and Women's Studies under a decision published in the Official Gazette. The word "gender" was replaced with "family" throughout the by-laws of the renamed center.

The Şanlıurfa Governor's Office renewed a ban on all public meetings and demonstrations that had been in effect across the province for the past month for another 30 days between 20 October to 18 November.

Net news agency reporter Emre Orman, arrested over his social media posts, was imprisoned pending trial for "spreading propaganda for a terrorist organization."

Members of the ultranationalist Vatan Partisi (Homeland Party) covered a mural of 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg on the wall of an apartment building in Kadıköy, Istanbul, with a banner featuring a painting of Eren Bülbül, a teenager killed in a clash between security forces and PKK members in 2017, in protest of what was claimed to be a pro-YPG tweet by Thunberg.

The Ankara Governor's Office banned a planned rally against "climate change and ecological destruction" that was called by the Confederation of Public Employees' Trade Unions (KESK), the Confederation of Progressive Trade Unions of Turkey (DİSK), the Union of Chambers of Turkish Engineers and Architects (TMMOB) and the Turkish Medical Association (TTB).

A ban on all public meetings and events that had been in effect in Van for three years was extended for another 15 days by a decision of the Governor's Office on the grounds of "public order," "security," and "preservation of peace."

A march that the CHP Nevşehir Provincial Office planned to hold on 29 October to mark the Republic Day was banned by the Nevşehir Governor's Office.

Nurcan Kaya, lawyer and a columnist for the news portal Artı Gerçek, was arrested for "openly inciting people to hatred and enmity" through her social media posts. Kaya was released after being questioned later in the same day.

Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu publicly criticized the TV shows *Çukur* (the Pit) and *Adana Sıfır* (Adana Zero), saying in a speech that they were "poisoning children's minds."

A scene in the movie *Neşeli Günler* (Happy Days) that aired on Show TV was censored due to appearance of a writing referring to İlerici Gençlik Derneği (Progressive Youth Association), affiliated with the Turkish Communist Party.

RTÜK voted to cancel membership of Faruk Bildirici, a representative of the main opposition party CHP at the broadcasting watchdog, after criticizing RTÜK president for sitting on the boards of multiple public institutions.

More than 40 journalists were fired at *Hürriyet* newspaper, which was bought last year by the pro-government conglomerate Demirören Group.

## What has Susma done?

### Susma gatherings

#### Mersin: Festivals, Bans, New Possibilities

We organized a panel discussion titled *Festivals, Bans and New Possibilities* on 28 April 2019 on the sidelines of KuirFest in Mersin. Kültürhane was the host of our event.

The panelists -- Necati Sönmez of Documentarist and Which Human Rights? Film Festival, Koray Özbal from the KuirFest team, and İlham Bakır, a founder of the FilmAmed Documentary Film Festival -- discussed incidents of censorship in festivals across Turkey in recent years and the challenges faced, as well as alternatives and best responses.

#### Datça: Growing Larger on the Stage: New Areas of Production, New Words and Possibilities

We held a panel discussion on *Growing Larger on the Stage: New Areas of Production, New Words and Possibilities* within the scope of the Datça Theater Festival, which has been organized in Muğla's Datça district for the past couple of years. The panelists were playwright Ebru Nihan Celkan, who resolutely continues her theatrical production through different channels in spite of the increasing obstacles in recent years, director Berfin Zenderlioğlu, and actor Serdar Orçin, who is also a member of the Executive Board of the Actors' Union of Turkey.

While talking about how the crackdown, which took its toll on every discipline of art particularly following the State of Emergency (OHAL), affected the theater scene, the panelists also discussed the alternative ways they used in overcoming censorship and new possibilities for production.

#### Kocaeli: Freedom of the Media and Expression Online

On 9 October, we organized a panel discussion on *Freedom of the Media and Expression Online: Challenges and Opportunities* at the Kocaeli Academy for Solidarity with the panelists Ali Duran Topuz, the editor-in-chief of online news portal Gazete Duvar, Burcu Karakaş of Deutsche Welle Turkish, and academic Adem Yeşilyurt. The discussion focused on how the characteristics of journalism were shaped in Turkey since the

1950s, evolution of the media in Turkey from the standpoint of freedom of expression, and obstacles put before the online media, which has been on the rise in recent years as an alternative to the one-sided outlook of the mainstream media.

## Legal Seminars

### **İzmir: International Workshop on Freedom of Expression and the Media**

We brought together jurists, journalists, scholars and human rights defenders to discuss violations of freedom of expression in Turkey in recent years at the *International Workshop on Freedom of Expression and the Media*, which we held on 21-22 September at İzmir Sanat (İzmir Art Center) in collaboration with the İzmir Bar Association.

On the first day of the two-day event that was hosted by the İzmir Metropolitan Municipality, representatives from civil society organizations including Amnesty International, the Law Society of England and Wales, Reporters Without Borders (RSF), P24 and Pirate Party Movement of Turkey, members of local and national media organizations and lawyers from several bar associations from across Turkey presented their statements in sessions titled *Freedom of Expression and the Media in International Law, Internet and Media Bans in Turkey and Around the World* and *Freedom of the Media and Jailed Journalists in Turkey*.

On the second day of the workshop, reports titled *New Strategies Against Violations of Freedom of Expression and the Media in Turkey*, *Alternative Quests for a Free Internet* and *Promoting Freedom of Expression in Provinces* were prepared at three working groups that were formed by participants.



## Other works by Susma

### Uncensored Internet Campaign:

The new Internet law that requires online broadcasters to obtain licenses from RTÜK (Radio and Television Supreme Council) and authorizes the public broadcasting watchdog to supervise online content, arrests on account of social media posts, blocked news websites, the ban on Wikipedia that has been in effect since 29 April 2017, access to VPN services being blocked, Internet service providers cooperating with governments in their politically driven requests...

In the light of growing restrictions on freedom of expression online, we agreed during our Annual General Assembly held at the end of 2018 to set Internet freedom as our focus theme throughout 2019. Through articles, panel discussions, videos, events and social media campaigns that we organized with the hashtag #Sansürsüzİnternet (#UncensoredInternet) on key dates such as the anniversary of Wikipedia ban on 29 April, the World Press Freedom Day on 3 May and the anniversary of the İnternetime Dokunma (Don't Touch my Internet) protests on 15 May 2011, we kept the uncensored Internet campaign in the limelight throughout the year.

### Forum Against Censorship:

On 17 June, within the scope of the 12th Istanbul Documentary Days, the Susma Platform organized a *Forum Against Censorship* in partnership with the festival organizers. Bearing in mind the fact that censorship and the crackdown take a particularly heavy toll on documentary filmmakers and video activists, we invited representatives of film industry professional associations and legal experts as well to the forum and talked about ways to fight censorship and methods of resistance. Bans, criminal investigations and confiscation of digital archives -- challenges that are commonly faced by filmmakers who attempt to produce documentaries on rights violations -- were also discussed.

The forum agreed to support video activist and documentary filmmaker Oktay İnce's weekly protests to demand the return of his digital archive confiscated when he was arrested during a police raid on his home and to organize campaigns in support of *Bakur* (North) and *Nû Jîn* (New Life) documentaries, whose directors were put on trial on "terrorism propaganda" charges.

### **Nû Jîn / Bakur cases:**

We followed terrorism cases brought against directors of *Nû Jîn* and *Bakur* documentaries at high criminal courts. After conviction of Nû Jîn director Veysi Altay and Dicle Anter, then director of the Yılmaz Güney Movie Theater when the documentary was screened there, and prior to the final hearing in the trial of *Bakur* co-directors, we organized a gathering with filmmakers in collaboration with Altyazı Cinema Association. At that meeting, we prepared a press statement on court cases against these two documentaries, which we circulated on social media ahead of the final hearing of the *Bakur* trial on 18 July.

### **Pride Week:**

Throughout the Pride Week, we hosted *Sınır/Sız ALAN* (Limit/less Space), an exhibition of works by queer and feminist artists, at the Istanbul Literature House. On the sidelines of the exhibition, we organized the *Nasıl bir Sınır/sız ALAN?* (What kind of a Limit/less Space?) panel, which discussed queer artists' strategies for survival in the face of censorship.

In addition to running an extensive social media campaign highlighting bans on the Pride Week events, we also published interviews with representatives of SPOD LGBTI+, Kaos GL, Lambdaistanbul and Pembe Hayat (Pink Life) LGBTI+ Association as part of a series titled *What is the state of LGBTI+ movement in the post-OHAL era?* We published Merve Diltemiz Mol's documentary *OHAL'de LGBTİ+ Olmak* (Being LGBTI+ under OHAL) in its entirety on Susma Platform's YouTube channel and excerpts on our social media accounts.

### **Internet Bans and Freedom of Expression at Boysan's House:**

We were a guest on a panel discussion on recent Internet bans and restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression, which was held at Boysan'ın Evi (Boysan's House), a space opened in the memory of late LGBTI+ activist Boysan Yakar.

The panelists, including human rights and free speech defenders, took up issues such as how online hate speech against the LGBTI+ community generates a mechanism of censorship and self-censorship and how methods of censorship targeting LGBTI+ associations and activists evolved since the lifting of the state of emergency.

**Universal Periodic Review - UPR:**

We jointly sent a written submission with Freemuse on the state of freedom of artistic expression in Turkey in 2015-2019 as part of the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process, which involves a periodic review of the human rights records of all 193 UN member states.

The UPR process, which takes place at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, provides an opportunity for the states to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situations in their countries and to overcome challenges to the enjoyment of human rights. It involves reviewing of states' human rights records and is instrumental in holding the states under review to account for the progress or setbacks in promotion of human rights.

Turkey's review will take place at an upcoming session on 20-31 January 2020. The review is hoped to be an opportunity to assess whether Turkey fulfilled requirements of the recommendations it accepted in the previous cycle, to convey to the government violations of artistic freedom of expression that we have documented under various categories since 2015 and recommendations to improve the situation, and to urge it to provide guarantees that the accepted recommendations will indeed be implemented.

**Alternative Formations and Freedom of Expression article series:**

We have begun to publish a series of interviews focusing on new actors working for promotion of the freedom of expression.

## Legal expert interpretation

### Figen Albuga Çalıkuşu

Reading through Susma Platform's extensive and meticulously documented list of freedom of artistic expression violations throughout 2019, one comes to realize that almost not a single day in the whole year went by without an incident of censorship, ban and repression making the news. By the time you finish going through the list of violations, it feels like you just watched a horror movie. Turkey is indeed passing through a tunnel of horror, a fact full consequences of which will be recognized in due course.

Just have a look at how the year began: Authorities refused to deliver Musa Anter's book *Vakayiname* (Chronicle) to journalist Nedim Türfent, held in Van High Security Prison, on the grounds that it would "jeopardize the indivisible unity of the state of the Republic of Turkey" and that there were "attempts to foment strife and chaos within society."

Right after that, academic Bülent Şık was charged with "providing and disclosing forbidden information" and "disclosing work secrets" for publishing the findings of a Ministry of Health-led research about carcinogenic pollutants that were kept from the public.

How should a jurist assess a year that starts with such blatant violations? And add to this the Anti-Terror Law that criminalizes thought, or the law against insulting the president that is implemented to punish dissent in a scale unseen in any democratic country, or arbitrary bans on public assembly, or the fact that the entire society has been victimized by censorship as exemplified in the conviction of directors of documentaries *Bakur* and *Nû Jin...*

And this is neither all nor the worst.

There are horrid examples of violations in the course of trials of academics and journalists, including that of Ahmet and Mehmet Altan where thought was punished as a terrorist offence and where courts attacked the rule of law by disregarding the Constitution -- the fundamental social contract on the basis of which the state and the society exist -- and a decision of the Constitutional Court.

Optimists may bring up the Judicial Reform Package.

It is true that this "amelioratory" legislation was enacted and went into effect.

There was even an amendment made to the Anti-Terror Law whereby the following sentence was added to the paragraph covering terrorism

propaganda: "Expressions of thought that fall within bounds of criticism or for reporting purposes cannot be prosecuted." Indeed, the very fact that this amendment was made is nothing short of admitting and acknowledging that thought was in fact deemed to be a crime until then.

This is in spite of Article 26 of the Constitution, which says, "Everyone has the right to express and disseminate his/her thoughts and opinions by speech, in writing or in pictures or through other media, individually or collectively. This freedom includes the liberty of receiving or imparting information or ideas without interference by official authorities."

It seems that the courts became so reckless and used the Anti-Terror Law to punish thought as an act of terrorism at such a wide scale that the executive branch of the government seeks to introduce some fine-tuning through the legislative branch.

We are faced with a self-serving mentality of using political trickery and cunning maneuvers designed to save the day instead of upholding the rule of law with all its norms and institutions. Isn't it what we are always up against? We have a Council of Judges and Prosecutors that keeps judges who violate the Constitution in their posts, or even promotes them as members of the Supreme Court of Appeals.

How can we have a meaningful discussion about judicial reform when the government continues to preserve a network within the judiciary which it exploits as a useful tool? The judiciary is not independent or impartial. And this lack of independence and impartiality does not stem solely from the Council of Judges and Prosecutors. The judiciary, which has long been marred by politicization and factionalism, is currently a scene for a pursuit of revenge by those who replaced others from the previously dominant faction affiliated with the Gülen network. Presence of "militant" members of judiciary from other religious groups is now widely accepted as a fact of life. Unless this shaky, cumbersome, corrupt monstrosity is removed, none of the judiciary's problems can be resolved.

Why is public trust in the judiciary is extremely low? Why does the Turkish judiciary rank at the bottom of every global index? Does the Judicial Reform Package pledge any institutional measure to restore independence and impartiality of the judiciary?

The truth is it cannot because the purpose of the package is to save the appearances, without bringing any real change. The authoritarianism that

intensified in the aftermath of the 15 July 2016 coup attempt and the instrumentalization of judiciary in this process is corrupting the state and the society. Persuaded that this trend cannot last forever, many jump to the conclusion that the change is around the corner at the sight of a positive development. Majority of the people cherish rare positive developments as the start of "normalization" or a "thaw." Yet, we keep living in the same nightmare.

This is the premise on which I rest my assessment of 2019. Normalization can come only through an unconditional return to the rule of law and a reform of the decaying judicial system in this context.

The government most definitely does not have such a desire or a plan. Its desire to institutionalize the authoritarian and arbitrary governance, on the other hand, is quite strong.

Therefore, a more realistic conclusion is that the few isolated positive developments which well-intentioned optimists like to see as signs of "normalization and thaw" are nothing more than convenient maneuvers by the political elite to deceive domestic and international actors while it seeks to achieve its own goals.

For jurists like me who witness that judges disregarding the Constitution keep their positions or even being promoted, reaching a different conclusion would be tantamount to be an instrument of the government's deceptive tactics.

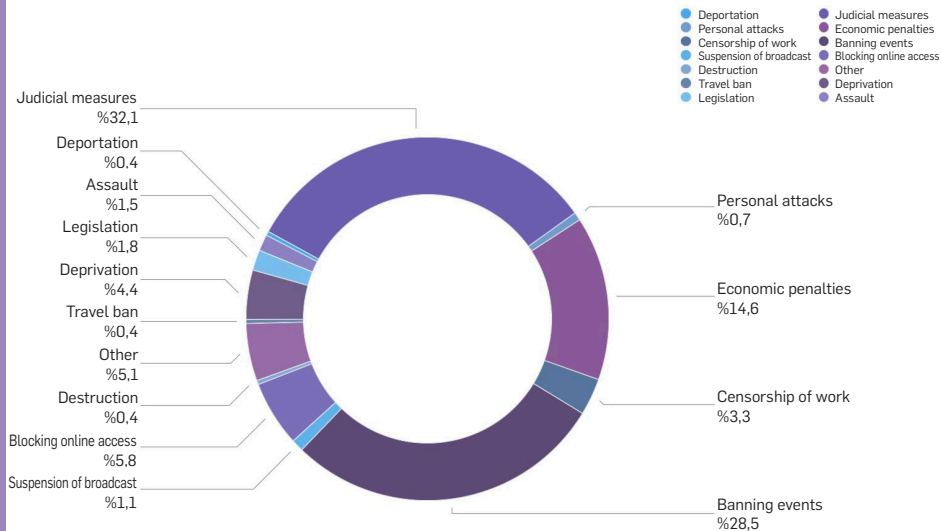
This is how 2019 went by.

I wish time will bring an era when the rule of law is truly upheld with all its norms and institutions and the forces who seek to destroy it are removed from the judiciary.



What are the methods of censorship?

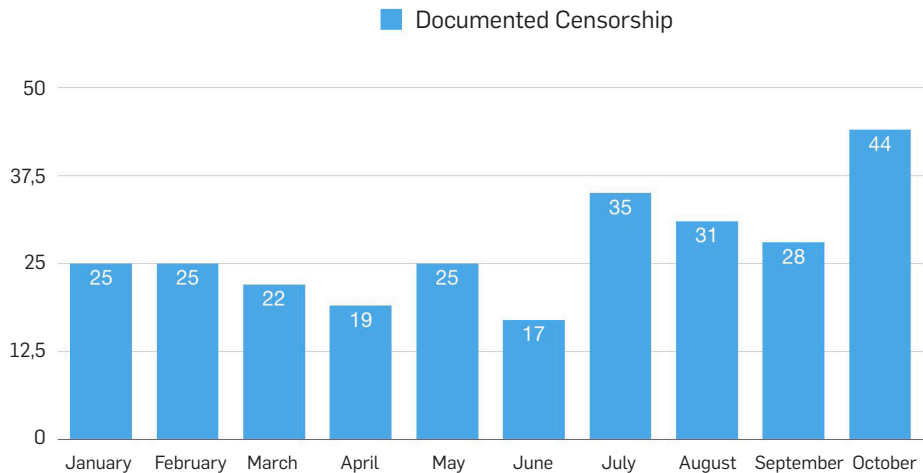
Most of the violations of freedom of expression are committed through judicial means. The 32-percent section indicating the frequency of the use of judicial measures such as criminal investigations, trials, arrests and detentions shows that the government still fights against freedom of expression through the harshest means. Banning events or demonstrations is another widely used method of violating freedom of expression (28 percent). Use of economic penalties, including layoffs and broadcast suspension and administrative fines meted out by RTÜK to television channels, as an instrument of censorship is also common (14 percent).





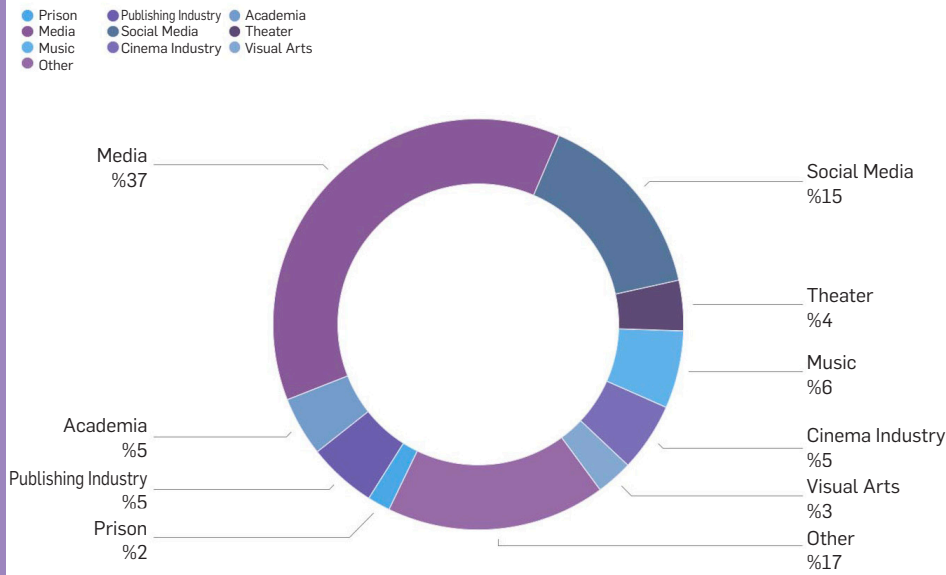
## What is the relationship between violations of freedom of expression and political developments?

Looking on a monthly basis, we can see that censorship intensifies when political tensions rise. For instance, despite the municipal elections on 31 March and the rerun of Istanbul municipal election on 23 June, number of cases of censorship is at usual levels in these months. This may be due to the government using a softer strategy or the candidates' non-confrontational rhetoric in these elections. But we can see clearly that incidents of censorship increase right after the polls. Looking more closely at the cases of censorship, one can observe that the pressure that was quietly building up during the election era resurfaced soon after and trustee appointments got under way. Similarly, censorship incidents suddenly spike again in October, which is associated with the government's severe crackdown on criticism of the Operation Peace Spring.



**In which areas is censorship applied?**

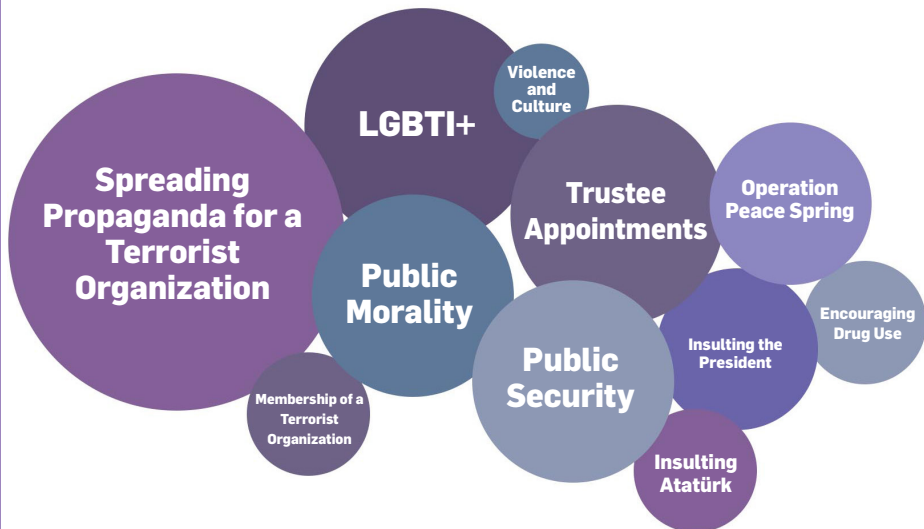
The media, which includes cases of detention and arrests of journalists, censorship of news and firings of journalists, accounts for the largest share with 37 percent. Social media comes second, where censorship targets freelance journalists and citizen journalists, in addition to members of the public from all walks of life. When we look at other areas including theater, cinema industry, music, visual arts and publishing sector one by one, we see that the figures are small. But collectively, they make up 23 percent of the areas where censorship occurs.



## What are the grounds for censorship?

Identifying the reasons for censorship and violations of freedom of expression has been one of the biggest challenges of this study. In most cases, there may not even be a given reason or the reason becomes so insignificant that it does not get reported in the media. In addition, although in some cases there is a stated ground, the real reason may be something else that is linked to political dynamics. Thus, cases of censorship involving bans on LGBTI+ events or protests against trustee appointments to municipalities or the Operation Peace Spring are also included in this graph.

Propaganda for a terrorist organization or membership of a terrorist group have been the most frequently used grounds for freedom of expression violations over the years. Grounds such as public morality or public order are also quite common, especially when it comes to violations of freedom of expression in the forms of bans on public events or demonstrations and suspension of broadcasts.



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